

Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Summer 2007

THE HABITAT CONNECTION: RIPARIAN

Have you ever thought about where most of Wyoming's wildlife calls home? Did you think of the prairie habitat? It might seem like prairie would be the answer since Wyoming has a lot of prairies. But the habitat in Wyoming that holds the most wildlife is called riparian. More than 80 percent of Wyoming's wildlife uses the riparian zone at some point in their lives.

The riparian area is the green zone around a stream, river or lake. It can be a small area or a very large area, depending on the size of the stream, river or lake.

Paint Creek is found in the prairie.



The green zone can range in size, anywhere from a few inches to miles. In the green zone, water and good soils provide a great place for trees, bushes and grasses to grow. The trees attract many kinds of birds, like the red-winged blackbird. It also attracts animals that use the riparian zone for hunting grounds. Minks, otters and raccoons are just some of the wildlife you might find.

Don't forget you can find riparian zones in all kinds of habitats. There are streams that run through prairies and forests, high elevations and low elevations. Wildlife uses the green zone in all of these areas.

The mink and raccoon live in riparian habitats.



The green zone is found around the Encampment River in Wyoming.



Red-winged blackbird

Images by Lindsay Parker and WGFDD

FIELD Wildlife Journal

Lucy-Diggins Wold, Information and Education (I&E) Specialist

There are a lot of biologists in the Wyoming Game and Fish Department who study riparian areas. There are also other jobs in Game and Fish that are really important to help keep the green zones in Wyoming. One of those jobs is called an Information and Education (I&E) Specialist. Lucy Diggins-Wold, the I&E specialist in Green River, works hard to educate people about the importance of riparian habitats.

“Because of our dry state, riparian areas are probably the most important habitat type for wildlife we have in Wyoming, and it is important for people to understand them,” I&E Specialist Diggins-Wold says. “So I spend time with students to help them take a closer look at what is in the water and along the water’s edge.”

She does this by doing stream investigations of insects, fish and other animals that might be living in the area. I&E Specialist Diggins-Wold uses the same scientific tools as the biologists to help teach kids. And the kids even get to use the tools and get wet!

Another duty of I&E specialists is to work alongside biologists and report to the public what they are finding in the riparian habitat.

I&E Specialist Diggins-Wold takes photographs of the wildlife work, then writes about it in newspaper articles, radio spots, magazine articles, trail signs, brochures and even Web pages. “The great part about my job is I get to work in the field with the wildlife and then tell people about how the wildlife are doing. It is a perfect balance in my job.”

Information and Education Specialist Lucy Diggins-Wold



Students study riparian zones and their importance.



I&E Specialist Diggins-Wold works on writing newspaper articles.

In addition to Lucy Diggins-Wold, there are six other regional Information and Education Specialists across Wyoming with the Game and Fish. Hopefully you will get to learn from them or even read one of their articles!

WILDLIFE PROFILES



LuRoy Parker



Gary M. Stole, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



WGFD



LuRoy Parker

WILDLIFE PROFILES

Western Painted Turtle

Size: 4 to 10 inches long.

Eats: fish, live and dead plants, insects.

Lives: slow-moving, shallow streams, rivers and lakes.

This turtle is green in color with yellow and dark-colored lines on its shell. It has a stripe down its back. The western painted turtle spends most of its life in the water, so it depends on water and the riparian habitat to survive. It likes the riparian habitat because it can find food and still hang out at the water's edge to sun itself on logs. Have you ever seen a turtle sunbathing? It does this to increase its body temperature. In Wyoming the western painted turtle is found mainly in eastern counties and is abundant near Wheatland. It likes to stay in areas below 6,000 feet.

Beaver

Size: 3 to 4 feet long and weighs 44 to 60 pounds.

Eats: bark and small twigs, particularly aspens and willows.

Lives: streams and lakes with trees on the banks.

Did you know the beaver is a rodent? It has two large, dark orange incisors, which are its front teeth. Like all other rodents, these teeth never stop growing. Can you imagine having teeth that always grew? Beavers keep their teeth worn down by gnawing on things like twigs and branches. Beavers are very important for the riparian areas because their dams hold water that helps vegetation grow. Their dams also help trap dirt that has eroded from stream banks and is traveling through the water.

