

Appendix K: Riparian Planting Projects

Restoring Riparian Habitat

RCO seeks to provide funding for projects that will restore healthy, functioning riparian ecosystems, which are fundamental for clean water, healthy salmon populations, and climate resilient watersheds. To that end, RCO has adopted riparian buffer width standards for a project with riparian planting as the primary purpose.

The amount of the buffer will depend on the landscape. There are two types of ecosystems in Washington: forested ecoregions and dryland ecoregions. In general, forested ecoregions dominate western Washington, northeastern Washington, and portions of southeast, north central, and the eastern Cascade Mountains. Dryland ecoregions are more readily contained in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregions east of the Cascade Mountain Range.

Required Buffer Widths

Forested Ecoregions

To achieve full riparian function in forested ecoregions, RCO requires that planted riparian widths should be one, 200-year Site Potential Tree Height measured from the edge of the active channel or active floodplain.

Dryland Ecoregions

For dryland ecoregions, RCO requires the planted riparian width to be one, 200-year Site Potential Tree Height if available, or the width of the riparian vegetation community. If site conditions do not support tree species or Site Potential Tree Height is less than one hundred feet, then the riparian width is determined by the full extent of all riparian vegetation (the riparian zone) or a minimum of one hundred feet.

Guidance Documents

Applicants, lead entity evaluators, and the SRFB Review Panel should ensure planted riparian widths are appropriate for the site and represent a clear benefit to salmon recovery as articulated in the regional recovery plans. The SRFB Review Panel uses the SRFB Evaluation Criteria, appendix F, to review each project.

For projects with the primary purpose of riparian planting, RCO requires the planted riparian buffer meet the widths outlined in the Department of Fish and Wildlife's 2012 [Stream Habitat Restoration Guidelines](#) and the 2020 [Riparian Ecosystems, Volume 2: Management Recommendations](#).

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has developed an [online mapping tool](#) to help determine the Site Potential Tree Height for any site.

Exceptions to the Buffer Requirement

If the primary purpose of the project is not riparian planting, rather the primary purpose is another eligible work type (i.e., in-stream restoration or fish passage) and the riparian planting provides an ancillary benefit, the minimum planting width is not required but is recommended. For example, streambank stabilization cannot be a primary project. If a project has both, then riparian planting is the primary purpose.

RCO recognizes it's not possible to meet a one-size-fits-all requirement at each site. Most riparian planting projects funded by RCO are on private lands. Private landowners, who are essential partners to these projects, voluntarily allow riparian plantings on their properties to support salmon recovery efforts. Some landowners are not able to offer a wide enough area to meet 200-year Site Potential Tree Height, but still want to participate in restoration. Sponsors are encouraged to apply even if their projects do not meet the 200-year Site Potential Tree Height.

For streams listed for temperature on the 303(d) list, the sponsor must provide adequate justification as to why the requirements cannot be met and how the project still restores riparian function. If a project does not meet the 200-year Site Potential Tree Height, the applicant must do the following:

- Provide an exception including the presence of a structure or property line; road or railway, pipeline, powerline, or other utility; or topography that impedes the ability to meet minimum width requirements.
- If an exception does not apply, then the sponsor must provide the following:
 - Justification that the planting project still achieves the goal of restoring riparian function (i.e., continuity, shade, pollution removal, contributions of detrital nutrients, recruitment of large woody materials, and bank stability, etc.).
 - A letter of support for the project from either of the following:

- Natural resource management tribal biologist whose usual and accustomed areas include the project location.
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat biologist.

For riparian planting projects less than 200-year Site Potential Tree Height and not on streams listed for temperature on the 303(d) list, the project will be reviewed by the local technical advisory group and the state review panel for riparian function.

Match Requirements

For projects that meet Site Potential Tree Height from the active channel or floodplain match is not required. For projects that cannot meet the minimum buffer width, the minimum match required is 15 percent.