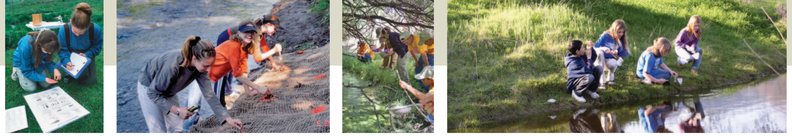
www.uwex.edu/erc/youth/riparian.html



holding onto the GREEN ZONE

A Youth Program for the Study and Stewardship of Community Riparian Areas

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Youth Riparian Education Initiative is a collaboration of federal agencies and land grant universities to provide resources to engage youth in stewardship activities that support the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) riparian restoration goals. Project resources were primarily designed to help land managers communicate with the public about management techniques and decisions.

The new Earth science curriculum, *Holding onto the GREEN Zone,* is a product of the Initiative that will encourage collaboration between land managers and youth educators/leaders to promote conservation of fragile riparian resources. Through the processes of science inquiry and experiential learning, learners will enhance their science knowledge and come to understand the importance of preserving and restoring riparian ecosystems.

Project partners include the University of Wisconsin Extension, Langston University, Oregon State University, BLM, USFS, and the National Riparian Service Team. Support was provided by BLM and by the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES).

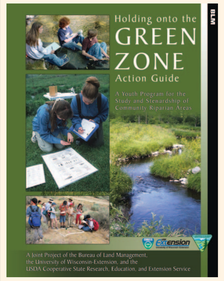
SITUATION

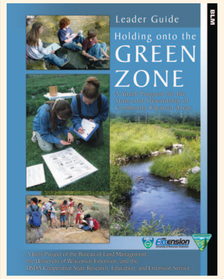
BLM land managers hoped to improve public understanding about riparian ecosystem dynamics, dilemmas, and management alternatives in communities where they worked. They requested education resources to take to schools and youth programs. It was important to managers to increase local understanding and skills, while also helping youth understand that determining appropriate management objectives and actions is a professional level skill. Managers did not want local groups to develop their own action plans or work on stewardship initiatives without extensive consultation with professional riparian managers.

As a result of manager recommendations, the *Holding Onto the GREEN Zone* curriculum emphasizes awareness, experience, question-asking, and careers. It offers hands-on activities to help youth understand the science that underlies riparian ecology. Youth apply scientific methods to describe a riparian area in their community and make predictions about its future condition. Youth do not assess the health of the riparian area or make management recommendations; these are skills riparian managers say take years of experience to practice successfully.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Conducted a survey and discussions with over 100 riparian land managers, federal agency professionals, Extension professionals, and other water educators to identify youth resources and key education topics.
- Outlined riparian education needs after conducting a gap analysis of national youth riparian curriculum materials and related published, audio-visual, and Internet resources.
- Created a draft curriculum that includes a youth guide, leader guide, and poster. The curriculum was pilot-tested, revised and reviewed again by National Riparian Service Team members, project partners, and other Extension educators.





The *Holding onto the GREEN Zone* curriculum includes an Action Guide for students, a Leader Guide, and a full-color poster.

The Student Action Guide is designed to help learners in grades 5–8 to investigate six key elements of the riparian zone:

- Water quality and quantity
- Stream shape, slope, and speed
- Soil qualities
- Plant characteristics
- Erosion and deposition
- Surrounding land uses: human, livestock, and wildlife

Students participate in both classroom and outdoor activities.

The Leader Guide takes the guesswork out of designing a riparian education program or rejuvenating an existing program. It includes background information, a unit-by-unit guide, and safety tips. Appendices contain additional riparian resources, including selected curricula and activities, a curriculum concept map, and sources for background information. Curriculum activities are correlated to the *National Science Education Standards*, the *NAAEE Excellence in Environmental Education: Guidelines for Learning*, and *4-H Youth Development Guidelines*.

Leaders are strongly encouraged to involve a natural resource professional from a local environmental group or agency to bring science expertise to the experience and to introduce youth to natural resource careers.

For more information, contact:

Kate Reilly, UW-Extension
klreilly@wisc.edu

Graphic design by Annika Sargent, UW-Extension Environmental Resources Center