

Bluestem Breezes  
Karaline Mayer  
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## **Maintaining grassed waterways**

On Monday, as I'm building this week's column, the 8-day forecast shows at least four days of rain. In the event we receive considerable rainfall, you may be spending a few more hours indoors.

At a meeting once, I learned those days are meant to be spent working "on" the business. This can mean working in the office on bookwork, budgeting, researching, etc. This can also mean working in the shop on maintenance. You pick the meaning, but the important part is that rainy days can still be productive for your business.

Waterways may be an area of your operation somewhat overlooked. On your next rainy day, I encourage you to spend time learning of ways your operation may reap additional benefits from properly maintained waterways. Here is a brief overview from DeAnn Presley, K-State Soil Management Specialist:

Grassed waterways play an important role in improving water quality. Prevention of gully erosion is the primary contribution, but grassed waterways also intercept pollutants leaving the field. Grassed waterways are designed, however, for the safe and rapid transport of water, not for the shallow sheet flow necessary to effectively intercept pollutants. Because waterways are a flow-way for excess runoff, nutrient and pesticide applications within the boundaries of grassed waterways must be carefully managed to avoid movement of pollutants directly to surface water.

Waterways are only one component of a conservation system that includes terraces, conservation tillage, and nutrient and pest management. A well-designed and maintained soil conservation system helps sustain productivity while providing clean water to the watershed.

### **Do:**

- Inspect waterways once a year and after every heavy rainstorm.
- Remove grass by mowing, haying, or grazing. If mowing with a sickle mower, remove clippings; if mowing frequently or if using a rotary mower, the clippings are chopped up and need not be removed.
- Fertilize according to soil test recommendations and forage or seed needs.
- Lift tillage equipment and shut off sprayers when crossing waterways.
- Remove sediment and fill eroded spots and wheel ruts quickly.
- Control erosion and runoff in fields draining into the waterway to reduce sedimentation and possible herbicide damage.

### **Do not:**

- Mow shorter than 3 to 4 inches
- Use the waterway as a road or cattle path. Tire tracks or cattle trails are often the beginning of gully erosion.

- Let the grass get clumpy. Water will cut channels between clumps rather than flow through the grass. This will cause erosion.
- Overgraze the waterway. Bare spots are subject to wash-out, and grass that is too short does not provide adequate erosion protection.

Note: This article is adapted from Maintaining Grass Waterways, K-State publication MF-1064 at: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/MF1064.pdf>. For additional information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.