

Ripples

LAKE RIPLEY

PRIORITY LAKE PROJECT

Vol. 6, No. 1

Winter 1998

Shoreline Buffer Strips:

A Low-Cost, Natural Solution to Geese and Pollution Problems in Lake Ripley

Did you know that 28 tons of soil and 145 pounds of phosphorus wash into Lake Ripley each year from surrounding shoreline properties? Fortunately, there is something we can do about this.

Shoreline buffer strips are an easy, inexpensive way to keep eroded soil and phosphorus out of the lake. Native grasses and flowers planted in narrow buffer strips can effectively trap pollutants before they reach the lake. Native plants also have stronger, deeper roots than traditional lawns, which helps trap loosened soil on shorelines.

The taller vegetation in these buffers also acts as a natural fence, keeping geese off your lawn. Buffer strips also maintain a more natural appearance, thereby improving aesthetics and wildlife habitat.

How much do buffer strips cost?

If you sign a cost-share agreement and agree to maintain the strip for 10 years, the Lake District will provide technical assistance and 70% cost sharing.

The 175-foot-long buffer strip at the Golfside Association (see photo) cost residents only \$90.



Buffer strips at work on Lake Ripley: Golfside Shoreline Association volunteers and the Lake District planted this eight-foot-wide buffer along 175 feet of their shoreline. They also installed coconut fiber logs to stabilize their shoreline.

FROM THE HELM

Last year there were great accomplishments and great challenges. The challenges began when the DNR announced major cuts would be made in their Non-Point Source Pollution Prevention Program. This program has been invaluable to Lake Ripley, allowing the Lake District to establish an office, hire a full-time employee, and cost-share lake protection projects.

At the same time, our employee of nearly four years, Ron Kroner, decided to pursue different career choices. But, to quote a cliché: "Things seem darkest before the dawn." We were able to hire a top-notch replacement, Wendy Garland. And together with the help of the community, we regained 90% of our funding.

Then, last spring, a 99-acre parcel near the lake inlet became available. We realized that the wetlands and farmed wetlands on the land would be crucial to the quality of Lake Ripley. We acted quickly and secured a DNR Lake Protection Grant for \$120,000. The Cambridge Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Superior Services of Fort Atkinson, and the Fort Atkinson Wisconsin Conservation Club also contributed over \$47,000 to help with the purchase and wetland restoration.

Now, we look forward to the coming year. Funding will again be an issue. Nonetheless, we have signed several new cost-share agreements. The Long Sod Farms have signed on to help improve Lake Ripley by reshaping and seeding their ditches to reduce erosion.

We are also trying to establish a one-of-a-kind Lake Watch Program. Starting in June, we propose to have a few volunteers patrol the lake for four hours each Sunday. Volunteers will report boating violations (without confronting violators) to the police, who will then decide if citations will be issued. This program will work only if we get eight or more volunteers. If you are interested, please contact our office or Board members.

Finally, we would like to establish a fish enhancement program for Lake Ripley. Working with DNR fish manager Don Bush, we will develop a plan to improve the lake's fish populations, possibly through habitat restoration and stocking.

As you can see, we have much work ahead of us, and we invite you to attend the Lake District meetings to offer your suggestions.

John Molinaro

Chair, Lake Ripley Management District

Wetland Restoration - Giving Nature A Second Chance

Did you know that Wisconsin was once about one-quarter wetland? That's approximately 10 million acres. There was a good reason for this – wetlands provide many benefits for the environment. But these benefits drained away when over half of our original wetlands were dried up – mostly for crop production. You can help bring these wetlands back.

Wetlands help us in many ways: they store flood waters, filter sediments and pollutants, recharge groundwater, and provide wildlife habitat. The DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperate to restore valuable wetlands and offer cost-sharing for eligible landowners. Some sites

may qualify for 90%-100% cost-sharing. Sites that don't qualify for watershed cost-sharing may be eligible for other DNR or USFWS programs.

Are You Eligible?

To qualify for a wetland restoration, your land must prove suitable. Having the right soil is important. Typically, most croplands with hydric soils (rich, dark soils with poor drainage) and drained by tiles or ditches will qualify. Other possibilities are basins which may have silted in over time. Most restored wetlands are about 3 feet deep and may only contain water for part of the year. These wetlands are very important for wildlife.

