

**Welcome**

**Riparian Health Assessment Training**  
**June 23&24, 2009**



One page hand out with objectives and goals.

**Objectives**

- Recognise riparian areas and their value
- Better understand riparian form and function
- Learn and develop skills to measure riparian health
- Better understand the relationship between riparian areas and fish/fish habitat
- Learn more about the Cows and Fish program
- Create dialogue about riparian areas, watersheds and communities
- Introduce some of the local partners in watershed management



## Goals

Participants will have increased:

- comfort with recognising riparian areas on the landscape
- comfort explaining the role of riparian areas in benefits to society to others
- understanding of the utility and application of *Riparian Health Assessment*
- knowledge of strategies for actively managing riparian areas



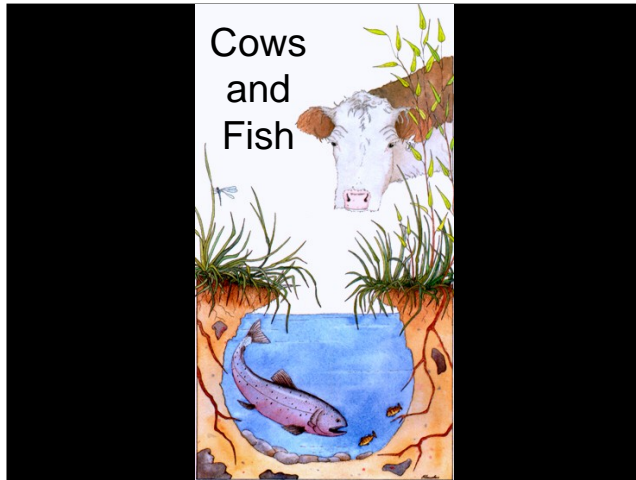
## The Cows and Fish Process; A Template for Watershed-based Extension

TSAG First Nations Training  
June 23&24, 2009  
Kerri O'Shaughnessy, Riparian Specialist  
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society

Supporting Reference Material:

- *Cows and Fish* Brochure
- *Cows and Fish* Process factsheet

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The Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, more commonly known as Cows and Fish, is a provincial non-profit society striving to foster a better understanding of riparian areas and their ecological function, thus enabling landowners to make informed management decisions that enhance landscape health and productivity. Working in partnership with landowners, communities, agencies and organizations, Cows and Fish has been delivering riparian awareness and management information since 1992, and registered as a society in 2003. Cows and Fish delivers presentations, field days, workshops, individual landowner visits, riparian health inventories and reports, and offers numerous written extension materials, technical advice, and a web site on riparian areas and grazing management.



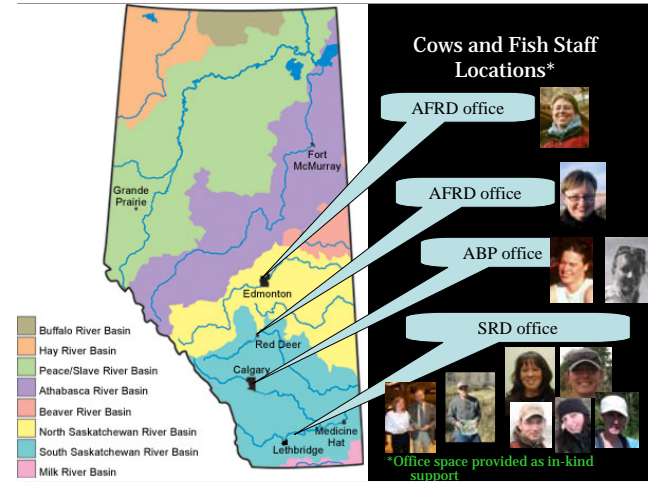
## Cows and Fish Members & Supporters

**Producers & Community Groups**  
 Alberta Beef Producers  
 Trout Unlimited Canada  
 Canadian Cattlemen's Association  
 Alberta Sustainable Resource Development  
 Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development  
 Alberta Environment  
 Fisheries & Oceans Canada  
 Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration  
 Alberta Conservation Association

Our founding members are the Alberta Beef Producers and Trout Unlimited Canada. Other support we receive through in-kind, cash or grant funding from federal government, provincial government and non-government organisations. The people and communities we work with are also a great source of support and are the reason we are doing what we do.