Moose

Size: 6 to 7 feet tall and weighs as much as 1,400 pounds.

Eats: willows, twigs and bark from trees.

Lives: riparian areas with aspens and willows.

Did you know moose are good swimmers? In the summer this comes in handy to keep mosquitoes and flies away. You can often find a moose hanging out in its favorite spot, the green zone. Moose eat mainly willows, which are shrubs found next to streams and lakes. But during the winter they lose weight because they eat twigs and the bark of trees, because all the leaves are gone from the trees. A moose can live up to 20 years.

Osprey

Size: 21 to 24 inches.

Eats: an osprey is a piscivore, meaning it eats mainly fish.

Lives: nests near lakes, rivers and streams.

Did you know an osprey is also called a fish hawk? This is because it is so good at catching fish. It has wings that have a "wrist," which allows it to hover over the water in search of its prey. It watches closely, and when it sees a fish, it dives towards the water with its talons, or claws, outstretched. The osprey then dives under the water to catch a fish! Almost 80 percent of the time when an osprey dives down into the water, it comes up with fish! Now that's a good fisherman!

OUR Wildlife Heritage

Early Settlers and Water

As early settlers moved across Wyoming, they often searched for places to rest near riparian areas. That is because they and their animals both needed water to survive the long trek to their new homes.

Those settlers who decided to live in Wyoming searched for areas where there was water for several reasons. First, they needed water to drink and also water for their animals, but they also used water and the lush riparian areas to water their crops. Is the town you live in near a river or lake? Name all the riparian habitats near your home.



Think about all the things you use water for. Do you think you could survive without water?



Around Wyoming

A Place for Wildlife

All riparian areas provide places for wildlife to eat, drink, hide and sleep, but did you know that riparian habitats have other functions? Riparian habitats help keep the water clean by acting as a filter. For example, when there is runoff in the spring, green zones help keep the soil that has eroded on land from entering the water. Lakes help store the water during the runoff to be used by wildlife and vegetation later when things might be drier.

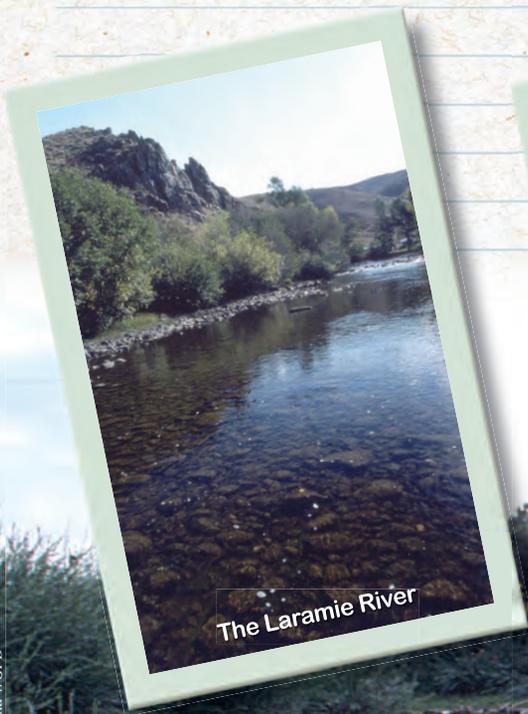


The Green Zone

Vegetation is another word for plants. Vegetation that lines the green zone is the most important part of the riparian habitat. This helps keep the stream



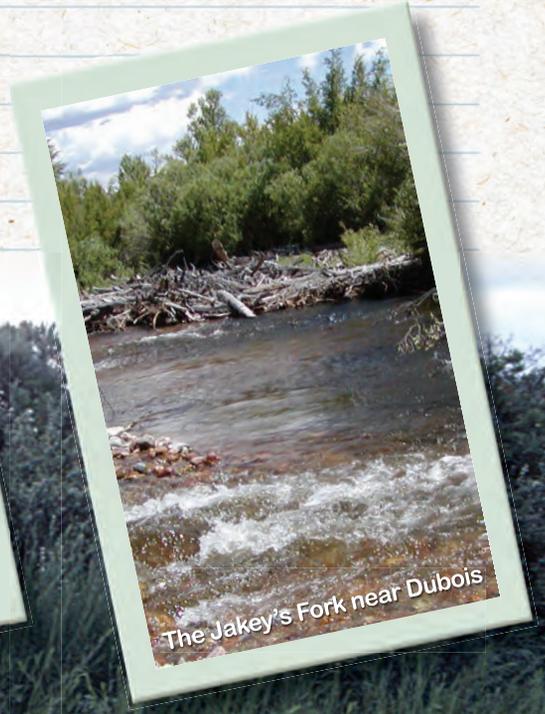
banks from eroding away. Plants can be anything from grasses with strong roots to trees that provide cover or shade to the river or lake. Wildlife like to hang out in the cool shade of the green zone during the summer months.



