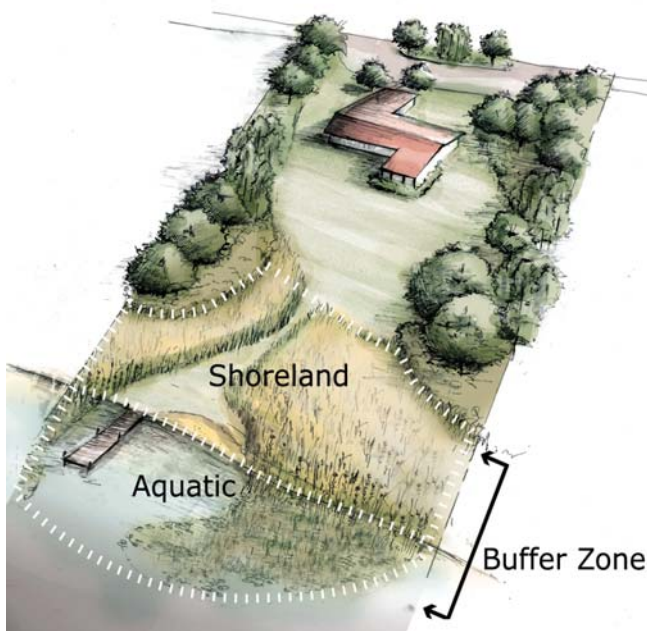


# Go 'Au Naturel'



**Natural landscapes** are essential to maintaining and enhancing the water quality in lakes and rivers. With the increased incidence of waterfront development on lakes and rivers across Wisconsin, it is more important than ever to maintain, enhance, or restore native vegetation along our shorelines. Shoreland vegetation, otherwise referred to as the shoreland buffer, is vital to the overall health of our lake and river ecosystems. The shoreland buffer zone is the transition area between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and can be thought of in a couple of different perspectives. The buffer zone includes terrestrial vegetation upland from the water's edge as well as aquatic vegetation within the lake or stream. Layers exist within the buffer zone including the aquatic vegetation (submergent, floating, emergent, and wet edge) and the upland vegetation (ground cover, shrub layer, tree canopy).

## Why are shoreland buffer zones so important in maintaining healthy lakes and rivers?

Buffer zones reduce erosion by stabilizing the soil and slowing runoff, and they allow for the filtering of nutrients, sediments, and other pollution. All of these are things that can potentially harm water quality in our lakes and streams. They can also impact habitat for plants, fish, and wildlife and ultimately our own enjoyment of the water.

Buffer zones also benefit plant, fish, and wildlife populations by providing movement corridors, habitat, and spawning and breeding grounds. They also discourage nuisance plants and wildlife and reduce wave impacts on the shoreline. Finally, buffer zones reduce the time and effort required for lawn care and maintenance while improving scenic beauty and aesthetics along our shorelines.

## What can waterfront property owners do?

You can enhance your shoreline and improve the quality of your land yet still enjoy the aesthetic, recreational, and wildlife opportunities that waterfront property ownership provides. It is simply a matter of balance.

A guiding principle is to seek a balance that satisfies our waterfront lifestyle and recreational needs while providing for sustainable habitat and water quality at the same time. This can be achieved by: managing and enhancing intact shoreland buffer zones and restoring degraded shoreland habitat, re-establishing native plant communities using local plants, and minimizing human disturbances to the shoreland area.

Stewardship of your shoreland buffer along with "*Your Littoral Front Yard*" will enable you to maintain, restore, and preserve the natural attributes of your property and the lake or stream you live on both today and into the future.

The focal points of this session are:

- *Physical Features*
- *Vegetation*
- *Access Area*
- *Yard Care / Maintenance*
- *Erosion Control*
- *Aesthetics*
- *Stewardship & Buffer Education*

# Go 'Au Naturel' - Assessing Your Property

Conduct a self-assessment of your property, focusing on the seven key shoreland buffer focus areas – physical features, vegetation, access area, yard care / maintenance, erosion control, aesthetics, and stewardship education.

## Physical Features – Mark the physical attributes of your waterfront property on your site map.

Buffer dimensions: buffer width \_\_\_\_\_ft buffer length \_\_\_\_\_ft

Shoreland buffer slope (circle one): flat (less than 15%) moderate (15 to 25%) steep (greater than 25 %)

Soil properties: soil type \_\_\_\_\_(clay, silt, loam) pH level: acid (0 to 5) neutral (6 to 8) alkaline/basic (9 to 14)  
soil moisture (mark wet and dry areas on your map)

Food availability (circle all that are present): seeds nuts berries fruits nectar foliage/twigs sap pollen

Protective cover ( “ “ ): wooded area dense shrubs bramble patch evergreens ground cover brush/rock pile

Wildlife reproduction habitat ( “ “ ): mature trees dense shrubs water garden/wetland cavity trees dens

Presence of wildlife enhancements ( “ “ ): birdhouse(s) bat-house(s) feeders bird bath(s)

## Vegetation – Assess the existing vegetation on your property and draw on site map as appropriate.

Presence of vegetation layers (circle all that are present): trees shrubs ground cover

Predominant site orientation: N NE E SE S SW W NW

Predominant sun exposure: mostly sunny partial sun / partial shade mostly shade

Presence of plant communities / transitional zones: aquatic plants wet-edge plants upland plants

Plant diversity: aquatic plants (circle one): low (1-5 species) medium (5-10 species) high (>10 species)  
wet-edge plants (circle one): low (1-5 species) medium (5-10 species) high (>10 species)  
upland plants (circle one): low (1-5 species) medium (5-10 species) high (>10 species)

Presence / absence of invasive species: \_\_\_\_\_

Presence / absence of cultivar species: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lake/River Access Area – Assess your lake or river view / access corridor and draw it on your site map.