Once your site is chosen, a Land Conservation Department technician or DNR wetlands' specialist will design a restoration plan involving a scrape, ditch plug, or tile break. After the permits are obtained and a landowner agreement is signed, a contractor is hired and the construction begins. Finally, after the construction is over, the disturbed area is seeded with a mixture of grasses to stabilize the soil.

Benefits for All

Like rivers, lakes and forests, our wetlands provide many benefits. Wetland restoration is a vital program because it restores those benefits once again. If you think you may own land containing a drained wetland and would like to restore it, please contact your local DNR wetland specialist.



Duane and Linda Dieckhoff received 70% cost sharing from the Lake District to restore two wetlands on their property. Bulldozers scraped away top soil to create shallow basins (above). Once natural vegetation takes hold, the wetlands will provide good wildlife habitat. Even in the first year, frogs and ducks have already discovered the wetlands (right).



A Fresh Look at *Shoreline Landscaping*

Tradition! To many shoreline property owners, the word means an expanse of mowed lawn up to the lake's or stream's edge. When asked why they follow this landscape practice, landowners often respond "to maintain the view of the water," "to reduce the problem with mosquitos" or "we've always done it this way."

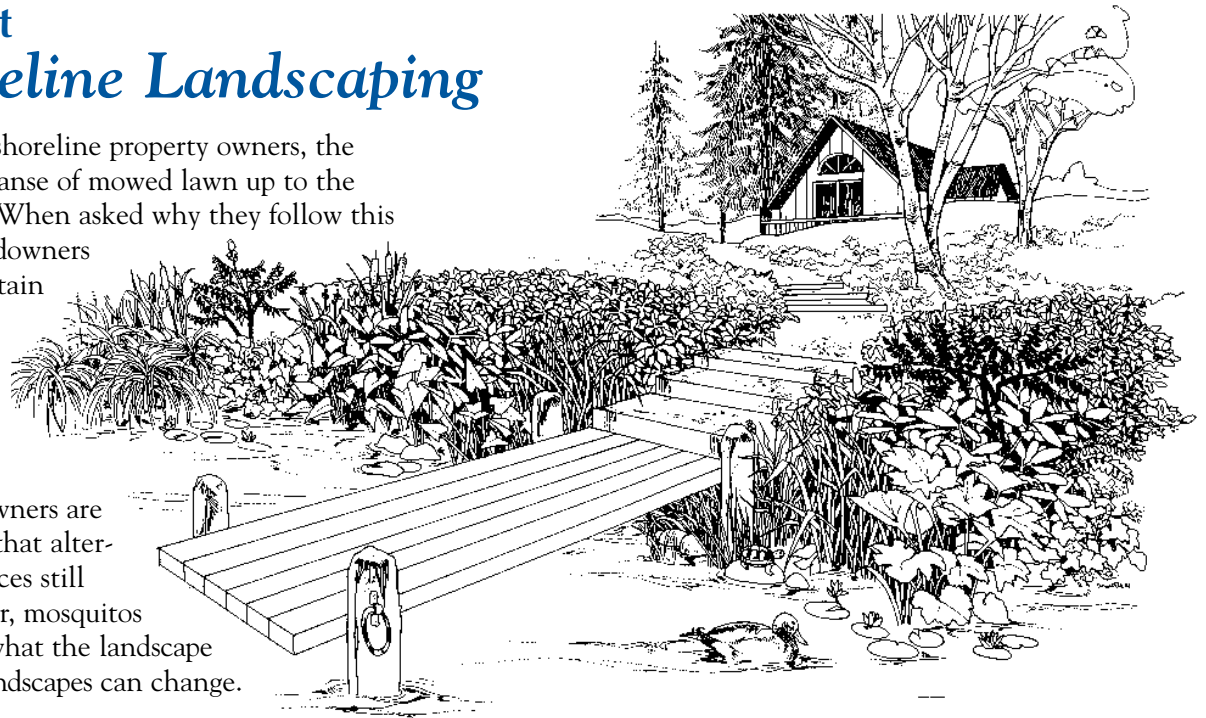
What these property owners are forgetting, however, is that alternative landscape practices still allow views of the water, mosquitos are present no matter what the landscape style, and people and landscapes can change.