We are a small organisation covering the province of Alberta responding to the demand by all kinds of people for information on riparian areas, their health, and their management. Plus upland range management, watersheds and communication.



Our offices are provided in-kind by Alberta Agriculture in Red Deer and Edmonton (Kerri), Alberta Beef Producers in Calgary (Kathryn) and Sustainable Resource Development F&W in Lethbridge. We have the most space in Lethbridge so that's where most of our people are. We go where we are invited and so far that is much of Alberta including the Peace Region and Lac La Biche. We have also been as far north as Fort Vermilion.



## *Cows and Fish*

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Cows and Fish strives to foster a better understanding of how improvements in grazing management on riparian areas can enhance landscape health and productivity, for the benefit of farmers, ranchers, and others who use and value riparian areas.

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*Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society*

Our mandate...



## *What Cows and Fish IS NOT*

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- A funding group to subsidize conservation
- A program about streambank fencing
- Related to resolving confined feeding operation issues
- About rationalizing livestock grazing everywhere
- About legislation, regulation, policy or codes of practice



## What Cows and Fish *IS NOT*

- A government program
- Exclusively about cattle grazing and fish
- Exclusively about streams or riparian areas
- Regional in scope
- A riparian “SWAT” team



## What Cows and Fish *IS*

- build ecological literacy
- Attitude shifts leading to changes in action
- Maintenance and restoration of biodiversity
- Fitting livestock into riparian systems
- Landscapes and watersheds
- People, partnerships and communities



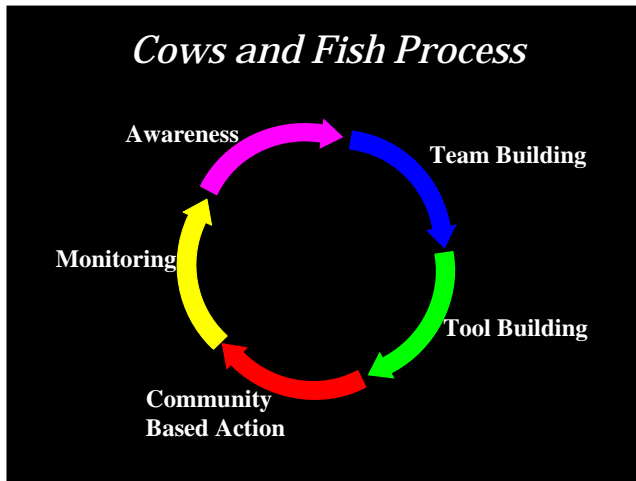
## What Cows and Fish *IS*

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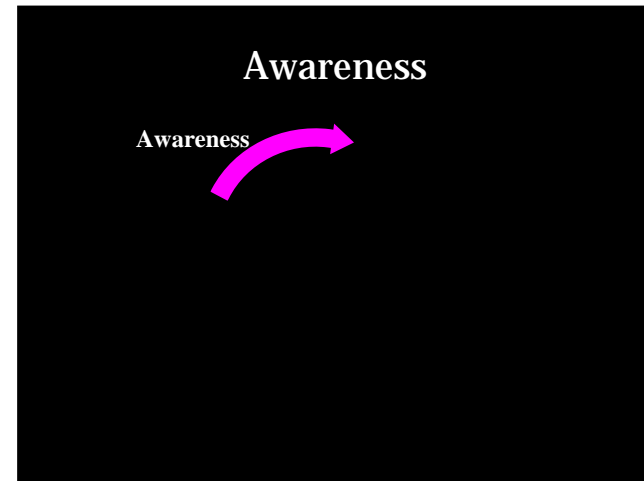
- A catalyst for action
- A facilitator
- Technical assistance
- A process
- A working partnership
- Another approach to resolve landscape issues



Just as a river's meandering path through its floodplain is its secret to balancing energy and erosion, the Cows and Fish approach, or process, is our secret to working with communities to maintain healthy and functioning riparian areas and achieving landscape change. Much like a river or stream, it is best to have a clear path carved out through the floodplain to help us get where we are going.