The Laramie River



Blue Crane Creek near Jackson



The Jakey's Fork near Dubois

Images by LuRay Parker and WCFD

Riparian zones help keep the water clean.

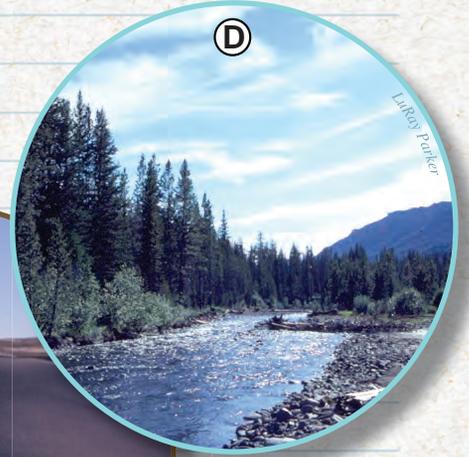
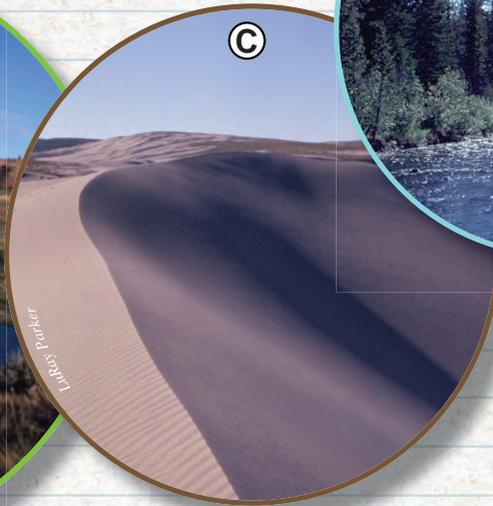
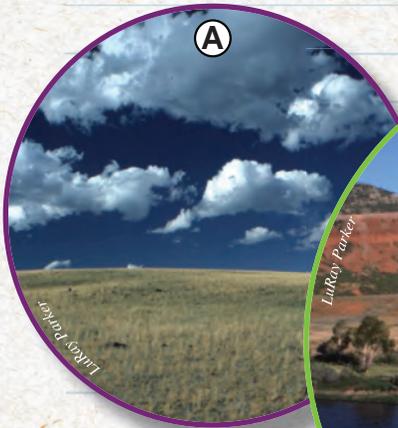
Look at the pictures on this page of green zones from around Wyoming. Can you tell if the riparian habitat is healthy? See if you can find these rivers on a Wyoming map.

Paint Creek near the Clark's Fork

Outdoor Classroom

Riparian Habitat Challenge

Can you identify the riparian habitat in these photos?



Can you identify which animals use the riparian habitat?



Answers on page 8.

▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

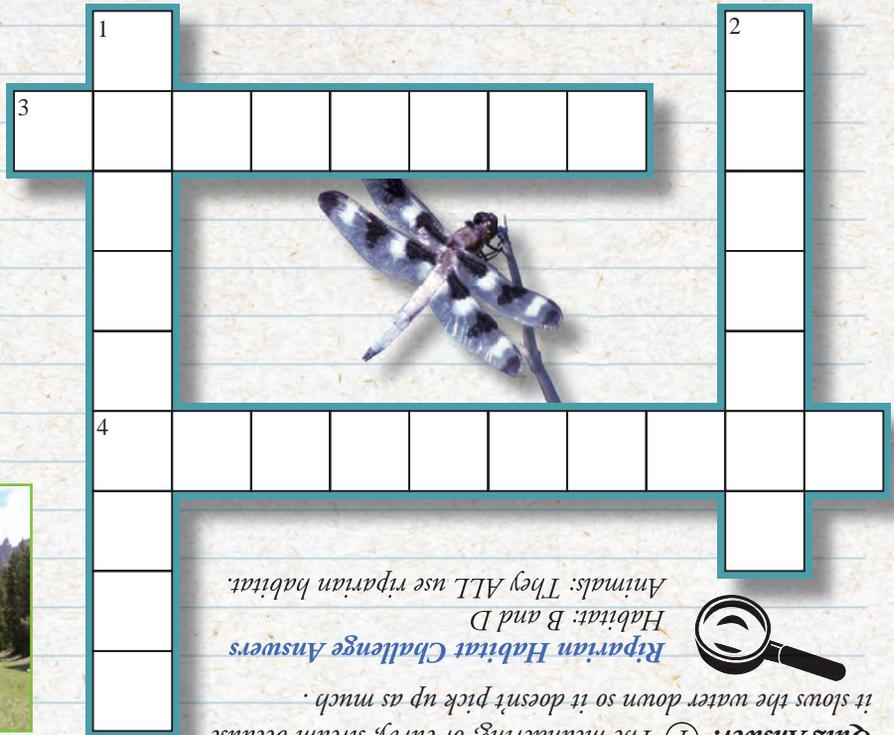
Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

- The name for the habitat or green zone around a stream, river or lake is called ...
- This is another word for plants.

DOWN

- An animal that eats fish is called a ...
- When soil is moved by water it is called ...



Quiz



Which of these streams will have less erosion?
1) Meandering or 2) Straight

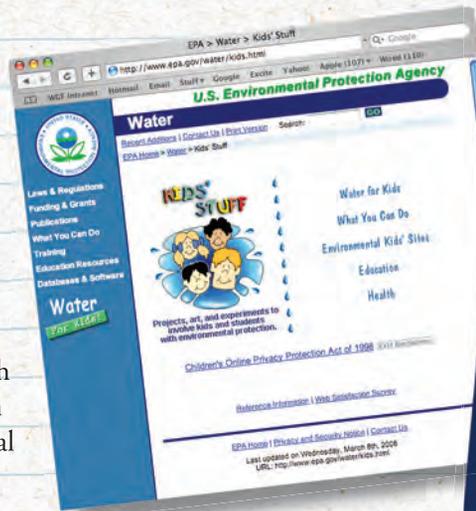
Quiz Answer: ① The meandering, or curvy, stream because it slows the water down so it doesn't pick up as much.

ACROSS 3. Riparian 4. Vegetation
DOWN 1. Piscivore 2. Erosion

▶ LEARNING LINKS ◀

Website

<http://www.epa.gov/water/kids.html>

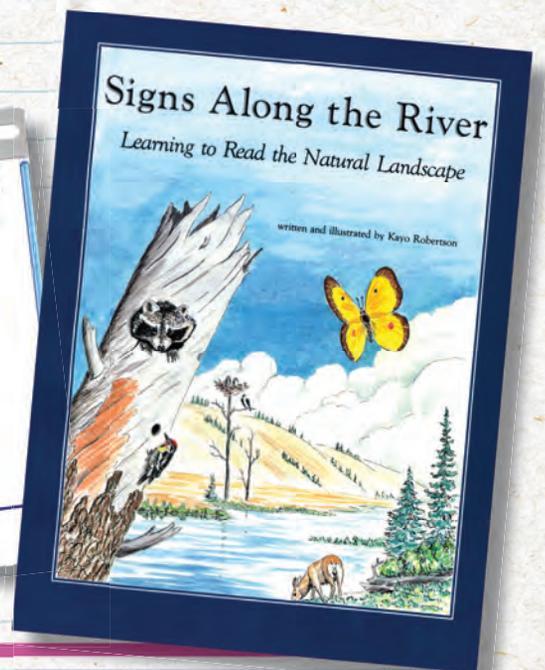


Book

Signs Along the River: Learning to Read the Natural Landscape

by Kayo Robertson

Can you walk along a riverbank and tell which animals live there? In this book, you will learn about the different hints or "signs" each animal leaves behind.



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