

Creeks and Communities: A Continuing Strategy for Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and Management

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A strategy for accelerating cooperative riparian restoration and management was initiated in 1996 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) Bureau of Land Management, in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Creeks and Communities strategy was designed to facilitate collaborative approaches, which take time and are greatly influenced by human dynamics, yet offer the greatest opportunity for managing conflict and reducing excessive process and expense. Healthy watersheds and riparian-wetland areas are critical to providing communities with the economic, ecological, and social benefits that come from the reliable availability of adequate supplies of clean water. While there is growing agreement regarding the importance of watershed and riparian-wetland function, there continues to be considerable disagreement about existing conditions and appropriate treatments. This disagreement has led to an environment of lawsuits and regulatory approaches, often leaving out the people most affected by the decisions. However, there is increasing evidence that effective solutions arise from the workings of citizens and stakeholders.

One of the principal tools used is the Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessment method. PFC is an assessment method, an on-the ground condition, and a communication tool that provides common terms, definitions, and concepts and also builds understanding among diverse stakeholders. This assessment method provides a qualitative and standardized approach of assessing the physical functionality of riparian-wetland areas. It can be applied in a variety of settings to gain consistent information that helps people begin to discern what is working well, what may be limiting, how management could be improved, or what further evaluations might be appropriate. A checklist is used for the assessment which synthesizes information that is foundational to determining the overall health of a riparian-wetland system. Use of the PFC concepts and the assessment process is facilitating the capacity for cooperative decision-making and management that benefits both the land and communities. This method was developed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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