

## Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) – Water Act For Prince Edward Island

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### Our mission:

Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is the country's leading land conservation charity. We have been helping protect land, plants and animals, since 1962. We use science to determine the highest priority areas across the province for conservation, and have helped protect over 2.7 million acres across the country. We protect a variety of habitats, such as forest, wetlands and beaches.

NCC uses conservation science to prioritize landscapes across PEI based on their rare and/or unique ecosystems and species, and threats. This helps securement staff make decisions that result in the best conservation bang for buck. Information is compiled from a number of interest groups to complete a conservation plan, which is designed to be a tool to help make landscape level decisions for conservation organizations and other interest groups.

Currently from an "aquatic" perspective, we focus on the conservation of riparian zones and advise in our science plans on appropriate buffer lengths to maintain the health of the watershed and surrounding landscape and wildlife that inhabit riparian zones

To conserve natural processes of the active river area<sup>1</sup>, you should manage for the following:

- Maintain connections and health of meander belts, riparian wetlands and floodplains
- Ensure that movements of channels are anticipated and that they can continue to function within meander belts and low floodplains
- Ensure that regular flooding of floodplain areas is anticipated and allowed
- Protect the hydrologic regime (broadly defined as the source of water and movement through different seasons and the drive for ecological processes in a river) of the watershed.

Benefits from protecting the active river area:

- **Maintain Wildlife Habitat** –birds, mammals, invertebrates, and amphibians all regularly rely on riparian habitat for food and refuge.
- **Mitigation of flood and erosion hazards** – Disrupting the natural migration of water through channelization or infrastructure disconnects the primary river from its regular outlets, forcing the water to find a new place to go, and also forcing the creation of new channels
- **Water Quality Protection** – Vegetation in riparian zones help protect surface and groundwater by creating complex flow paths, increasing opportunities for storage, uptake, filtering and transformation of dissolved chemicals and sediment. The longer and more complex the flow path, the more opportunity exists to take up materials and sediments.
- Installing buffers are the most common way to protect water quality within a watershed.
- **Recreation** – a healthy river maintains healthy fish populations.

### Nature Conservancy of Canada Recommendations:

- Amend legislation for an increased buffer width of a minimum of 30m, with preference of 60-100m (existing is 15m for a slope of less than 5%, and 20m for slope greater than 5%)
- With the upcoming development of the Aquatic Blueprint for the Maritime region, Nature Conservancy of Canada is positioned to complement and assist in development of the scientific components involved with the new Water Act in Prince Edward Island. A partnership between NCC and the Province of PEI could facilitate decisions around conservation and management of aquatic environments.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Active River Area" defines the land-water dynamic interactions and processes that create and/or contribute to river health.