View / access corridor width: \_\_\_\_\_ ft

Path design (circle one): straight meandering flat steep (mark path location on map)

Path material (circle one): grass wood chips gravel pavement stairway other: \_\_\_\_\_

Access function (circle all that apply): lake/river view wildlife viewing boat / dock access

Frequency of use (circle): low medium high

# Go 'Au Naturel' - Assessing Your Property, continued

## Yard Care & Maintenance – Assess your yard care & maintenance; draw maintained areas on the site map.

Turf grass (circle):      well-established      patchy      Percent of yard in manicured grass: \_\_\_\_\_%

Fertilizer use (circle one): yes    yes (phosphorus-free)    no      Watering frequency: none    daily    weekly    monthly

How do you dispose of yard waste? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you compost?    yes    no

## Erosion – Assess the presence or absence of erosion on your site, mark on map as appropriate.

Evidence of erosion (circle one):    none    furrows/gullies/slumps    bare soil    sediment in lake or stream

Severity of erosion (circle one):    low    medium    high

Probable cause of erosion (circle one): ice / wave action    groundwater seepage    overland flow    water level fluctuation

## Aesthetics – Assess how your waterfront property is perceived and / or enjoyed both by you and by others.

Neighborhood perspective (circle one):      manicured lawn      natural shoreline

Can lake or river users look in your windows (i.e., do you have privacy)?      yes    no

Is the lake or river framed naturally from your home's perspective?      yes    no

## Buffer Education – Spread the word about the benefits of natural shoreland buffer zones.

To what extent do neighbors influence your shoreland buffer "style"?    low                      medium                      high

Do you have a sense of community with other riparian residents?    yes                      no

Would you like to improve your lake or river stewardship efforts?    yes                      no

# Go 'Au Naturel' - Finding Solutions

The following are suggested ways that you can enhance or improve your shoreland buffer to protect water quality:

## General

- Invest time and/or money into a buffer enhancement project/s.
- If necessary, seek assistance with planning the project or with the labor involved in implementing the project.
- Consult one or more of the following for project permits as required: WI-DNR County/local zoning departments
- Consult your County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD), UW-Extension, lake association/district, county lake and stream association, or a landscape contractor / nursery for assistance

## Physical Features

- Identify opportunities to increase the size of your buffer zone: increase length along shore increase width/depth
- Identify which restoration technique/s would work the best for your situation: natural recovery vs. accelerated recovery
- Test your soil for pH, nutrients, moisture content, soil type with the help of: your local UW-Extension office, a home soil testing kit, or a private laboratory soil test
- Learn about the food preferences of wildlife species you wish to attract by consulting field guides and/or consulting with a wildlife biologist or other natural resource professional
- Work to attract wildlife to your property (songbirds, waterfowl, beneficial insects, butterflies, frogs / reptiles, mammals)
- Provide shelter areas for wildlife by creating or allowing any of the following to form: wooded area dense shrubs  
bramble patch evergreens ground cover brush/log/rock pile(s)
- Provide areas for wildlife to raise young, such as: mature trees, cavity trees/snags, dense shrubs, or dens.
- Attract wildlife with yard enhancements, such as: bird / bat house(s), bird bath(s), feeders, or wildflower garden(s).

## Vegetation

- Enhance or change the existing vegetation in any of the following ways: maintain / restore a natural landscape  
plant native vegetation increase plant diversity replace / reduce turfgrass remove invasive species
- Contact any of the following for help with a restoration plan: landscape contractor, County LWCD, WI-DNR
- Add these types of vegetation: wildflowers grasses / sedges / rushes shrubs trees ferns
- Identify native vegetation that is suitable to site conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lake/River Access Area

- Make the following changes / improvements to your access area: increase opportunities for viewing wildlife  
decrease size as is practical change design / substrate of access path

## Yard Care & Maintenance

- Fertilizer/ herbicide: avoid use as is practical use phosphorus-free fertilizer select plants that require no fertilizer
- Watering on your site: use mulch to reduce evaporation reduce watering frequency drip irrigate if possible
- Yard waste disposal: compost organic waste contact UW-Extension office for composting tips

## Erosion

- Consult a professional to identify the erosion type, cause, and level of severity
- Obtain information from WI-DNR or your County's LWCD about erosion control treatments, such as fiber logs, brush bundles, vegetation, riprap, etc.

## Buffer Education

- Talk to your neighbors about the importance of buffer zones for overall lake or river water quality. Share with them your shoreland enhancement / restoration plans and why it is good to do this sort of thing. Share information with neighbors.
- Become more active in community-wide lake or river stewardship efforts:  
Contact or sign up as a member of a county or local lake and/or river association.  
(On a lake) Become active with your local lake organization to educate others about positive lake stewardship.

# Go 'Au Nature!' - Action Plan Checklist

Use your property assessment and list of possible alternative solutions to select action strategies for restoring or enhancing your shoreland buffer zone. Consider where you may have the most impacts on the protection of wildlife habitat, water quality, and scenic enjoyment. Enter the selected actions in the chart below and set a target date for when you hope to accomplish each of those actions.

Go 'Au Nature!'		Action Strategy	Target Date
General	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Physical Features	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Vegetation	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Lake/River Access Area	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Yard Care & Maintenance	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Erosion	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		
Buffer Education	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	Notes:		

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