



Streamwalk Program

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GLOSSARY

Active channel width: The width of the stream at the bankfull discharge. Permanent vegetation generally does not become established in the active channel.

Aggradation: Geologic process by which a stream bottom or flood plain is raised in elevation by the deposition of material.

Bankfull discharge: The stream discharge (flow rate, such as cubic feet per second) that forms and controls the shape and size of the active channel and creates the flood plain. This discharge generally occurs once every 1.5 years on average.

Bankfull stage: The stage at which water starts to flow over the flood plain; the elevation of the water surface at bankfull discharge.

Baseflow: The portion of streamflow that is derived from natural storage; average stream discharge during low flow conditions.

Benthos: Bottom-dwelling or substrate-oriented organisms.

Boulders: Large rocks measuring more than 10 inches across.

Channel: A natural or artificial waterway of perceptible extent that periodically or continuously contains moving water. It has a definite bed and banks that serve to confine the water.

Channel roughness: Physical elements of a stream channel upon which flow energy is expended including coarseness and texture of bed material, the curvature of the channel, and variation in the longitudinal profile.

Channelization: Straightening of a stream channel to make water move faster.

Cobbles: Medium-sized rocks which measure 2.5 to 10 inches across.

Confined channel: A channel that does not have access to a flood plain.

Degradation: Geologic process by which a stream bottom is lowered in elevation due to the net loss of bottom material. Often called downcutting.

Downcutting: See Degradation.

Downstream: In the direction of a stream's current; in relation to water rights, refers to water uses or locations that are affected by upstream uses or locations.

Ecoregion: A geographic area defined by similarity of climate, landform, soil, potential natural vegetation, hydrology, or other ecologically relevant variables.

Embeddedness: The degree to which an object is buried in stream sediment.

Emergent plants: Aquatic plants that extend out of the water.

Flood plain: The flat area of land adjacent to a stream that is formed by current flood processes.



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- Gabions:** A wire basket filled with rocks; used to stabilize streambanks and to control erosion.
- Geomorphology:** The study of the evolution and configuration of landforms.
- Glide:** A fast water habitat type that has low to moderate velocities, no surface agitation, no defined thalweg, and a U-shaped, smooth, wide bottom.
- Gradient:** Slope calculated as the amount of vertical rise over horizontal run expressed as ft/ft or as percent (ft/ft * 100).
- Grass:** An annual to perennial herb, generally with round erect stems and swollen nodes; leaves are alternate and two-ranked; flowers are in spikelets each subtended by two bracts.
- Gravel:** Small rocks measuring 0.25 to 2.5 inches across.
- Habitat:** The area or environment in which an organism lives.
- Headwaters:** The source of a stream.
- Herbaceous:** Plants with non-woody stems.
- Hydrology:** The study of the properties, distribution, and effects of water on the Earth's surface, soil, and atmosphere.
- Incised channel:** A channel with a streambed that is currently lower in elevation than its past elevation (in relation to the flood plain).
- Intermittent stream:** A stream in contact with the ground water table that flows only certain times of the year, such as when the ground water table is high or when it receives water from surface sources.
- Macrophyte:** Aquatic plant.
- Macrophyte bed:** A section of stream covered by a dense mat of aquatic plants.
- Meander:** A winding section of stream with many bends that is at least 1.2 times longer, following the channel, than its straight-line distance. A single meander generally comprises two complete opposing bends, starting from the relatively straight section of the channel just before the first bend to the relatively straight section just after the second bend.
- Macroinvertebrate:** A spineless animal visible to the naked eye or larger than 0.5 millimeters.
- Nickpoint:** The point where a stream is actively eroding (downcutting) to a new base elevation. Nickpoints migrate upstream (through a process called headcutting).
- Perennial stream:** A stream that flows continuously throughout the year.
- Point bar:** A gravel or sand deposit on the inside of a meander; an actively mobile river feature.
- Pool:** Deeper area of a stream with slow-moving water.
- Reach:** A section of stream (defined in a variety of ways, such as the section between tributaries or a section with consistent characteristics).



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- Riffle:** A shallow section in a stream where water is breaking over rocks, wood, or other partially submerged debris and producing surface agitation.
- Riparian:** The zone adjacent to a stream or any other waterbody (from the Latin word ripa, pertaining to the bank of a river, pond, or lake).
- Riprap:** Rock material of varying size used to stabilize streambanks and other slopes.
- Run:** A fast-moving section of a stream with a defined thalweg and little surface agitation.
- Scouring:** The erosive removal of material from the stream bottom and banks.
- Sedge:** A grasslike, fibrous-rooted herb with a triangular to round stem and leaves that are mostly three-ranked and with close sheaths; flowers are in spikes or spikelets, axillary to single bracts.
- Substrate:** The mineral or organic material that forms the bed of the stream; the surface on which aquatic organisms live.
- Surface fines:** That portion of streambed surface consisting of sand/silt (less than 6 mm).
- Thalweg:** The line followed by the majority of the streamflow. The line connecting the lowest or deepest points along the streambed.
- Turbidity:** Murkiness or cloudiness of water caused by particles, such as fine sediment (silts, clays) and algae.
- Watershed:** A ridge of high land dividing two areas that are drained by different river systems. The land area draining to a waterbody or point in a river system; catchment area, drainage basin, drainage area.