

COMMENTARY

Shoreline buffers offer many benefits

A shoreline buffer is a strip of native vegetation left unmowed (“natural”) along your shoreline. Many natural shoreline buffers have been eliminated along our lakes’ shorelines due to efforts by owners. In most cases the lake wins and the shoreline is destroyed, leaving little wildlife habitat and a highly eroded shoreline.

What are the benefits of a shoreline buffer?

Expansive lawns mowed all the way to the water’s edges, and no aquatic vegetation are all too often the norm. Landscaping shoreland lots to achieve this ideal has led to a serious loss of natural shoreland habitat and deteriorating quality of our lakes.

By mowing to the water’s edge, many owners are unaware that they are destroying the balance of the aquatic and shoreline ecosystems and altering the wildlife habitat, natural beauty and character of the shoreline.

Specific benefits of a shoreline buffer include:

Buffers prevent soil erosion - Native shrubs and plants have root lengths of 18 inches or more which help hold the soil in place, minimizing erosion. Lawn grass (bluegrass) is a shallow rooted species (about 3

inches) that cannot protect soil as well as native shrubs and plants can.

Buffers keep fertilizer, driveway runoff, soils and other excess nutrients from washing directly into the lake. When these items enter the lake, fish spawning beds can be destroyed, dissolved oxygen is depleted and algae and aquatic plant growth is encouraged.

A good buffer can remove as much as 70-95 percent of incoming nutrients and other pollutants from the runoff into the Lake.

Trees in a buffer shade the shoreline and cool the water. Cooler water keeps fish eggs from overheating and reduces algae growth.

Buffers reduce the number of mosquitoes. Vegetated buffers provide resting or feeding areas for mosquito predators, such as dragonflies.

Buffers reduce the number of Canada Geese on your lawn. Canada Geese are generally reluctant to walk through tall vegetation, so developing a shoreline buffer is a natural way to reduce their presence on lawns.

Buffers reduce your time spent mowing. Once established, shoreline buffer needs very little care and is never mowed.

Buffers protect valuable near shore habitat. Ninety percent of all lake life is born, raised and fed in the area

where the land and water meet.

Natural shorelines are more aesthetically pleasing.

This may be difficult to realize at first, but, once you take a look around, you will notice how beautiful a shoreline with trees and vegetation is compared to a mowed shoreline with erosion problems.

To help reduce erosion, increase infiltration, and clean up stormwater runoff, the Comfort Lake – Forest Lake Watershed District has initiated a cost-share incentive program for projects such as shoreline buffers and raingardens, that improve water quality, decrease stormwater runoff, and preserves native plant and wildlife communities around our lakes and streams.

For more information, or to arrange a free visit with a runoff management professional, contact Randy Anhorn, administrator/limnologist at the CLFLWD offices at 651-209-9753 or send an e-mail to: randy.anhorn@clflwd.org.

Additional information on the CLFLWD’s cost-share program can be found at clflwd.org.

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