The Cows and Fish process is simply a framework to help us work with communities, create partnerships, and allow landowners to lead, identify and address land use issues. On a yearly basis, Cows and Fish engages approximately 5000 landowners, community members and agency and organization staff in this process of education, team and tool building, community-based action and monitoring. Working with nearly 100 community watershed groups throughout Alberta over the last 17 years has enabled Cows and Fish to learn through experience which approaches are most effective. That experience, in combination with independent evaluations, has allowed us to evaluate the success of this process through both trial and error and structured evaluations.



Beginning with **awareness**, we can explore the parameters of the Cows and Fish process in more detail. Awareness is about building ecological literacy within individuals and communities. Awareness helps people recognize what a riparian area is, how it functions ecologically, and the value of this piece of the landscape. Delivered in a non-confrontational and non-threatening manner by people that are trusted, awareness enables landowners and communities to build a foundation of knowledge and understanding from which to make sustainable land management decisions.

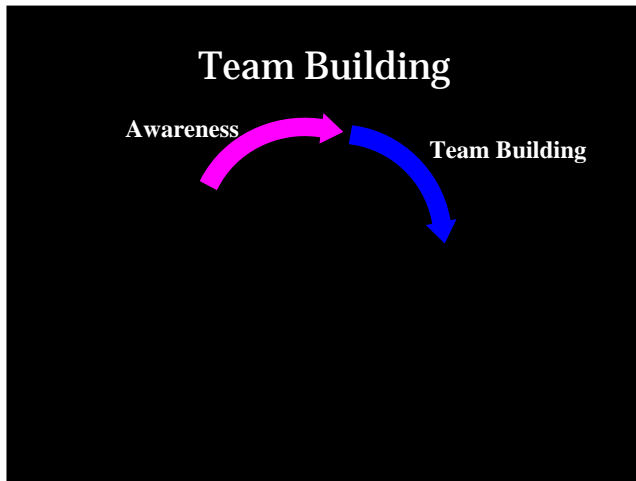
Communicating, ensuring we are all on the same page, and speaking the same language, making things more clear for people, improving understanding.



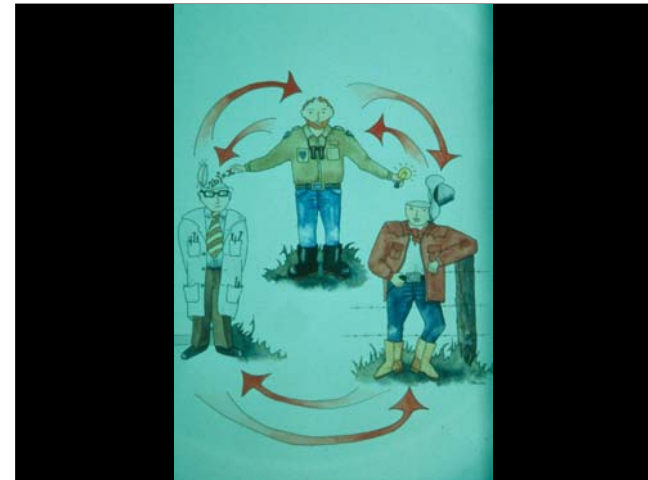
Cows and Fish focuses on a building-block approach to awareness, beginning with basic ecological principles, encouraging the understanding of the issues before leaping to solutions.



Previous experience has shown that with better information and increased understanding of landscape processes, ecological functions, and watershed health, local communities and individuals make better landscape management decisions. Improved landscape management decisions lead to sustainable agricultural operations and communities, healthy fish and wildlife populations and enhanced watershed function, water quality and quantity. Knowledge is empowering!



