FOREST GUARDIANS

ENDANGERED STREAMSIDE FORESTS

A 1995 report concluded that the southwestern cottonwood-willow forest is one of North America's most endangered ecosystems.

Streams are the arteries of life in the arid Southwest. Today these once biologically rich areas are in the "worst shape in history," according to the EPA, the result of being clogged with cattle for a century or more. The cottonwood/willow gallery forest has declined by an estimated ninety-five percent from pre-settlement times.

Despite making up only one percent of the arid Southwest, river forests provide clean water and critical wildlife habitat. They help prevent floods, filter sediments, and meter out water in times of drought. Healthy streamside woodlands are highly valued by recreationists, who are attracted to the cool shade, clean water, diverse wildlife, and scenery. Streamside areas are also centers of biodiversity; seventy-five percent of all our endangered wildlife depend upon healthy streams and remnant river forests.

> "There are still millions of acres of land and thousands of miles of stream courses that remain in an unsatisfactory condition. Riparian areas, instead of being lush green oasis in the hot dry climate, are void of vegetation, eroding and, frequently as dry as uplands."
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> - U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region 1991 Watershed Report

Because cattle consume 20 gallons of water daily they spend ninety percent of their time concentrated along streams, stripping away vegetation and trampling streambanks. The result: clean water is polluted, fish and wildlife habitat destroyed, and recreational values are damaged.

A 1988 General Accounting Office Report concluded that "poorly managed livestock grazing is the major cause of degraded riparian (streamside areas) habitat on federal lands." Removing cattle is the first and vital step towards the restoration of damaged streamside ecosystems.

UNGRAZED STREAMSIDE AREAS

- Stabilize stream banks, thereby reducing flood damage.
- Provide a renewable source of clean water by filtering sediments.
- Have diverse and healthy cottonwoods and willows providing habitat for eighty percent of all fish and wildlife species.

GRAZED STREAMSIDE AREAS

- Pollute water directly with livestock wastes and indirectly by trampling stream banks and stripping away vegetation.
- Degrade aquatic habitat by removing vegetation that shades streams and filters sediments.
- Decrease biological diversity by degrading critical wildlife habitat.

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