

Protecting Water Quality on your Horse Farm

Stream Bank Protection

It is important that horses are fenced away from streams, rivers and wetlands to protect water quality. Horses entering a stream to drink or loaf can lead to stream bank erosion, sediment, nutrient, and bacterial pollution, and degraded habitat for fish and other aquatic creatures.

Follow these steps to protect the streams on your farm:

1 Provide alternate water sources.

If you currently rely only on streams as a drinking water source for your pastured horses, develop an alternative water supply away from the stream. Water troughs and automatic waterers are options. They cost more and require installation and maintenance, but provide a higher quality water source compared to most streams. Ponds can also be used to provide water, but only if they are not connected to a stream.

1 Fence horses out of all streams, rivers and wetlands on your property.

Leave at least 25 feet (50 feet or more is best) between the stream and your fence line. This is the stream “buffer,” sometimes called a “riparian buffer” (riparian refers to the area next to the stream on the floodplain). If you have a pond that is connected to a stream, horses should be fenced away from it, too.

2 Replant your stream buffer to filter pollutants.

If the buffer between your pasture and the stream is degraded (showing soil erosion or bare spots), consider planting additional native trees, shrubs or grasses to restore it. The thicker the vegetation, the more the buffer will soak up nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the rain water run-off from your pastures. Thick stream-side vegetation can also act as natural flood control, soaking up flood water and returning it to the ground. It also shades the stream, which benefits insects, fish and mussels.

3 Designate and protect stream crossing sites.

If you do need to cross streams on your property, either for trails or to reach pasture turnouts, designate a single, small crossing site to avoid damage to the stream and stream banks in other areas. If you can build a foot bridge strong enough for horses, that is best. Otherwise, protect stream banks from erosion by using a small amount of gravel for the entrance/exit to the stream, fence the corridor, and keep surrounding areas vegetated.



Photo courtesy of Prince William (Virginia) Soil and Water Conservation District

By fencing horses out of the stream (just to the left of this pic) and planting grass along the stream buffer, surface runoff of nutrients from the pasture to the stream on this horse farm are significantly reduced.



Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District

www.ncagr.gov/SWC/findyourdistrict.html

or County Agricultural Extension

www.ces.ncsu.edu/local-county-center

for more information, recommendations and possible financial assistance.

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