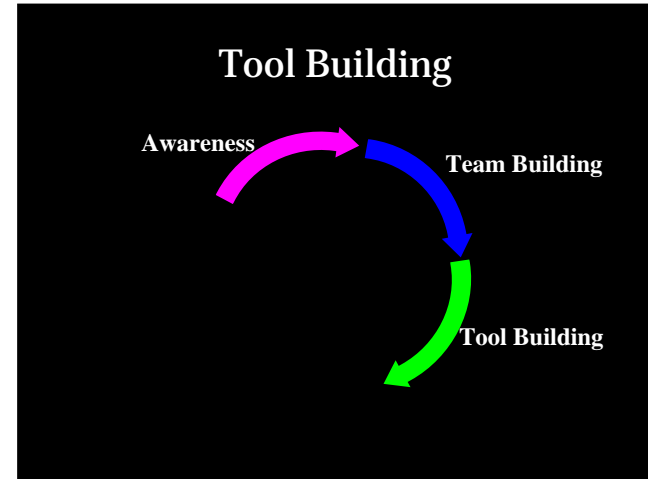
**Team building**, the second element of the process, links landowners, communities, and resource managers to form local partnerships to address local riparian and watershed issues.



Professionals with science and resource management backgrounds bring knowledge, facts, research and data to the team. Landowners and community members bring their insights from living and working on the land, in addition to an astute, hands-on understanding of the landscape and their community.



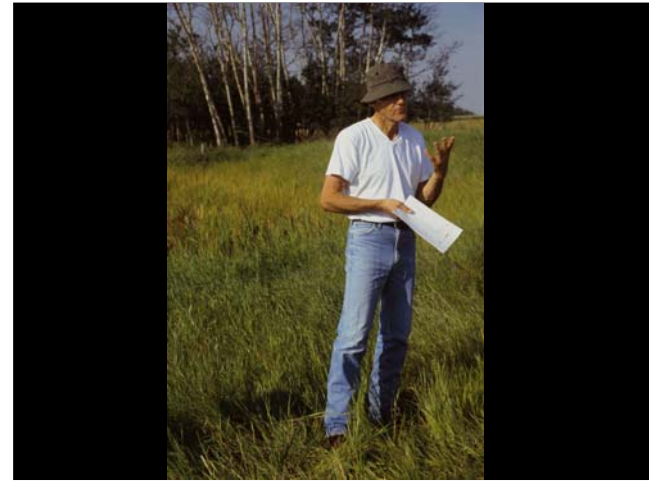
When working together, people living/working on the landscape and resource professionals can have a profound impact on the landscape – blending natural wisdom with scientific knowledge to enable landscape change



The third element, **tool building**, provides landowners with the tools, options, and techniques to make management changes. Tools are the actions that are undertaken to maintain, restore and enhance riparian and watershed health.



At a local level, management changes can be tried, tested and evaluated to determine the costs and benefits associated with the change. Experience and demonstration have shown that practicality, economic viability and simplicity are paramount to the uptake of most management options. Acting as a catalyst to their neighbours, landowners often spark further uptake of tools within their community by learning from one another and sharing ideas.



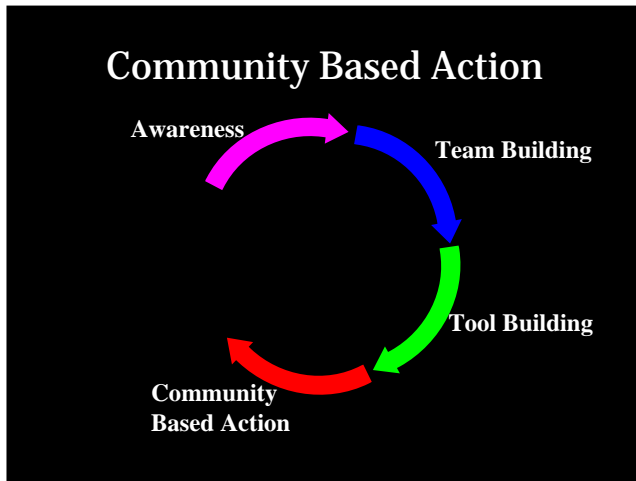
Our experience suggests that successful tools include profiling landowners that are currently managing healthy riparian areas, demonstrating new technology



