

Fountain Creek Watershed

Flood Control & Greenway District



FACT SHEET

Riparian Areas & Wetlands Provide Critical Wildlife Habitat



ABOUT THE FOUNTAIN CREEK WATERSHED

A watershed is a region that drains into a river, river system or other common body of water. The Fountain Creek Watershed is located along the central front range of Colorado. It is a 927-square-mile area of land and water that drains to the Arkansas River at Pueblo and, ultimately, to the Gulf of Mexico. The watershed's boundaries are defined by the shape of the land – Palmer Divide to the north, Pikes Peak to the west, and a minor divide 20 miles east of Colorado Springs. Why is watershed protection important? Improving our waterways helps with water quality, stormwater management, flood prevention, creating recreational opportunities and nature habitat for wildlife.

WILDLIFE NEEDS A HEALTHY CREEK SYSTEM

Here's a startling fact: *Riparian habitat makes up less than 3 percent of the land in Colorado, but it is used by more than 90 percent of our wildlife!* Riparian areas are "green zones" along creeks and rivers, often host to an abundance of vegetation, birds, and mammals. Clearly, riparian habitats are critical assets for wildlife.

In addition, scattered wetlands along the creek offer unique environmental benefits. The biodiversity of this ecosystem is large – it supports a diverse array of amphibians, birds, fish, and plants. Plus, wetlands serve a useful purpose in flood control by temporarily storing and slowly releasing stormwater. Meanwhile, wetlands act as natural filters by removing sediment and pollutants from the water.

The Fountain Creek Corridor Restoration Master Plan lists many different types of wildlife present in the riparian zones and wetlands along Fountain Creek. Have you seen any of these species in your home watershed?

- Song birds, raptors, wild turkeys, and wading birds including blue herons
- Beavers and skunks
- Deer and elk
- Foxes and coyotes
- Mountain lions
- The Arkansas darter fish (on the list of endangered and threatened species)

Here's another startling fact: *The Colorado Division of Wildlife uses the wild turkey population in the Fountain Creek Watershed as an indicator of overall habitat health – unfortunately, the turkey population is on the decline.*



WILDLIFE NEEDS A HEALTHY CREEK SYSTEM – CONTINUED

The decline of turkey “rafters” (flocks) is a red flag. It’s a warning sign for us all to take note of the decline and loss of wildlife habitat throughout the Fountain Creek Watershed. Wildlife habitat is directly dependent on healthy creek eco-systems such as riparian zones and wetlands. Unfortunately, ongoing creek issues such as erosion, cut banks, and severe flooding events result in heavy downstream sedimentation. Meanwhile invasive, non-native species such as tamarisk (salt cedar) and Russian olive thrive along our creeks. They crowd out native plants and trees and can even block wildlife access to the water.

The Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control & Greenway District collaborates with other agencies, organizations, and citizens to address these issues. Implementing projects that mitigate these concerns will restore and protect our creek system. Plus, over time, this process can create a sustainable wild turkey population – a healthy population that will reflect its healthy wildlife habitat.

SAMPLE OF DISTRICT PROJECTS SUPPORTING RIPARIAN AREAS & WETLANDS

1. *Pueblo Channel Project at 13th Street* – This project used extensive riparian revegetation to reshape an eroding bank of Fountain Creek, which included planting nearly 600,000 square feet of upland seedlings and riparian seedlings. Various restoration efforts provided channel stability to reduce erosion and sedimentation. These efforts restored, protected, and enhanced the adjacent wetlands and riparian habitat.
2. *Highway 47 Bank Restoration* – Realignment of this Fountain Creek channel provides a more natural, stable slope. Riprap bend protection defends against bank erosion and channel migration. Extensive revegetation efforts – including planting nearly 40,000 willow cuttings – stabilized the bank and floodplain while improving the health of the riparian corridor.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Continuing to implement projects that address erosion, sedimentation, and water quality throughout the Fountain Creek Watershed will restore riparian zones, enhance wetlands, and protect wildlife habitat. That’s why the Fountain Creek Watershed District is working to mitigate these issues – these efforts will result in a watershed that wildlife can use AND that we can enjoy for recreation.



DISTRICT CONTACTS

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC): Technical experts who provide recommendations to the Board on public policy or expenditure of funds for the benefit of the watershed and to carry on other investigations. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/technical-advisory-committee).

Citizen’s Advisory Group (CAG): Citizens representing various interests within the watershed who offer advice to the Board on managing the watershed. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/citizens-advisory-group).

District Board: Representatives from Pueblo County, El Paso County, City of Pueblo, City of Colorado Springs, City of Fountain, and others as defined by statute. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/district-board).

For more information about the statutory authority and purpose of the Fountain Creek Watershed, Flood Control and Greenway District, see Colorado Revised Statute 32-11.5. You can also visit www.Fountain-Crk.org or call 719-650-7474.