

Habitat Restoration for Riparian Wildlife in the South Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys, BC

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Eighty-five percent of riparian habitats have been lost in the south Okanagan. To recover the populations of riparian wildlife, there are many riparian restoration projects being conducted within many local groups. Here we outline just the three that we have been actively involved with. In 2000-2003, 15 km of cattle fencing, at a cost of ~\$5K per kilometre, has been erected to begin to integrate the re-establishment of riparian areas with agriculture. Ranching operations match this funding by establishing alternate watering facilities for livestock and maintaining fences. Ranchers will also allow access to their properties so that vegetation and bird community responses to the new habitats are monitored. This monitoring effort will be integrated within the new Landbird Inventory program designated as a high priority by Partners in Flight in the south Okanagan and Similkameen valleys this year.

In 2002, the Osoyoos Indian Band developed a range plan for cattle which benefits chats by reducing grazing in the riparian zone where 8 chat territories were found this year. It also benefits cattle by allowing pastures near riparian zones to regenerate and provide better forage quality for livestock. The higher the quality of forage, the less likely cattle are to browse the riparian shrubs and trees.

In 2003, Canadian Wildlife Service initiated the restoration of 56 ha riparian meadow in Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area. This will be the largest riparian restoration project in the south Okanagan and will benefit numerous species at risk including Chats, Western Screech Owl, Gopher Snake, and Spadefoot Toad.