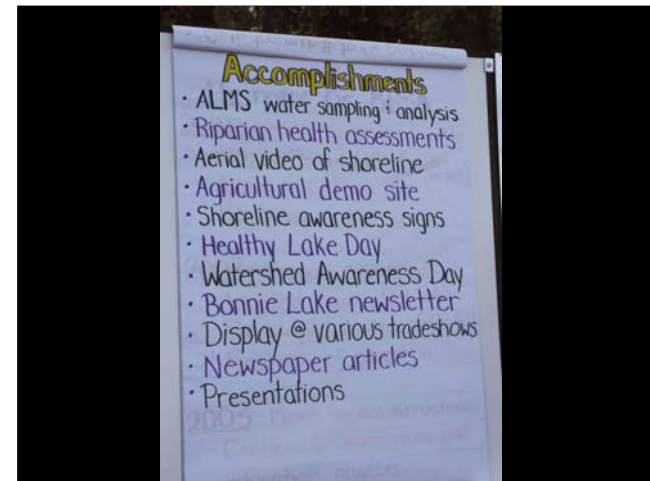
blending historical images and messages with ecological principles in extension tools and presentations (like the Life and Times series).



Tools that are oriented to youth, such as the Cows, Fish, Cattedogs and Kids! game show, educate youth about landscape processes and ecology and provide a channel to transfer messages home to adults.



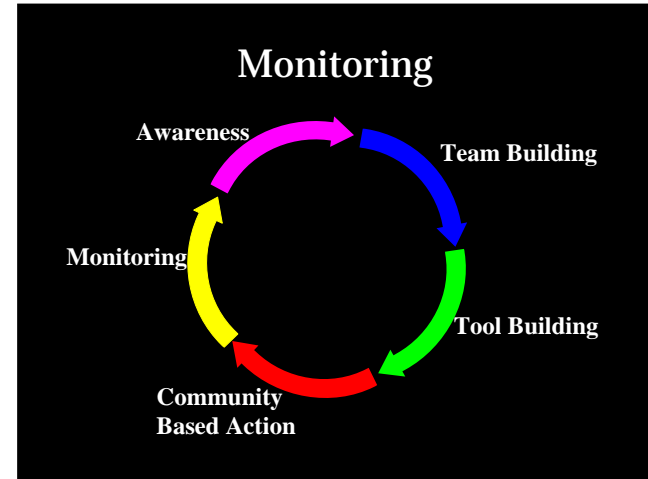
**Community-based action** is the culmination of all elements of the process. Working at a local, community level through the elements of the Cows and Fish process ensures locally driven, community-based solutions to riparian and watershed issues. Ultimately, the goal of the Cows and Fish process is to construct a stewardship ethic within the community and individual landowners.



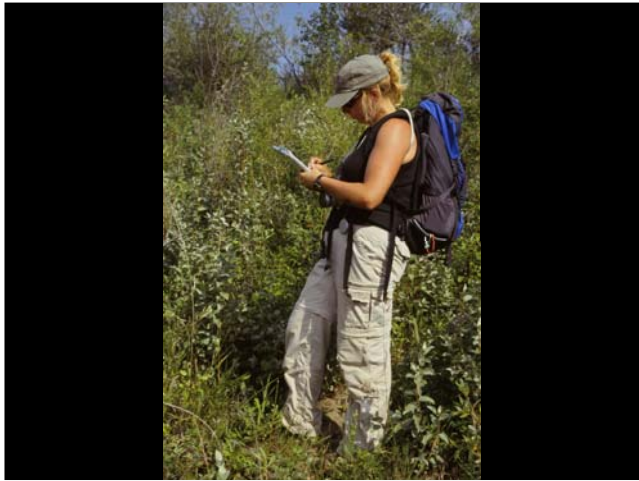
When local watershed and riparian programming is consistently delivered and facilitated through this community-based process, effective landscape change that has longevity occurs.



Community-based action recognizes that farmers, ranchers, urban and rural landowners, lakeshore residents, acreage owners and their communities are in the best position to identify the need for management change, formulate the change and benefit from it.



