LAKE STEWARD PROGRAM

Minnesota Lakes & Rivers

The **Lake Steward Program** with Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates works with lake associations to award property owners that protect lake health through land management. Improving water quality is a community goal that can be achieved when each individual recognizes the need to protect water quality and acts to align their property management with practices that sustain a healthy environment.

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates protects Minnesota's lake and river heritage for current and future generations by forging powerful links among lakes, lake advocates, and policy makers.

Allow Native Plants and Vegetation to Flourish - Provide a 25 Foot Buffer Zone

The "buffer zone" of a property, the area from the waterline up towards the home or cabin, is crucial to the health and protection of a lake. The more native plants, grasses, trees and shrubs that grow in the buffer zone, the greater the filtration of runoff pollution and the greater the stabilization of the shoreline. Mowed lawn from the upland zone to the waterline causes seven to nine times the amount of runoff to reach the lake. A shoreline buffer of 25 feet or more creates an effective natural barrier to pollution carried in rainwater runoff. Taller vegetation allows for a stronger root system to develop and creates a sustainable, natural filter for rainwater runoff. A great way to protect lake health is to simply stop mowing a lawn 25 feet or more up from the waterline. "Don't Mow, Let it Grow" is a great first step to protecting lake health and water quality in Minnesota.

Maintain Septic Systems According to Best Management Practices

It is recommended that septic system maintenance occurs every one to three years. If a septic system malfunctions and leaks, lakes and rivers can become severely contaminated by the waste. Be sure to inspect a septic system every one to three years and contact your local septic system professional immediately in the case of a septic emergency.

Reduce the Amount of Impervious Surfaces

Hard surfaces like concrete, roofs, patios, and walking paths prevent rainwater from soaking into the land before entering a lake or river. As rainwater flows over hard surfaces it can pick up a variety of harmful chemicals on its way to a lake. Reduce the amount of impervious surfaces on your property to allow rainwater to infiltrate into the earth and prevent harm to the lake. Consider installing pervious stones or pavers if planning a sidewalk, patio, driveway or walking path on a lakeshore property.

Pick Up Pet Waste, and Keep Fire Pits Away from the Waterline

Pet waste carries harmful nutrients and pathogens. Be sure to pick up pet waste and dispose of it in a trash container. The ash from fire pits contains a lot of phosphorus. Keep fire pits at least 25 feet from the shoreline.

Allow Fallen Trees and Branches to Remain in the Water

When trees fall into a lake they create a favored habitat for a variety of fish, birds, and aquatic animals. Turtles, frogs, and other animals and insects thrive in these natural environments. Allow fallen trees and branches to remain in the water so long as they do not interfere with navigation or recreation.

Store Docks and Other Equipment Away from the Shoreline

When removing your dock, swim rafts, boat lifts and other water related equipment for winter try to protect the shoreline vegetation. If possible, store equipment at least 25 feet from the waterline and minimize the amount of space it takes up by stacking equipment or elevating on blocks.

Avoid the Use of Riprap, and Allow Native Plants to Emerge

Some property owners choose to cover their shoreline in large rocks or boulders in an effort to prevent erosion. These rock installations are known as riprap, but often fail to prevent erosion and can be damaged by ice, wave or wake action. In addition, riprap does not provide a buffer for runoff pollution. Try to avoid the installation of new riprap on a shoreline.

If riprap is already present, plant native plants, shrubs and trees between the stones. This will strengthen the integrity of the riprap and the roots will filter and absorb excess nutrients, reducing the amount of phosphorus and other pollutants that reach the lake.

Allow Aquatic Plants to Flourish on the Shoreline

Aquatic and floating plants provide a critical habitat for fish and wildlife and oxygenate the water. Allow aquatic plants to grow where they are not impacting the use of your property, such as the sides of beaches or other unused spaces. Avoid pulling or smothering aquatic plants with barriers, or using mechanical devices or chemicals for removal. Aquatic plants benefit a lake and its inhabitants; allow aquatic plants to grow where they do not impact recreation or navigation.

Avoid the Use of Broadcast Fertilizers and Pesticides

Fertilizers and pesticides are a major pollutant of Minnesota's lakes and rivers. Near shore fertilizers and pesticides are easily washed into the lake by snowmelt or rain where they drive algae blooms and kill aquatic insects which small fish feed upon. To protect lake health and water quality avoid the use of fertilizers and pesticides on lakeshore properties.

Allow Natural Vegetation to Grow - Anywhere!

The Lake Steward Program challenges the common perception of beauty. Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates promotes seeing the beauty of the natural environment, in healthy aquatic habitats, tall grasses, native flowers, fallen trees and native trees and shrubs. After restoring a shoreline, many property owners enjoy the return of animals and wildlife. Beauty can be seen in the cooperation of people, plants, and animals to promote a healthy aquatic environment.

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