

Riparian Buffers

Riparian Buffers are vegetated areas next to water bodies that protect against nonpoint source pollution, provide bank stabilization and provide wildlife habitat. Typical riparian buffers on Spring Island include areas bordering ponds, salt marsh and ravines which drain into water bodies. On Spring Island many of these important areas exist on individual properties. The critical management of these areas is therefore often up to the property owner. Since these water bodies are usually the focus of views, the management of the buffer area assumes added complexity.



Runoff from heavy rains can potentially carry silt, fertilizers, and pesticides into nearby wetlands. Vegetation along riparian buffers forms thick mats of roots and decaying leaves and stems which help to filter water as it flows across and just below the soil surface after heavy rains. This is critical to maintain the health of the delicate wetlands they border. Riparian buffers slow the horizontal movement of water, giving it time to be absorbed rather than flowing directly into wetlands where sensitive marine life may be affected. The leaves of plants also slow the fall of water and disperse it as the rain falls.



The roots of plants growing in riparian buffers also work to stabilize the bank of soil bordering wetlands. The interwoven fabric formed by plant roots retains soil and forms a barrier against the erosive action of the water.

Like all “edge” areas between different habitat types, riparian buffers are critical and diverse habitats. This border between wetlands and upland forests provides wildlife with a diversity of plants for food and shelter; and when they border freshwater ponds and ravines they also provide critical water needs. Wildlife also uses riparian buffers as travel corridors and therefore depend on the thick vegetative cover for shelter from predators as they move.



On Spring Island the building setback from wetlands varies from 50’-120’. Lawn or turf areas must be at least 30’ from pond edges and

at least 50' from marsh edges. These setback requirements have been set so that riparian buffers will be established and maintained.



If your property borders a pond, marsh or ravine you are encouraged to properly maintain or enhance your riparian buffers. Since lawn or turf areas do not provide the benefits of a riparian buffer as previously described, you may need to introduce native plants to restore lawn or turf to healthy buffers. A list of plants suitable for riparian buffers follows:

<i>Serenoa repens</i>	Saw Palm
<i>Sabal minor</i>	Dwarf Palmetto
<i>Chasmanthium laxum</i>	Upland or Slender Oats
<i>Erythrina herbacea</i>	Coral Bean
Cinnamon, Royal, Netted Chain & other ferns	
<i>Muhlenbergia filipes</i>	Sweetgrass
<i>Lyonia lucida</i>	Fetterbush
<i>Ilex glabra</i>	Inkberry
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Yaupon Holly
<i>Myrica cerifera</i>	Wax Myrtle
<i>Vaccinium arboreum</i>	Sparkleberry
<i>Itea virginica</i>	Virginia Sweetspire
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	Buttonbush

Management of riparian buffers can be done to maintain views and continue to provide filtering of runoff, bank stabilization and wildlife habitat. Randomly spaced trees should be maintained

although lower branches can be pruned except in some instances. Shrubs can be pruned at random heights for a natural look and to maintain shrub health and thickness. Grasses and ferns can be cut once a year in late winter or early spring to promote new growth.



Enjoy the view and protect the resource by maintaining a healthy riparian buffer.