

are self-evident. Buffers catch silt before it gets into streams, and they filter harmful chemicals from agricultural run-off. Buffers provide a rich habitat for a host of birds, mammals, amphibians, and other wildlife. Buffers are the main food source for trout, in the form of insects that drop off trees, and also of tiny organisms that feed on organic debris from the buffer zone. Trees in buffer zones shade the water, keeping it cool for fish. These are only a few of the benefits of riparian buffer zones.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now address two myths that are impeding the implementation of riparian buffers on PEI. The first is the myth "The heart of the buffer zone issue is landowner rights." According to this myth, landowners have a right to do what they wish with land they own. This is a fallacy because there's a principle much more fundamental, which is: No person has the right to damage other peoples' property. Landowners' rights stop where damage to other peoples' property begins.

Let's go back to the book of Exodus:

. . . if it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay

. . . .  
If you have an animal capable of damaging other peoples' property, you have an obligation to control it. And if you don't, you must pay for the damage it causes. Cattle don't gore fish, but they can kill them just as effectively by urinating and defecating in streams. Trout and salmon are clean-water species, and they can't thrive in a cesspool anymore than people can.

The fundamental obligation to avoid damage to others' property has also been part of English common law for centuries. And it applies to any other way that use of land damages other peoples' property. A landowner whose cultivation practices fill the stream with silt is violating this obligation, because he or she is destroying the fish in the stream. Silt entering streams eventually finds its way to estuaries, where it causes further damage by ruining shellfish beds. Trout in streams and shellfish in oyster beds belong to the public, and the public did not ask for their property to be destroyed.

The second myth is that buffer zones are good ecology but bad economics. This too is a fallacy. Good ecology is good economics.

1. The economist Robert Costanza has calculated that world ecosystems contribute \$33 trillion worth of services annually.
2. Costanza's work also shows that this economic contribution is concentrated along watercourses and coastlines. On PEI, the recreational fishery for trout and salmon is worth \$7 million annually.
3. A recent study by Trout Unlimited, an American conservation group, singles out Prince Edward Island as having unique advantages for sea-run brook trout because of its short rivers with nearby estuaries.
4. At present, silt pollution in our streams seriously impairs trout reproduction, and the situation is so bad that fish have entirely vanished from some stream reaches in east Prince County.
5. If this silt pollution were stopped, and our trout resource re-built to its potential, it would be would the envy of eastern North America.

PEI also has an international reputation in oysters, but silt pollution has rendered large areas of seafloor useless as oyster