

# Restoration of Riparian Areas

## *A Chicago River fact sheet*

### **The Importance of Riparian Areas**

Many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians depend on riparian habitats. "Riparian" refers to the unique ecosystems that surround the banks of river and streams. The individuals in a riparian community have specific adaptations for living in repeatedly flooded environments. Riparian forests provide critical wildlife habitat for migratory songbirds, waterfowl, fish, amphibians, and a host of other species.

Riparian corridors are highly favorable for wildlife. They are the areas with the most water and the densest plant cover, providing predator protection, shade, breeding and nesting areas, and food sources.

Intact rivers and riparian areas attract more than wildlife. People hike, boat, fish, hunt, and explore these areas, bringing tourism dollars into the local economy. Healthy riparian areas improve water quality, reduce erosion, attract beneficial insects, and enhance a variety of recreational opportunities. For their lushness and productivity, many consider riparian areas vital habitat.

### **The Need for Active Restoration**

Riparian restoration transforms weedy, abandoned land into valuable native riparian savanna, woodland, and forest. The success of these projects depends greatly on science and technology to ensure that the projects benefit targeted wildlife, the environment, and local communities.

Without active restoration, invasive plants such as garlic mustard and buckthorn invade denuded areas and diminish the re-growth of native vegetation. The impact of invasive species is devastating. They provide no food or shelter for wildlife. They increase erosion to river channels and banks and therefore damage bridges and roads. Also they reduce the availability of ground water and drastically change river flow and velocity which further impacts native habitat, wildlife and human safety.

**The benefits of restoring riparian habitats can be seen below.**

### **Benefits to the River**

- Improves flood control
- Stabilizes banks
- Restores physical and successional processes

### **Benefits to Humans**

- Improves water and air quality
- Improves aesthetics
- Provides recreation opportunities
- Provides economic opportunities
- Increases the natural wealth of area

### **Benefits to Wildlife**

- Increases habitat connectivity
- Provides quality habitat

### **Benefits for Flood Protection**

- Prevents economic loss to farmland
- Traps debris by screening floodwater
- Reduces inland erosion by slowing flows
- Traps silt deposits
- Acts as filter for non-flood farm drainage