Riparian Forest Buffer (Code 391)

An area predominantly covered by trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to and up-gradient from a watercourse or water body.

Practice Information

This practice applies to areas adjacent to permanent or intermittent streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and areas associated with ground water recharge. The riparian forest buffer is a multipurpose practice designed to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Reduce transport of sediment to surface water, and reduce transport of pathogens, chemicals, pesticides, and nutrients to surface and ground water
- Improve the quantity and quality of terrestrial and aquatic habitat for wildlife, invertebrate species, fish, and other organisms
- Maintain or increase total carbon stored in soils and/or perennial biomass to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasses
- Lower elevated stream water temperatures
- Restore diversity, structure, and composition of riparian plant communities

Dominant vegetation consists of existing or planted trees and shrubs suited to the site and purpose(s) of the practice. Grasses and forbs that come in naturally further enhance the wildlife habitat and filtering effect of the practice. Headcuts and streambank erosion should be assessed and treated appropriately before establishing the riparian forest buffer. Specifications for each installation are based on a thorough field investigation of each site.

Common Associated Practices

NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Riparian Forest Buffer (Code 391) is commonly applied with other conservation practices, such as NRCS CPSs Riparian Herbaceous Cover (Code 390), Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (Code 395), Streambank and Shoreline Protection (Code 580), and Tree/Shrub Establishment (Code 612).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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