



Ponoka Riparian Restoration Program

2015 Program Guidelines

1. Overview

Poor water quality is a major issue in the Battle River watershed. Long-term river water quality monitoring shows that high nutrient levels (phosphorus and nitrogen) are of particular concern, regularly exceeding water quality guidelines for the protection of aquatic life. Various factors contribute to these high nutrient levels and water quality in general; the health of riparian areas is one such factor. Aerial videography carried out in 2007-2008 along the entire Alberta length of the Battle River showed that many stretches of the river's riparian areas are in poor health. An Index of Biological Integrity (IBI) study conducted in 2006-2007 also confirmed that biological integrity of the river system was impaired in many locations. Several of the sites tested within Ponoka County received an IBI score of between 0-40%, which indicates areas where there is little to no fishing and many fish species at risk.

Land use in the project area is dominated by privately owned annual and perennial crop and pastureland. As such, agricultural beneficial management practices on private land may have a great influence on the health of riparian areas in this part of the watershed. The Ponoka Riparian Restoration Project is a targeted effort to engage landowners within Ponoka County, the Town of Ponoka and the nearby First Nations community to undertake beneficial management practices along the Battle River and its tributaries to improve riparian health, water quality and fish habitat in one area of the watershed that has been most impacted by human activities.

Interested landowners are invited to complete an application form that describes what they would like to do on their land. The application form includes an estimate of project costs along with a description of the project and its impact. Applications will be reviewed by the PRRP Advisory Committee and successful applicants will enter into a formal agreement with BRWA.

The BRWA will work with our partners to host landowner meetings, complete riparian health inventories and provide technical advice on management changes and restoration work as part of the PRRP. Funding for this program is provided by our partners Environment Canada and Ponoka County.

2. Projects Eligible for Funding Support

Any projects that meet the purpose of the PRRP may be eligible. Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Fencing (including cross-fencing) to manage livestock access to water bodies, banks, shorelines, riparian areas, or native range.
- b) Creating permanent cover (e.g. trees, shrubs, perennial forages, grass) buffer zones adjacent to water bodies or riparian areas.
- c) Developing off-site watering systems.
- d) Providing alternative shelter for livestock (alternatives to using riparian or native range trees/willows/shrubs).
- e) Converting non-native vegetation to native shrubs and trees adjacent to the river.
- f) Planting native trees and shrubs in riparian areas and native range where none exist.
- g) Controlling weeds in riparian areas, or in native range.
- h) Manure management around surface water or shallow groundwater (including soil and manure testing as part of a manure management plan).
- i) Building bridges/other approved crossings to manage how livestock or ATVs/snowmobiles cross water.
- j) Septic/sewage system improvements (where the septic/sewage system is currently having negative impacts on surface water or shallow groundwater).
- k) Any other idea that a landowner has, that meets the purpose and intent of the program, may be eligible.

To be eligible, **the project must be effective for its intended purpose**. For example, if the project is a fence with a purpose to keep cattle out of a wetland for certain periods, then the fence needs to be designed and ultimately built and maintained such that cattle are kept out of the wetland during those periods. Length of project and maintenance period will be determined on a case-by-case period.

3. Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Capital Items associated with an approved project, for which the landowner has a receipt of expense made, can be eligible for funding through the PRRP. Expenses will be approved on a case-by-case basis as part of the funding agreement. Eligible program funds may include:

- Project materials (e.g. fenceposts, wire, bridge decking, water pumps, grass seed, native tree/shrub seedlings, windbreak planting, etc.)
- Contracted labour for the project (e.g. engineers, fence-builders, surveyors, etc.)
- Contracted or rented equipment for the project (e.g. tractor, post-pounder, backhoe, etc.)

Items that are ineligible for PRRP funds include:

- Any cost not associated with the approved project
- Any cost for which a landowner does not have a receipt of expense made.
- Any cost that has been covered by any other funding program.

