

*A Planning Guide for Protecting
Montana's
Wetlands and Riparian Areas*

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Acronyms

ADID = Advanced Identification Process
CIP = Capital Improvements Program
Corps = Army Corps of Engineers
CRJC = Connecticut River Joint Commission
DEQ = Montana Department of Environmental Quality
DNRC = Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
EPA = Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA = Federal Emergency Management Agency
FWP = Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Heritage = Montana Natural Heritage Program
LWQD = Local Water Quality Districts
MCA = Montana Code Annotated
MPDES = Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
MWCC = Montana Watershed Coordination Council
NPDES = National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRIS = Natural Resource Information System
NWI = National Wetland Inventory
PUD = Planned Unit Development
SAMP = Special Area Management Plan
SMZ = Streamside Management Zone Law
TDR = Transfer of Development Rights
USFWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS = U.S. Geological Survey
WPCSRF = Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund
WRP = Wetland Reserve Program

Preface

Montana's vast landscape and water resources are critical to the economy, public welfare, and the quality of life of the state's local communities. Each year, development and land use change modifies these resources. Wetlands and riparian areas, where water and land come together, are particularly sensitive to changes. As more and more people choose to build homes, recreate, or otherwise utilize the land next to Montana's streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds, and as property values increase, the pressures to develop these areas are increasing—often to the detriment of the very qualities that attracted buyers in the first place.

Wetlands and riparian areas are some of the most productive and valuable of Montana's natural areas, providing a wide variety of environmental and human benefits. The benefits of these two resources for local communities include:

- Improving water quality by filtering sediments and toxins out of water;
- Recharging wells and ground water supplies;
- Providing flood control;
- Enriching open space;
- Increasing real property values and marketability because of aesthetic attributes;
- Enhancing fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Improving recreational opportunities.

Many of the impacts to wetlands and riparian areas can be avoided by land use planning decisions made at the local level. This handbook is designed to assist local government officials, planning boards and planning staff, landowners, developers, community members, and other Montanans in identifying and using land use planning tools, both to advance local interests and to contribute to the protection of wetland and riparian resources. The handbook describes:

- *Chapter 1: Why local governments should protect wetlands and riparian areas;*
- *Chapter 2: Montana's wetland and riparian resources;*
- *Chapter 3: How to build a local protection program;*
- *Chapter 4: How to develop on-the-ground conservation measures;*
- *Chapter 5: How Montana's land use planning tools can be used in protection efforts; and*
- *Chapter 6: Other tools and resources that may help local governments in their conservation work.*

Wetlands include marshes, ponds, potholes, sloughs, and other areas covered with shallow water during all or part of the year. Riparian areas are the green zones of native vegetation next to rivers, streams, and drainages. Because of their similarities, both wetlands and riparian areas are covered in this guide.