



Montmorency Conservation District
13210 M-33 North (Fairgrounds)
P.O. Box 789
Atlanta, MI 49709
989-785-4083
montmorencycd.org

Vegetation Buffer Strips Protect Lakes and Streams



The water quality of our lakes and rivers is one of the most important environmental issues we in the Great Lakes area are grappling with today. This issue affects both our residential and agricultural communities. Contamination from both sediment and nutrients are the largest non-point source concerns. What can the average resident, who lives along the shoreline of a lake, river or stream do to help alleviate this negative impact?

One answer for residential homeowners near surface water is something we can borrow from the agricultural community. For many years now farmers have been planting vegetation buffer strips (or zones) between their fields and sources of water, such as lakes and streams.

A vegetation buffer strip is an area of plants used to reduce sediment, organics, nutrients, pesticides and other contaminants from runoff and to maintain or improve water quality. Besides helping filter runoff, buffer strips stabilize stream banks and shorelines. This means less erosion to your property. They encourage a larger variety of wildlife to your land.

Buffer strips, with trees added, can assist in regulating water temperature by shading the stream and/or shoreline. A loss in vegetation along a stream can increase the water temperature anywhere from 2 to 10°C. The amount of dissolved oxygen decreases when the temperature increases. Both affect the area wildlife, especially fish.

Creating a buffer strip can involve something as easy as a discontinuation of mowing by the water's edge so that your turfgrass becomes taller in this area and native plants may begin to volunteer establishment in this undisturbed area as well. A planned landscaped buffer may involve planting trees, shrubs, and other native vegetation. These buffers can be designed with a definite look and/or function in mind to beautify your property. A vegetation buffer strip along lakes and ponds will also inhibit geese and ducks from coming onto your property from the water and leaving a mess on your lawn. Along with being functional, buffer strips require very little maintenance once they have been established and flowering native plants are hardy and will bloom from spring to fall.

While buffer strips are not an antidote for all of our water quality problems, they can be an attractive part of the solution.

For more information about buffer strips:

MSU Extension Land & Water Program has a shoreline management web site. This site offers information about alternatives to “turf to the water’s edge” landscaping.

<http://www.shoreline.msu.edu/index.html>

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council offers many publications for shoreline property owners. Many are available as a free download.

<http://www.watershedcouncil.org/resources%20and%20publications/>