



The National Wild Turkey Federation launched the Waterways for Wildlife Initiative, a comprehensive, landscape-level effort, in 2021 to address critically urgent conservation needs in riparian ecosystems along rivers and streams in the Great Plains of the United States. This ambitious initiative is designed to continue our efforts to address the declining health and condition of riparian areas across the Great Plains, where these areas are natural magnets for wild turkeys and hundreds of other species of wildlife. Many of these important wildlife habitats, however, face serious decline due to habitat degradation and other pressures. Partnering with governmental agencies and conservation organizations, the NWTF aims to improve 75,000 acres of wildlife habitat along 1,500 linear miles of waterways in the Great Plains landscape by 2032, ensuring these “ribbons of life” continue to support both wildlife and local communities.

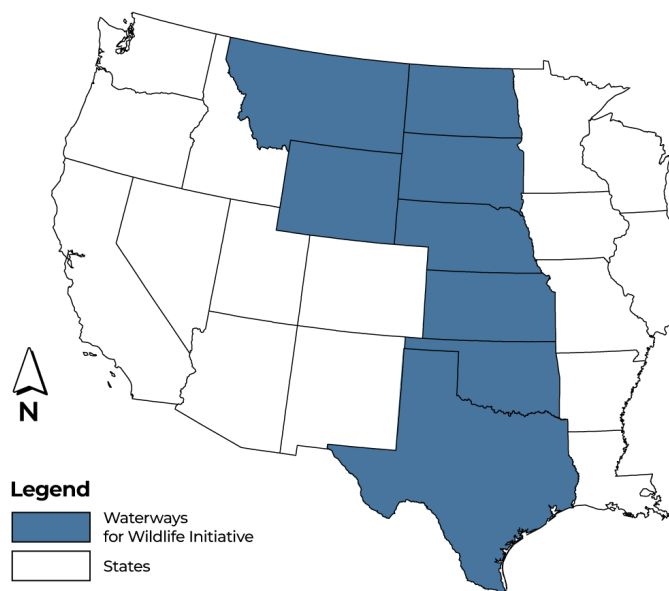
What are “Riparian Areas” and why are they important?

Commonly referred to as riparian corridors or zones, riparian areas are natural ecosystems consisting of grasses and woody species located along the banks of rivers, streams, creeks, or any other water network. While riparian areas make up less than 1.5% of the entire landscape in the Great Plains, more than 70% of all plains wildlife species depend on these ecosystems for water, food, cover, roosting, nesting and as travel corridors. Often described as “ribbons of life,” riparian areas support deciduous trees, shrubs and grasses in an otherwise arid and open grassland environment.

Riparian areas are also important for fish and other aquatic species, as they help control erosion and filter excess nutrients from surface runoff that can adversely affect spawning and rearing areas. They also serve to control flooding, improve water quality, provide for community water supply demands and recharge underground aquifers. These functions are vitally important to the people who live on the landscape, for production agriculture, the support of local economies, jobs, hunting, fishing and in providing quality wildlife habitats.

The Conservation Need

Riparian ecosystems are dynamic, naturally shaped by cycles of flooding and drought that refresh soils, create new seedbeds, and sustain diverse plant and wildlife communities. In the Great Plains, however, land use changes, altered water flow, increased water demands, invasive species and livestock pressures have disrupted these natural processes – reducing habitat quality and threatening the health of these vital communities.





Stream bank degraded from uncontrolled grazing impacts



Healthy riparian area



Spring source protected by fencing to maintain stream flow

Strategies

Through the Waterways for Wildlife Initiative, the NWTF develops partnerships with other conservation groups, landowners and governmental agencies to restore and enhance riparian habitats across the Great Plains.

Key strategies include:

- Developing livestock infrastructure such as fences around riparian areas to assist landowners in managing access
- Planting native trees, shrubs and grasses along riparian areas
- Removing invasive plant species that compete with important native species
- Supporting research, outreach and education for riparian best management practices
- Partneris on land acquisitions and conservation easements when applicable

Financial Need

The NWTF seeks to raise \$10 million in private funding over 10 years and leverage an additional \$40 million in matching funds to fund \$50 million in critical conservation practices through the Waterways for Wildlife Initiative.

A Plan for Action

Through this initiative, the NWTF will restore and strengthen riparian habitats across the Great Plains, from North Dakota and Montana to South Texas.

The goal: improve the health of 75,000 acres and enhance riparian and plant communities along 1,500 miles of rivers and streams, ensuring these vital ecosystems thrive for wildlife and people alike.

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Accomplishments

Initiative Totals: \$931,500 NWTF funds

\$32,486,032 total costs
49,979.9 acres
279.6 stream miles
34.9:1 match rate
4,394.7 acres, 67.92 stream miles

Annual Breakdown:

Year 1 - \$2,888,869 total with partners, 33,108 acres, 71.32 stream miles
Year 2 - \$5,381,640 total with partners, 2,969.5 acres, 38.94 stream miles
Year 3 - \$16,322,334 total with partners, 5,725.5 acres, 62.5 stream miles
Year 4 - \$3,033,861.55 total with partners, 4,054.4 acres, 38.32 stream miles
Year 5 - \$5,127,327.92 total with partners, 4,394.7 acres, 67.92 stream miles