

Our Lakeshore Connection

What happens on the land surrounding a lake can have a significant impact on the lake itself. Lakes in more populated areas or with more recreational activity are at greater risk of being polluted and choked by algae and invasive species. When runoff from rain or melting snow enters a lake it carries a lot of extra nutrients. The right amount of nutrients is essential for a healthy lake but too much can cause uncontrolled algae growth.

Planting native grasses and flowers along the shoreline or installing a rain garden reduces the amount of pollutants running into your lake and increases food and shelter for wildlife such as birds and butterflies, all while providing you an endless summer of bright, beautiful flowers.

These plants normally provide food and habitat for wildlife and hold the lakebed in place with their roots. When they're gone the shoreline becomes unstable and can erode leading to property loss. A lakeshore mowed to the water's edge can recede as much as five feet in 10 years. Invasive plants like eurasian water milfoil and animals like zebra mussels and invasive carp may invade the lake and cause serious harms in the whole ecosystem. We love our lakes and want them to stay clean, swimmable and full of native fish and wildlife for our children to enjoy. So, what can we do to keep them that way? Lakeshore owners have a great opportunity to be stewards of their lakes. What we do on our lakeshore properties can impact fish and wildlife shoreline stability and algae growth. Our actions could cause a lot of harm or a lot of good and it's up to us to decide. However, one lakeshore property alone can only make a small difference. The healthiest lakes are a result of lakeshore neighbors all working together.

First, Before starting your lakeshore restoration project ensure your lawn care practices are lake friendly. Take steps to minimize excess storm water nutrients and chemicals entering your lake. Installing rain barrels and redirecting gutter downspouts into a rain garden are great ways to reduce runoff. You can also add habitat islands to reduce manicured lawn size. Pick up pet waste. Properly maintain septic systems and use eco friendly methods to remove weeds. When mowing, aim the shoot away from the lake because grass clippings are a significant source of excess nutrients. Better yet mulch-mow your grass and leaves and you'll cut the need to use synthetic fertilizer in half.

Second, fix any erosion issues. Rock riprap is a common fix and will hold your shoreline in place, but it provides no benefit to wildlife and does not filter nutrients from runoff. Native plants are essential for a healthy shoreline both on land and in the water. Once native plants are established their roots lock the shoreline in place and prevent erosion and property loss. Trees and shrubs with extensive root systems will give your shore even more structure and support. A shoreline with diverse plants intertwined with riprap stands up best to damaging waves and ice.

Third, focus on adding buffers to areas you don't actively use for water access. Shoreline plants are buffers that play a major role in keeping the lake healthy. Plants act like goalies preventing excess nutrients like fertilizer, pet waste and grass clippings from getting into the lake and causing algae blooms. Two to three properties with well-placed native plant buffers are enough to reduce algae growth in a lake by 500 pounds. Creating clear boundaries using pavers can give the planting a manicured look, retain all the benefits of native vegetation and leave enough lawn to lounge on. Native plants are great habitat for pollinators, dragonflies native fish and other wildlife. Once your lakeshore oasis is established there will always be something interesting to watch from your porch. Tall shoreline plants will also deter nuisance wildlife like geese that prefer mowed lawns where they can watch for predators. Geese will swim right by properties with healthy buffers.

Fourth, minimize clearing aquatic vegetation like water lilies. These plants are vital for holding the lakebed in place and preventing the sediment from being stirred up. They also provide food and habitat for lake critters including turtles frogs and fish.

Finally, always be vigilant to prevent the spread of aquatic invaders such as zebra mussels, eurasian water milfoil and invasive carp. Lakeshore residents are often the lake's last line of defense and the first to spot any new infestations that may pop up. If you do notice a problem contact your local natural resource management organization for assistance. Aquatic invasive species can choke out native plants and animals, result in heavy financial burden on lakeshore owners and undo all the good work you've done to restore your lake.

Your unique native landscaping design can easily allow plenty of room for a dock, direct water access and all your recreational equipment. A well-kept shoreline is beautiful to look at, creates critical habitat for wildlife and can reduce algae growth in your lake. Studies have shown that a three-foot increase in water clarity can increase your property value by \$30,000. Best of all, native plant buffers create a natural privacy screen without obscuring your view of the lake. Adding trees and shrubs along your property line will also provide cooling shade, privacy from neighbors and a picture frame view of your lake.

Achieving this vision of a healthy lake takes cooperation from us all. When surrounded by a stable shoreline of native plants on shore and in the water, and a neighborhood of lakeshore stewards, your lake will be clean and clear. It will be able to support abundant recreational uses and a vibrant community of fish, birds and other native wildlife and keep harmful pollution algae and invasive species in check. Lakes are the pride and joy of Minnesotans. As a Lakeshore owner you are vital to making sure our lakes are healthy for future generations to enjoy. What will you do today to protect them for the future?

*Drawn from Transcription from the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwjAoRwLrmM>
Animated video about lakeshore restoration and stewardship created in collaboration with the Anoka
County Water Resource Outreach Collaborative and several local Lake Associations.*