

BENEFITS OF RIPARIAN VEGETATION

INTRODUCTION

These days, there is a lot of discussion about riparian zone and vegetation management.

Some of the benefits of maintaining or establishing riparian vegetation are outlined below.

DECREASED EROSION

Over clearing and overuse of riparian land results in more water moving quickly off the land surface in times of heavy rain. This leads to flood outs, stripping of topsoil, and accelerated bank erosion that can result in the loss of valuable agricultural land.

Well-vegetated stream banks are more resistant to undercutting and slumping than cleared stream banks.

IMPROVED WATER QUALITY

Healthy riparian zones can decrease the amount of soil and nutrients moving from the land to the stream. Trapping of soil and nutrients will improve water quality and decrease the loss of in-stream habitat through siltation and also reduce fears over the impact sugar production has on the Great Barrier Reef. Healthy riparian vegetation will also keep water temperatures cooler, providing a more stable environment for aquatic animals.

DECREASE IN RODENT HARBOURAGE AREAS

Cane rats feed on grass and weed seeds to obtain protein that they need to breed. Grassy and weedy areas outside of the crop also provide harbourage areas for the rats during harvest season and while the crop is low. Native trees can form a closed canopy in a couple of years that will shade out grasses and weeds, removing rat habitat and consequently the rats.

DECREASE IN INSECT PESTS

Healthy riparian zones provide habitat for insect eating birds that can protect pastures and crops from insect damage.

INCREASE IN CAPITAL VALUES

Anecdotal evidence from real estate agents suggests that well managed riparian frontage can add up to 10 per cent to the market value of a property.

There are many other benefits, to both the sugarcane production system and environment in general, from maintaining or establishing healthy riparian zones. These can be found in the LWRRDC produced document *Is there a rat in your hip pocket?* or by contacting Dave Green at BSES Tully on 07 4068 1488.

Compatible Fact Sheets:

What is riparian land?

Types of bank erosion

How does riparian vegetation improve water quality?

How riparian vegetation affects stream banks