

Ground Cover

Time – 35 minutes

Persons – 2

Materials –

- Measuring tape
- Ground cover worksheet

Note: Riparian ground cover transects start at the stream edge and extend 20 paces away from the stream, into the riparian vegetation.

1. You will collect data along five separate transects in your stream stretch, spaced out at approximately equal distances along your stream reach. If possible, you should run two transects on one side of the stream and three on the other to get a better picture of the total riparian zone. Refer to the figure to the right for help locating these transects.

2. Begin at your first transect. Starting at the stream's edge, take one pace away from the stream. Touch your finger to the ground at the tip of your front foot.

3. Note the ground cover type that your finger touches. The categories are: live vegetation, litter (dead vegetation or sticks), rocks, or bare ground. Record the type with a slash in the appropriate box on the ground cover worksheet. Note that each column on the data chart is for a separate transect.

4. Repeat steps 2 – 3 for 20 paces. Then move on to the second transect. Repeat for all 5 transects.

5. When you've finished with all five transects, add the totals for each row (cover type). This will give you the percentage of each type of ground cover in the riparian zone. To check your math, add your percentages for each ground cover type. They should total 100%.

The percentage of each ground cover type provides a measure of ground cover that can be compared to other sites or used to compare changes over time (between different years or seasons). As a general rule, though, a healthy riparian zone will be covered by a mixture of litter, rock and vegetation. Important exceptions to this are desert streams, which have very sandy banks.

Ground Cover Transect

