The Buffer Zone... is that strip of vegetation located between developed land and a lake, stream or wetland. A good buffer protects the water, adds beauty and provides habitat for wildlife!

**Lawns and Shoreline do not mix!**

The most common mistake is planting lawn to the water’s edge. Turf grasses have shallow roots, increasing the risk of shoreline erosion. Also, lawns provide limited habitat for wildlife.

It is not necessary to turn your entire yard into a natural prairie or forest to protect a body of water. It is easy to reach a balance between a high quality buffer along the shore and a functional yard closer to your house.

**Native plants protect your shore**

Turf grass has a shallow root system. Shorelines with turf grass commonly erode. Native plants compose a high quality buffer. Their deep root systems resist erosion and stabilize shorelines.

**Protect the Water, provide a Buffer!**

**Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District**

Eroded bank 2” rooting depth for turf grass

Healthy shoreline with a high quality “Buffer Zone”

Unhealthy “turf grass only” shoreline

The RWMWD is a grouping of five smaller urban watersheds (Phalen Chain of Lakes, Beaver Lake, Battle Creek, Fish Creek and East St. Paul) that drain to the Mississippi River just downstream of downtown St. Paul. We are a special purpose local unit of government with a mission to protect and improve water resources and water related environments. For more information, you can visit our website at www.rwmwd.org, or call our offices at (651) 792-7950.

(651) 792-7950 www.rwmwd.org

Native plants protect your shore

**Turf grass**

- 1 ft. rooting depth

**Softstem Bulrush**

- 1 ft. rooting depth

**Rooting depth**

- 1.3 ft.

**Creeping Spikerush**

- 0.5 ft. rooting depth

**Tussock Sedge**

- 8.2-13 ft. rooting depth

**Prairie Cord Grass**

- 6.5-12 ft. rooting depth

**Horsetail**

- Up to 5 ft. rooting depth

**Swamp Milkweed**

- Up to 4 ft. rooting depth

**Switch Grass**

- 5.25 ft. rooting depth

**Purple Coneflower**

- 4.7-6.5 ft. rooting depth

**Little Bluestem Grass**

- 5.5-6.5 ft. rooting depth

**Purple Prairie Clover**

- 5.5-6.5 ft. rooting depth

It’s real estate worth protecting!
1. Slows and filters runoff. A good buffer protects your lake, stream, or wetland by slowing runoff and allowing it to soak into the ground.

2. Stabilizes shoreline. Buffers prevent fluctuating water levels, moving ice, surface runoff and wave action from eroding your shoreline.

3. Provides habitat. The water's edge provides food and cover for birds, butterflies, turtles and other wildlife. A good buffer can be a very diverse habitat.

4. Enhances aesthetics. Natural buffers beautify your yard with a variety of colorful wildflowers that bloom throughout the season. Buffers can also create a natural screen, increasing privacy.

6. Increases property value. A high quality buffer is an asset that can add resale value.


What makes a good buffer?

1. Wider is Better — The wider the buffer the greater the benefit. But even a 10-foot buffer is better than no buffer at all.

2. Natural Vegetation — A mix of native plant species – trees, grasses, and wildflowers — adds to buffer quality and improves wildlife habitat. Deep-rooted native plants are best adapted to hold soils in place.

3. Weed Management — Like any urban landscape your buffer needs maintenance. Periodic weeding will prevent invasive species such as purple loosestrife, buckthorn and reed canary grass from taking over your buffer, compromising wildlife habitat.

4. Natural Water Flow — Water runoff slows down and is filtered and infiltrated when it naturally flows through a buffer, as opposed to being piped or ditched. Through this process a buffer improves the quality of water entering our lakes and wetlands.

Six reasons why a buffer makes for a better wetland

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How to create (or enhance) your own buffer

There are three main steps to creating or enhancing your own buffer. We recommend that you use the resources listed below to get started.

1. Study your property — Evaluate and learn about your shoreline or wetland edge. What type of plants are growing there? Do you have an undisturbed buffer? How wide is it? Are there signs of erosion?

2. Create a plan — Determine your buffer area. Research ways to remove invasive plant species. Decide on methods to increase native plant species diversity – e.g., stop mowing, seed selected areas and plant along the water. Select appropriate plant species. If erosion is a concern, choose appropriate methods of soil stabilization, which may include grading. (Note: A permit may be needed to plant below the Normal Water Level – Call MN DNR Central Region at 651.722.7956 for more information.)

3. Implement your plan — Prepare your site. Stop mowing. Spread out and slow down water flow to minimize erosion. Remove invasive weed species and turf grass. Plant or seed your buffer. Maintain your natural buffer – e.g., water the first year, weed, and replant bare spots. Watch for new native plant species becoming established. Record your observations. Share your knowledge with others!

Resources and additional information

(If you do not have web access and would like more information on buffers.)

Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District
www.rwmwd.org

University of Minnesota – Shoreland Management
www.shorelandmanagement.org

List of Minnesota native plant suppliers
www.dnr.state.us/gardens/nativeplants/suppliers.html

MN DNR Restore your Shore – CD and book resources
www.dnr.state.mn.us/restoreyours.hon/index.html