

# STREAM BUFFERS

## A Tool for Watershed Protection



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

**Stream buffers, also known as riparian buffers, are vegetated areas on either side of a stream or river.** When working properly, buffers protect the waterbody from the impacts of human activity. Buffers can differ greatly, ranging from flat floodplains to steep gorges.

### What are the benefits of stream buffers?

A healthy buffer improves stream health and water quality by slowing runoff, filtering pollution, preventing soil erosion, and shading the stream to keep waters cool. Buffers also absorb and slow flood waters, which protects property and human safety.

### What are healthy buffers vs. unhealthy buffers?

A healthy buffer has many different species of native trees, shrubs, and grasses, and has minimal human disturbance. The wider the buffer, the better the benefits. The recommend width is 30–100 feet to effectively improve wildlife habitat, water quality, and storm resiliency.

Characteristics of an unhealthy buffer include lack of vegetation, manicured grasses, vegetation with shallow root systems, invasive plant species, grazing animals, hardened shorelines, impervious surfaces (such as pavement), or inadequate buffer width.

### Protecting Healthy Buffers

Property owners can protect streams by allowing native trees, shrubs, and vegetation to grow. The roots protect stream banks and absorb flood waters.

You can help improve the health of your buffer by making sure water is able to soak into the buffer's soil, by taking steps such as reducing lawn areas and pavement. Removing grazing animals and invasive species from streamside areas is also important.

Municipalities can enact local buffer ordinances to protect stream buffers from development. Conservation groups can purchase conservation easements to legally protect streams in perpetuity.

### How to Learn More

If you are interested in restoring your stream buffer by planting native trees and shrubs, please visit our website: <http://on.ny.gov/1luqWju>.

You can learn more about riparian buffers and funding at: <https://on.ny.gov/2PlaU2W>.



Healthy stream buffers have trees, shrubs, and grasses.



Unhealthy buffers include hardened shorelines and lack tree and shrub cover.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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