An expansive lawn can cause problems for the adjacent lake or stream. Soil, fertilizers, and pesticides may be carried with runoff waters from lawns into the water.

Proper landscape design and selection of plants for shoreline residences can reduce detrimental effects on water quality. Traditional yards should be redesigned to allow a 15-25 foot (or wider) "buffer" zone of more natural vegetation adjacent to the lake or stream. Banks can easily be densely planted to control soil erosion and eliminate the work involved in maintaining a lawn.

Modifying shoreline management practices of the lake or stream can be accomplished in a number of ways, depending on the site situation and desires of the property owner.

- Leaving a buffer zone of unmowed turf along shorelines is the first and easiest step to reduce the runoff of pollutants. The grasses will grow 12-24 inches tall before going to seed. Using a smooth flowing curve for the buffer zone's inland edge and any pathways to the water creates a pleasing, natural appearance.
- Planting bulbs, perennial flowers, and/or groundcovers in the grasses of a buffer zone adds seasonal color. Working up small areas and mulching around new plantings will reduce both competition from the grasses and potential runoff problems.
- Native plants are well adapted to our climate and blend in well with natural shorelines. Native prairie forbs (wildflowers) planted in the buffer zone can provide an ever-changing foreground to the view of the water. Over time, the native wildflowers



will spread, filling the buffer zone with drifts of color. "Purists" may wish to gradually convert the area to prairie by incorporating native grasses along with the forbs.

- Another shoreline alternative is to use trees, shrubs, and groundlayer plants in the buffer zone. Properly placed, these plants will frame good views, screen unappealing views, and deaden the noise of lake activities.
- Incorporating woody plants in planting beds reduces runoff, beneficially modifies soil moisture and temperature, and provides a natural appearance. Gradually the whole shoreline can be planted to create a woodland setting with appropriate openings for visual and physical access to the water. Woodland wildflowers can be planted under the trees and shrubs as they grow and establish their shade patterns. This landscape option creates the shoreline appearance that was naturally adjacent to most of our Southeastern Wisconsin lakes and streams before the water's edge was altered by human activities.

More information on shoreline landscaping alternatives is contained in the publication "Shoreline Plants and Landscaping," (GWQ014) one of the Yard Care and the Environment series of fact sheets available from your local UW-Extension or Land Conservation Department office. Many property owners will want to maintain some conventional lawn away from the shoreline. Other fact sheets in the Yard Care and the Environment series offer lawn management suggestions.

WRP and CRP: Great Incentives for Watershed Protection

Every farmer in the Lake Ripley Watershed should know about two federal conservation programs, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), that provide excellent incentives to protect the area's water quality and natural environment. Call the Lake District (423-4537) or NRCS (920/674-6102) if you're interested.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

WRP helps landowners retire marginal farm land and restore their original wetlands. Landowners retain private ownership, but limit future land uses to protect the land.

Landowners have the following options:

Permanent easements: The USDA pays the landowner the agricultural value of the land plus 100% of the wetland restoration costs.

Thirty-year easements: The easement contract lasts for 30 years, and the incentive payment is 75% of what would be paid for a permanent easement and 75% of restoration costs.

Ten-year restoration cost-share agreements: This contract requires you to re-establish degraded or lost wetlands in exchange for 75% of the restoration costs. There is no easement on the property. For more information on wetland restorations, see page 3.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP helps landowners plant vegetation on their cropland to prevent erosion, improve water quality and establish wildlife habitat. Landowners sign 10-15-year contracts and receive annual rental payments, incentive payments and cost-share assistance to install approved practices. Some practices (e.g. buffer strips) have continuous sign-up periods.



Wendy Garland is the new project manager for the Lake Ripley Priority Lake Project. Call 423-4537 or stop by the Lake District office in Cambridge at 101 E. Main St. to meet her.

Ripples

Lake Ripley Management District
P.O. Box 22
Cambridge, WI 53523

