Increased Property Value

How does maintaining or improving a stream increase property value?

Studies have shown that:

The appraisal value of houses with natural streams is 3 times higher than those with channelized streams.

The closer a property is to a natural area, the higher the value.

60% of suburban residents enjoy wildlife viewing and are willing to pay a higher price for properties that are attractive to wildlife.

Who is responsible for what?

Every stream has two components: the water flowing in it, and the land beneath and around it.

Private individuals own the land that forms the stream channel on their property. However, because it is considered a “public good”, the water in the stream is owned by the State of Ohio, or all of us! This means that property owners can use the water, but not in ways that infringe on the rights of others.

What many property owners may not realize is that “using” water properly also depends on what they do on their land. If, for example, a landowner decides to armor the stream bank, culvert the stream in a pipe, remove natural bed materials, or fill in a ravine, these land alterations can negatively affect:

How the stream water flows
What the water contains
Erosion rates downstream
The value of the property that was “protected” or “improved”
Whether the stream’s inhabitants are healthy, or can even exist!

The landowner is ultimately responsible for any resulting changes downstream.
**What happens when a stream un-meanders?**

Streams are not pipes. When we eliminate natural meanders in streams, and attempt to “nail” the stream into a straight line, the effects are often dramatic. Excessive energy often becomes trapped in the stream channel. Erosion increases as the stream attempts to recreate the missing meanders. Floodplains often become disconnected from the stream, and downstream landowners are at a greater risk of flooding and erosion.

**Is stream bank erosion natural?**

Even streams in balance erode, but usually not in a way that degrades the stream. In a healthy stream, the amount of material eroded equals the amount of material deposited. If a stream begins to erode excessively, it may be out of balance. Increased storm water runoff upstream may start a downward cutting process, which leads to unstable, eroding stream banks.

**A stream’s Buffer Zone (also called a Riparian Buffer Area)** is the strip of natural vegetation along the banks that separates the stream from developed areas (farm fields, lawns, buildings, driveways, etc.) Mowing right to the stream edge may look nice and neat, but it’s actually creating disaster, faster! You may be able to get away with it for awhile, but it will catch up with you. If you eliminate a Buffer Zone’s natural plants and shrubs, you lose the valuable root systems that hold the soil in place. The result: the banks erode faster, they de-stabilize, they crumble and cave in, and you’ll soon be living with this! Just think of all that valuable land just washing away.

**How wide should a healthy buffer zone be?**

Ideally, a healthy buffer zone should be large enough to accommodate a naturally meandering stream for many years to come, regardless of up-stream changes in the watershed. Streams tend to meander within a predictable width, otherwise known as their “belt width”. The size of the belt width is related to the size of the watershed draining to the stream.

Unfortunately, in urban areas, these recommended buffer widths often exceed the entire width of our properties! One rule of thumb often used in identifying a recommended buffer width is 3 times the width of the stream.

**What do healthy buffer zones do?**

- **Stabilize stream banks**
- **Reduce erosion**
- **Provide wildlife habitat**
- **Increase beauty**
- **Reduce sediment**
- **Provide shade to keep the stream at cooler temperatures for healthy aquatic communities**
- **Increase property value**

**Don’t Mow In The Buffer Zone**

**Don’t Dump**

It’s unacceptable to dump tires, machine parts, plastics, and other unnatural trash into our waterways — And “organic” material like leaves and grass too!

When yard waste (grass, leaves, pet waste, etc.) is deposited in the stream, it begins to rob the water of critical, life-giving oxygen. As a result, fish kills can occur while the stream becomes unsightly and foul smelling.

Dumping concrete and rocks in the stream to build artificial walls can **accelerate** stream bank erosion!