

Habitat Restoration Riparian Buffers



COUNCIL OF THE
GREAT LAKES REGION
Solving for Sustainability

Restoring riparian habitats is a strategic investment in resilience, water security, and biodiversity. By leading collaborative, science-based restoration projects, businesses can address root causes of basin degradation, reduce operational risk, and strengthen climate resilience. It's important to deliver credible, durable contributions to watershed health and long-term business value.

Restoring Riparian Habitats to Benefit Basin Health and Corporate Water Stewardship

Healthy riparian zones and freshwater habitats are essential to the long-term resilience of the Great Lakes. Restoring wetlands, floodplains, and river corridors, or establishing vegetated buffers along waterways, is one of the most effective nature-based solutions (NbS) available to businesses. These actions strengthen water security, improve water quality, reduce flood risk, support biodiversity, and deliver visible climate and community benefits.

Unlike narrowly focused efficiency or replenishment projects, habitat restoration addresses the root causes of basin degradation. It improves hydrology, recharges groundwater, filters pollutants, stabilizes soils, and enhances ecological connectivity. These interventions align directly with leading frameworks, including the AWS Standard, Science Based Targets for Nature (SBTN), and global initiatives such as the Freshwater Challenge, positioning companies to deliver credible, durable contributions to basin health.

Basin Realities That Shape Action

Riparian and habitat restoration is increasingly adopted by companies that recognize most water risks originate beyond the facility fence line. Successful projects reflect local watershed conditions and are developed in partnership with governments, Indigenous Nations, utilities, conservation groups, and community members.

Common restoration approaches include:



Wetland restoration or rewetting to improve water storage, filtration, and aquifer recharge



Riparian buffer establishment using native vegetation to reduce erosion, shade streams, and trap pollutants



Floodplain reconnection to restore natural flows and reduce flood peaks



Reforestation, prairie restoration, and invasive species removal to stabilize soils and improve habitat quality



Green infrastructure (bioswales, rain gardens, permeable surfaces) to complement natural systems in developed areas

Together, these interventions improve water quality, strengthen hydrologic function, enhance biodiversity, and increase resilience to climate impacts.

Call to Action: Lead Through Restoration

To maximize impact and credibility, companies should:

- Collaborate with watershed groups, conservation districts, and Indigenous Nations
- Prioritize projects that address shared basin needs, not just corporate priorities
- Integrate restoration into facility planning, land-use decisions, and supplier engagement
- Pair restoration with AWS, SBTN, VWBA, and WRC frameworks for stronger governance and monitoring
- Support public funding and policies that protect wetlands, rivers, and critical habitats
- Restoration delivers the highest value when it is collaborative, science-based, and aligned with watershed priorities.

Riparian Restoration in the Great Lakes Basin

Invest in riparian and habitat restoration to secure water resources, reduce risk, and deliver lasting business and community value.



Reduce Operational & Compliance Risk

- Improve water quality and reduce treatment costs
- Stay ahead of tightening regulations on nutrients, sediment, and PFAS



Strengthen Climate & Flood Resilience

- Use natural infrastructure to absorb stormwater and reduce flood peaks
- Lower insurance exposure and prevent costly service disruptions



Protect Long-Term Water Supply

- Enhance groundwater recharge and maintain reliable baseflows
- Secure stable water availability for future operations

Restoration Projects Make Strong Business Sense

Restoration is not just an environmental contribution, it is a strategic investment that reduces risk, strengthens resilience, and delivers long-term business value.

Reduce Operational & Compliance Risk -

Wetlands and riparian buffers improve water quality, filter pollutants, and stabilize flows. This reduces treatment costs, minimizes downtime during storm events, and positions companies ahead of tightening regulations on nutrients, sediment, and PFAS.

Strengthen Climate & Flood Resilience -

Restored habitats act as natural infrastructure, absorbing stormwater and reducing flood peaks. The result: fewer service disruptions, reduced asset damage, lower insurance exposure, and greater continuity across operations and supply chains.

Protect Long-Term Water Supply - Restoration enhances groundwater recharge, maintains reliable baseflows, and supports cleaner, cooler water. For water-dependent industries, this is a direct investment in stable long-term water availability and reduced future competition for resources.



Collaborate with watershed groups, Indigenous Nations, and conservation districts



Align projects with AWS, SBTN, VWBA, and WRC frameworks for credibility



Integrate restoration into facility planning and supplier engagement



Support policies and funding that protect wetlands and riparian zones

