

With a vibrant downtown perched atop steep terrace bluffs, and a bustling commercial and recreational fishing pier and harbor area nestled between rocky headlands, Trinidad's picaresque small coastal village charm is further complemented by a diversity of national, state, and county parklands surrounding the city and an extensive trail system that meanders along coastal waters and through forested recluses. While inviting, inspiring, and engaging, these areas and the resources and habitat they provide nonetheless warrant our protection. As the owner or manager of a VDU, you have the added responsibility of ensuring your business does not impact Trinidad's open spaces.

This pamphlet provides suggestions for how homeowners can co-exist with these cherished environmentally sensitive resources without harming them. Trinidad has several particularly sensitive environments, many of which are adjacent to residential areas. These include streams and riparian areas, bluffs and native habitats. This brochure focuses on what you can do as a homeowner and VDU operator / manager to help protect these important public resources for the benefit of all.



*Protecting the
Creeks,
Bluffs And
Water Quality
within the
City of Trinidad
(A Guide for VDU Owners)*

What are Sensitive Habitats in Trinidad?

These can be areas that harbor rare species or important ecological communities. They contain mostly intact habitat consisting of native vegetation. These areas tend to provide important services for people as well, including filtering runoff and / or preventing erosion. In Trinidad these areas include creeks and their riparian corridors, bluffs, coastal scrub habitat, beaches, intertidal areas and Trinidad Bay. Because private property is most likely to contain streams and bluff tops, those habitats are the focus of this brochure.

Riparian areas are the lands along the banks of a natural course of fresh water, such as a river, stream, creek, drainage swale, spring, or seep. They are the transition zones between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Different from surrounding lands because of the unique soil and vegetation characteristics associated with the presence of water, riparian areas support vegetation that is distinct from what grows in the adjacent aquatic zone on one side and the drier upland zone on the other. Watercourses are particularly important because they can impact water quality in other areas such as Trinidad Bay.

Why are Streams and Riparian and Blufftop Vegetation Important?

Creeks and their associated riparian corridors are important public assets that provide unique ecological, aesthetic, and recreational values to the community. Streams provide numerous values and functions, such as: helping maintain water quality, storing and conveying storm water and floodwater by acting as natural storm water management facilities, groundwater recharge, providing important fish and wildlife habitat and food, both in stream and within their corridors, and offering areas for recreation, education, scientific study, and general aesthetic appreciation.

Riparian areas provide valuable ecosystem services, the processes by which the environment produces vital resources such as clean water, timber, habitat for fisheries, and pollination of native and agricultural plants. Within Trinidad, riparian areas moderate downstream flooding, limit stream bank erosion, improve local water quality, recharge groundwater, and provide habitat and important migratory corridors for wildlife. Although they comprise only a small fraction of the land area, riparian areas are among the most important, diverse, and productive ecosystems in the region. They are also among the most environmentally sensitive.

What Can We Do to Protect These Sensitive Areas?

Creeks, riparian areas and blufftops can be easily damaged by careless actions or poor management activities. Land-owners and visitors alike can help preserve and enhance streams on their property in the following ways:

1. Maintain riparian corridors as wide as possible and preserve their natural features to protect vegetation, facilitate wildlife movement, and preserve healthy stream function. Stay on established trails and avoid entry into undisturbed areas.
2. Streamside and blufftop trees, vines, shrubs, and grasses are all essential parts of the local ecology. Leave existing native vegetation intact. Roots of riparian and bluff vegetation are essential to hold soils in place, prevent erosion and reduce saturation. Mowing, stripping, or clearing vegetation leads to erosion and loss of ability to filter and trap sediment and pollutants. Tilling, compacting, changing the soil grade or drainage patterns should be avoided.
3. Leave natural debris in the stream channel unless it poses an erosion or flood hazard. A moderate amount of fallen logs or other woody debris can provide natural protection for stream banks and important cover, food, and shelter for fish and other wildlife.
4. Keep fencing out of riparian setbacks and away from bluff edges. If fences are desirable to demarcate property boundaries, use wildlife-friendly fencing (i.e, split rail) with minimal soil disturbance.
5. Keep domestic animals away from stream banks. Dogs and cats prey on riparian wildlife. Domestic livestock trample and eat riparian vegetation, leading to erosion and habitat disturbance.
6. Don't direct drainage into a creek or over a bluff edge. Discharge swimming pool or cooled, dechlorinated hot tub water onto flat, grass covered areas well away from the septic system leach fields.
7. Do not throw grass clippings, yard prunings, liquid or solid waste, or other debris into a creek or over a bluff edge. These can kill plants and wildlife, interfere with natural drainage and increase erosion.
8. Don't use pesticides or herbicides. Rats, mice or insects that have been poisoned don't die right away and are likely be eaten by other wildlife which poisons the pest's natural controls. Pesticides and herbicides can make their way into natural areas and aquatic systems where they can create substantial negative impacts.
9. Direct outdoor lighting away from open space areas. And avoid disturbance of these areas with noise and foot traffic.