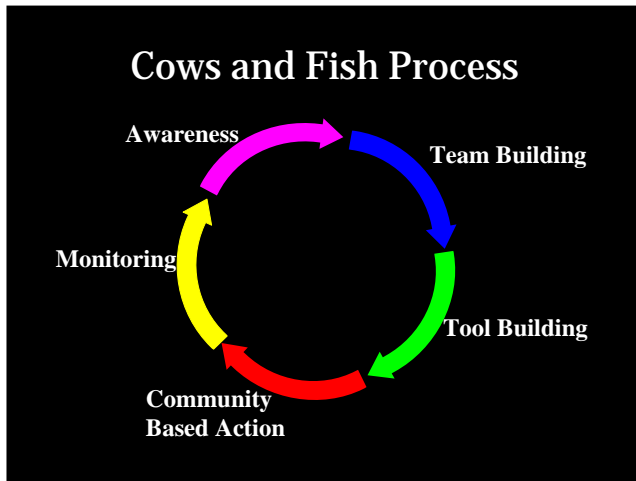
The **monitoring** component of the process is about measuring the success of a community goal of greater landscape or watershed health and sustainable agricultural operations and communities. Simple monitoring or evaluation may encompass measuring the effectiveness of awareness efforts.



More complex evaluation might include the collection of riparian health inventory information to set a baseline for the health of a watershed.



Whether simple or complex, evaluation and monitoring are important components to establish a measuring stick from which to gauge progress and success. Evaluation and monitoring results often act as a vehicle for further action, allowing communities and individuals to see where improvements could be made.



The process is not a successive set of steps. The process is circular, repetitive, and a continuum of overlapping elements. Repetition of particular elements, such as awareness, ensures understanding, building the foundation to translate management principles into individual action



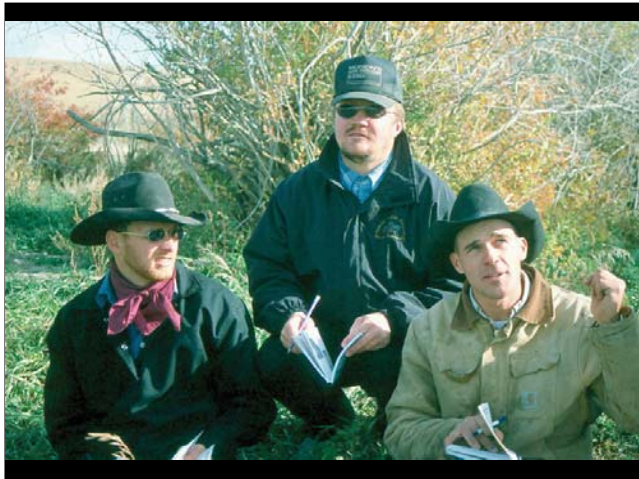
It's a pathway to implement landscape change, a framework for action at a local, community level and a template for watershed-based or environmental education.



The C&F Process is not a cure-all solution. There really is no quick fix, no silver bullet, no magic elixir for generating sustainable behaviour in people. This stuff may cure coughs, colds, sore heads, chills, cramps, colic, sprains, lumps, bumps, bruises and contusions – but it won't fix overgrazing, climate change, or water quantity issues – to name a few current ailments.



Don't be afraid to be persistent, and navigate the bends and bumps in the road that will undoubtedly appear.



With time and patience, the process will help you to empower communities and individuals to be proactive and decisive with regard to watershed and riparian management. In addition, it develops leadership, connects communities and hastens the transition from awareness to sustainable action – which whether we are dealing with watersheds, riparian areas, or forests is our goal as environmental educators.



Throughout Alberta, multiple community or watershed stewardship groups have found the Cows and Fish process a useful format to follow, to build a cumulative body of information, to empower and motivate community members and to measure progress.



Continuity and persistence, coupled with successful engagement of people are key constituents of the Cows and Fish process. The process allows for improved and more frequent interaction, builds relationships and ultimately leads to greater acceptance and adoption of new information.