

Ripple Effect #7

Reducing Sediment in the Red River

Slow the Water.

Remove the Sediment.

Clean the Red.

These three little phrases mean a lot when it comes to improving water quality in the Red River Basin. They are the “mantra” for many of the conservation organizations in the Red River Basin that work with landowners and others to reduce sediment (suspended soil) from entering the waterways of the Red River and its tributaries.

The Red River historically received its name because of the brownish-red tinge of sediment suspended in it, slowing the moving water. However, as land use changes have occurred, the Red is carrying larger quantities of water over longer periods of time, and that quantity of water is moving more tons of sediment than many scientists think it should be. Sediment carries phosphorus fertilizer; in turn, the increased phosphorus increases the biological productivity of algae in water bodies. The overall effect can be toxic to aquatic life and can make water bodies unaesthetic for people to be in or around.

So how do we carry out the first two of these statements?

- Planting vegetative buffers along the edges of waterways helps slow runoff before it enters the waterway. Vegetation traps sediment that is freely flowing with the water. This common conservation practice is useful along field edges near any size ditch and in areas where natural waterways have been impacted by livestock, roadways, yards or farming.
- Restoration of stream banks after flooding has eroded them is crucial. The slope must be restored and hardy vegetation planted to retain soil and prevent further erosion.
- Using field windbreaks, even as small as grass strips, can alleviate dust clouds from blowing across fields during the fall and spring.

Contact your local conservation district office to find out what programs are available to help you slow the water and stop the sediment so that everyone can benefit from a clean Red River of the North.