

# Lakes, streams, and riparian areas

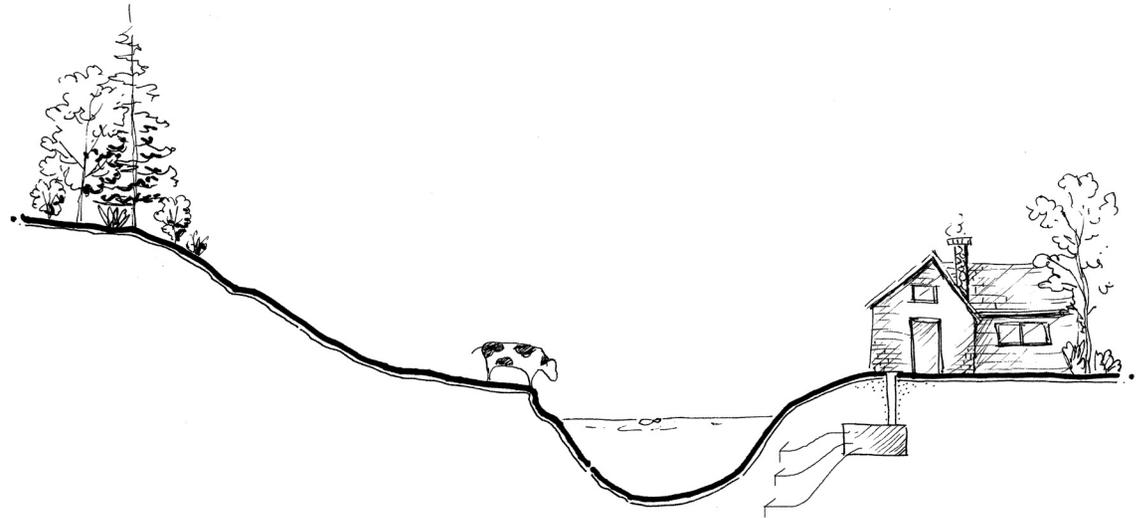
Water is the most important substance on Earth because all life is dependent on water for survival. Lakes, streams, and riparian areas provide not only water, but the food, irrigation and transportation needed for development. Their attractiveness for development, however, also threatens the health of these areas.

Lakes are large bodies of normally freshwater, which may be formed by river drainage, surface water runoff, glaciers, or ground water seepage. Lakes provide important habitat for fish, wildlife, and migratory birds. They are also valuable areas for recreational activities such as water sports, fishing, and hunting (Environmental Protection Agency 13 Dec. 2004).

Streams are natural bodies of flowing water that form complex ecosystems. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "a stream begins at its headwaters and gathers water from runoff, rain, snow melt, or from underground springs. Streams hold great importance regardless of size or flow. They provide water, a variety of aesthetic values, and are important wildlife habitats" (www.epa.gov/maia/html/glossary.html 13 Dec. 2004)."

Riparian zones are the areas of vegetation that are found along the banks of streams, lakes, and wetlands. Riparian areas are similar to wetlands in that they share some of the same functions of wetland ecosystems. These areas filter runoff, slow the velocity of high water, protect stream banks against erosion, and provide critical habitat for wildlife (Gilmer 1995).

It is important to protect lakes, streams, and riparian areas for habitat, recreation, flood protection, water quality, and ecosystem health. Keeping an undeveloped area between building lots and the bank, shoreline, or riparian area is a simple means of protection. Pollution can be prevented by not placing septic or sewer systems, industrial areas, or animal feed lots too close to these areas and by controlling runoff from storm water. Bank erosion can also be minimized by restricting livestock from congregating and watering in riparian areas and along shorelines. Careful planning around lakes, streams, and riparian areas is an essential means of ensuring clean water and a healthy ecosystem.



Allowing livestock to water near stream banks and placing septic systems too close riparian areas are just two ways that water quality can be harmed.

## references and further reading:

Adopt-a-Waterbody, Utah. Utah's Adopt-a-Waterbody Program. 4 Jan. 2005 <<http://www.adoptawaterbody.utah.gov/index.htm>>.

Environmental Protection Agency. Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds. 13 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.epa.gov/owow/>>.

Gilmer, Maureen. Living on Flood Plains and Wetlands: A Homeowner's High-Water Handbook. Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1995.