

areas are often too small to maintain viable population levels and the isolation of one remnant intact habitat from another acts as a barrier for the dispersal of seeds or migration of young animals to other sites.

Such highly dissected landscapes are already characteristic of southern Ontario and Quebec where few large patches of woodland remain in an area that once was vegetated in continuous forest cover. In these landscapes, there is an urgent need to begin extensive restoration projects geared towards re-establishing large (or much less fragmented) blocks of natural habitat. For some natural regions, such as those in the Carolinian forest region of extreme southern Ontario, few sites even remain with sufficient natural habitat to serve as the requisite core areas for restoration projects. Therefore, here particularly, unless restorative action is implemented soon, future options for representative pristine areas in these landscapes will be lost, forever.

RIVERS

Rivers and streams serve as the vital arteries that carry water and its nutrients through the terrestrial ecosystem. Their health can be indicative of, or affect that of the basins they drain. These waterways support fish populations and their adjacent valley bottom lands are often characterized by the highest productivity: soils, vegetation, forests and wildlife habitat.

Traditionally, Canada's rivers and waterways were the navigation routes which first enabled resource extraction, settlement and development. Not surprisingly given their comparatively long history of human use, riverine habitat is amongst the most highly altered habitat in Canada. Particularly in the southern portion of the country, the riparian environment has been heavily impacted by farming, logging, mining, urban settlement and industrial development. This has resulted in soil erosion and the introduction of very large amounts of fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, sewage and industrial waste into these waters with resultant quality decline.

As key as rivers and streams are to environmental health, there is no program that enables their systematic protection in Canada similar to that afforded in the United States by its National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. While designation of national significance rivers is enabled under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS), this is not a land use protection status. (In fact some CHRS rivers feature considerable development such as New Brunswick's St. Croix River).

Some jurisdictions such as Ontario have protected intact individual river corridors intact (e.g. the Missinabi) as part of their pristine areas program but this does not result in overall drainage basin protection.