Note: Retroactivity

- Expenses made before a project is approved, **MAY be eligible if they were completed since April 1, 2015.**
- HOWEVER: the landowner must understand that he/she runs the risk of **not receiving** project funding for expenses made before a project is approved.
- The intent of this “Retroactivity Clause” is to support new projects, for example, a project done a couple of months ago, before the landowner realized there was a funding program, or to help cover costs of materials that may have been purchased some time ago (for example, fence posts), but happen to be going in the ground as part of a new project.
- Retroactive projects may not apply for funding if they had previously received funding for the project through other sources.

4. Funding Levels

The PRRP is a shared investment program. There is a limited amount of funding to be shared amongst all interested parties. The landowners are expected to share in the planning and implementation of their project. The BRWA may not be able to fund all the costs of a project in this program. The following funding levels will apply:

- a) The maximum funding provided to **any single project**, by the PRRP, will be \$5,000 for Ponoka County landowners and \$1000 for Town of Ponoka residents.
- b) Landowners are **able to apply for funding for more than one project** (ie. if the project idea would result in expenses of over \$5,000 the landowner is advised to break it into several individual parts). If a landowner has several \$5000 projects, all ideas will be considered. However, we cannot guarantee that multiple projects will be approved.

5. Riparian Restoration Project Application Decision Making

Applications will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee on an ongoing basis throughout 2015 and 2016. **The deadline for this term of funding is October 31st, 2015.**

The PRRP Advisory Committee consists of members from the BRWA, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Cows and Fish, Grey Wooded Forage Association, Ponoka County, and the Town of Ponoka.

All project applicants will be kept confidential to the PRRP Advisory Committee until the project has been approved and the landowner has given permission for their name to be shared.

6. Program Priorities

If required, preference for funding will be given to higher-priority projects, as determined by the FRRP advisory team and/or based on environmental considerations. Priorities include but are not limited to:

- a) Effect of proposed project on meeting the FRRP goals
- b) Protecting habitat / ecological function vs. restoring habitat / ecological function
- c) Current state of Riparian Area and potential for improvement
- d) Project size; number of acres it will help improve; number of livestock involved in project
- e) Project location with the Ferry Point reach priority area
- f) Willingness of landowner to share and demonstrate what's been done and lessons learned through the project (e.g. tours, articles)
- g) Ease of access to the project for education and awareness opportunities
- h) Value of habitat for fish and wildlife
- i) Previous work done to improve management practices and/or previous riparian health inventory
- j) Project costs
- k) Potential for further projects and improvements

7. Permits and Approvals

It is the responsibility of the landowner to ensure that they have all required permits and approvals, from any and all regulatory / permitting agencies. BRWA or our partners will not be responsible in any way for permits and approvals for any project under this program.

8. Participating Landowner Responsibilities

- Landowners will acquire and maintain all required permits, approvals, permissions, etc. for the project
- Landowners will be responsible for all up-front costs associated with a project. BRWA will reimburse for those project costs which are deemed eligible project expenses, once a funding agreement is in place. Landowners will be responsible for maintaining the project such that its intended purpose is accomplished for a length of time suitable for the project and agreed upon by all partners.
- Landowners will be responsible for all ongoing project maintenance (including costs).
- Landowners will provide reasonable, periodic access to project staff and our partners, for Riparian Health or Range Assessment or Inventory or other ecological assessments of the project area (this will include photographing the project site). Landowners will be given at least 48 hour notice.
- Landowners will consider requests by BRWA staff and/or project partners to include the project in presentations or printed material, tours / field days / demonstrations / etc., on a case-by-case basis.
- In consultation with the BRWA and our partners, landowners will develop and follow a stewardship plan for the project area, that all parties involved with the project agree with and support.
- Landowners will complete their project and send in receipts within 12 months of project approval.
- Not hold BRWA, project partners or funders liable for project failures do to unforeseen circumstances.