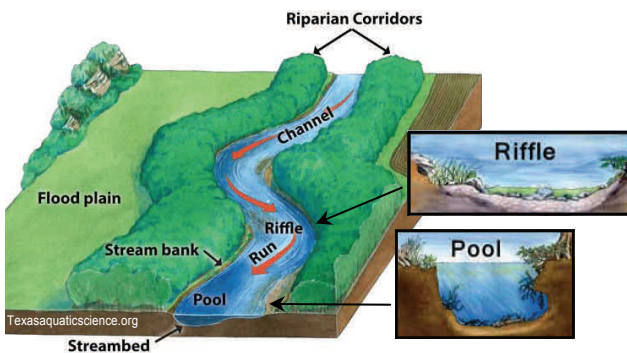


2 Life at the Water's Edge

How Streams Work

two in a series of six fact sheets on stream management

Streams are “dynamic systems”, which means they’re constantly changing and are always striving to balance energy.



Components of a natural stream

In our area, many streams are composed of alternately spaced, deep and shallow areas called pools and riffles.

Pools are deep areas that often contain fine materials such as sand, a perfect respite for fish! **Riffles** are shallow, fast moving areas that often contain larger materials like cobbles and boulders. These areas provide important habitat for fish spawning and macroinvertebrates (e.g. mayfly nymphs), an important food source for fish. Another important component of streams is the floodplain. **Floodplains** provide a critical service to the community and are essential for healthy streams because they:

- ◆ Reduce flooding in our communities by containing excess stormwater.
- ◆ Reduce stream bank erosion by relieving energy in the channel.
- ◆ Reduce pollution by allowing sediment, bacteria and fertilizers to settle out and be utilized by plants.
- ◆ Recharge and filter groundwater so streamflow is maintained in dry weather.

Why do streams meander?

It's a balancing act! All streams transport water along with bed materials like soil and rocks. By meandering, streams can balance the work involved in carrying bed materials and the energy of transporting water.

How much will a stream meander?

The size of the meander is related to the slope of the stream and the area of the land draining to the stream. Steep mountain streams hardly meander at all, while large rivers in flat valleys often have large meanders.

What happens when a stream un-meanders?

Streams are not pipes. When we eliminate natural meanders in streams, and attempt to “nail” the stream into a straight line, the effects are often dramatic. Excessive energy often becomes trapped in the stream channel causing the stream to cut a deeper channel. Eventually deep, incised stream channels will begin to erode side walls of channels and widen the stream. Erosion increases as the stream attempts to recreate the missing meanders. Floodplains often become



Typical Natural Stream Corridor in Northeast Ohio, Cuyahoga SWCD

disconnected from the stream, and downstream landowners are at a greater risk of flooding and erosion.

Fact: Even water flowing through a pipe at low flow will meander!

Is stream bank erosion natural?

Even streams in balance erode, but usually not in a way that degrades the stream. Erosion in a healthy stream usually equals the amount of material deposited. If a stream begins to erode excessively, it may be out of balance. Upstream increases in stormwater runoff or changes to stream channels upstream may start a downward cutting process leading to unstable, eroding stream banks.

What's a healthy stream?

- ☐ A meandering, winding, “S”-shaped curve
- ☐ Open access to floodplains
- ☐ Vegetated riparian area





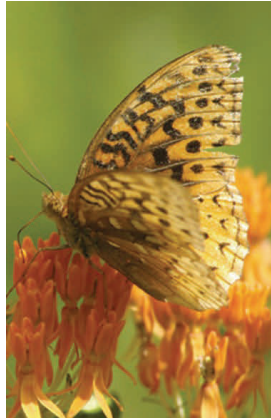
Backyard

Habitat

Improvement

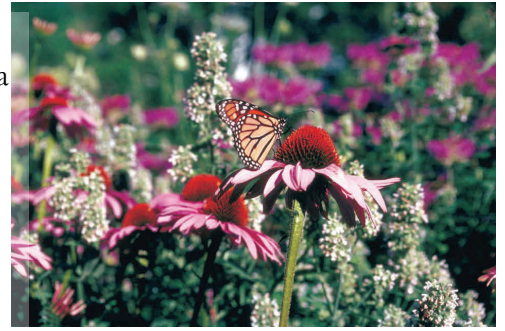
Ideas

Benefit with Butterflies



Attracting butterflies is a great way to begin the process of making our yards more wildlife friendly. Butterflies require two types of

plants: a nectar source for the adult butterflies, and a host plant for caterpillars. Butterflies can actually smell these plants up to two miles away! What's so amazing is that these plants are so common. Nectar sources: lilac, phlox, zinnias, cosmos, purple coneflower. Host plants: dill, parsley, carrot, violet, dogwood, viburnum.



To find out more about general stream management or stewardship go to www.cuyahogawcd.org, click on *What We Do* and then click on *Watershed Management*.

Acting today to conserve our local Creeks

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Life at the Water's Edge 2

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