

SESSION J: URBAN STREAMS

Two significant changes have occurred in riparian resource management, as it affects urban streams, since the first California Riparian Systems Conference in 1981. One has been the emergence of a strong movement at the urban neighborhood level seeking the preservation and restoration of the few remaining unculverted creeks flowing in cities. As a consequence of this, a new breed of participant; the urban volunteer activist, appeared in significant numbers at the 1988 conference. The increased awareness of riparian values at the grassroots level comes at a time when there is not much left of the State's riparian resources. In recognition of this, this new breed of environmentalist has moved the State to create a new Urban Creeks Restoration program, which is housed in the California Department of Water Resources. It disperses funds for a wide range of projects to protect and restore streams in urban areas. The movement has developed enough political clout, too, to influence federally or locally designed flood control and stream bank stabilization projects. In a few cases this emerging public interest has resulted in the drafting and adoption of new local regulations on development, open space planning, zoning and riparian corridor maintenance and management.

The other significant change that has occurred since 1981 has been the emergence of an environmental restoration movement and, with that, a group of restoration professionals. The formation of the California Riparian Study Group and the founding of a national group called the Society for Ecological Restoration are important steps in the establishment of a professional restoration discipline. Its major focus, at present, is on riparian systems.

Papers in this section provide examples of these two phenomena. Some of the papers were submitted by citizen volunteers who have been directly involved in designing (usually redesigning) flood control and bank stabilization projects. Some of the authors have contributed many hours of hands-on effort, seeking to conserve and enhance the riparian values of streams in their home areas. Among the speakers and panelists in the sessions on urban streams were environmental consultants and local, State, and Federal officials who are trying to respond to these public demands for more socially and environmentally sensitive projects. The reports presented here represent only a sampling of the papers given at the conference. They identify several, but certainly not all, of the technical, social, economic, and political issues growing out of the stream restoration movement. Most importantly, they call attention to successes that these volunteer groups and the associated government agencies are enjoying in meeting the urban stream restoration challenge.

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