

LAKE STEWARD

What to expect during your site visit



As a candidate for the Lake Steward Award, your property must be evaluated by your lake association's Shoreline Evaluator. This short site visit is to ensure that your property meets Lake Steward criteria and protects the lake.

Your property will be graded on the following criteria. You do not need to get 100% on every criterion. Rather, the impacts of each action are taken holistically, with certain things like the shoreline buffer, carrying more weight in your score.

Upland Zone

The Upland Zone is the area from the OHW (ordinary high water) mark, extending landward. It is characterized by moist to dry conditions, where various vegetation types like grasses, shrubs, and trees can grow. This is likely where the primary structure is located.

Signs of Erosion in the Upland Zone Major erosion is characterized by bluff erosion, extensive areas of erosion, or when soil is moving towards the lake. Minor is when there are small areas of erosion that may not be moving towards the lake.

Use of broadcast pesticides and fertilizers State law requires that only phosphorus free lawn fertilizer be used for most situations. A quarter of Minnesota lakes have high levels of phosphorus, which means that they do not meet water quality standards for recreation. Excess phosphorus feeds algae growth and excess nitrogen promotes lake plants while reducing diversity. To protect pollinators, there shouldn't be any broadcast spraying of pesticides or insecticides.

Waste is getting to the lake (pet waste, firepit ashes, etc). Pet waste or ash from a fire pit within 50 feet of the lake or on a steep slope or bluff pollutes the lake. If you have a fire pit, please remove it from the shoreline zone (within 50 feet of the lake), or replace it with a raised fire pit from which ashes can be removed and disposed of far away from the lake so that the ashes cannot enter the lake.

Septic system maintenance A maintained septic system is pumped out at least every 3 years. Leaking or damaged septic systems can be a large source of lake pollution.

Runoff is directed to the lake Runoff is often directed to the lake by grading, tiling or downspouts. Rain gardens and other stormwater management, usually placed near impervious surfaces, can reduce runoff to the lake. Consider aiming gutters away from the lake, to a place where rainwater can successfully filter into the ground, or into a rain barrel.

Percentage of Upland Zone that includes trees, shrubs, and natural ground cover

The Upland Zone, especially because it tends to be larger in area than the buffer zone, can be very protective of the lake while also creating biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

Shoreline (transitional) Zone

The area of moist to saturated soil between the Upland and Aquatic zones. The shoreline has been described as the “glue” for the waterfront because it provides a natural barricade against erosion. This is not a demarcation between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems but a connecting zone for the transfer of water, nutrients and other substances from land to water.

Signs of shoreline erosion Major is when erosion is altering the shoreline with a slumping bank or changing shoreline contour. Minor erosion, in many cases, is natural, as shorelines are dynamic places.

Presence of riprap human placed rock) Riprap shorelines, although they may help reduce erosion, do not filter runoff or provide wildlife habitat. Riprap should only be used in special circumstances. Native vegetation, because of its deep roots, protects the lake from runoff and provides habitat, as well as protects a lakeshore against wave action caused by boats or wind.

Percentage of Shoreline Zone that is unmowed, and includes trees, shrubs, and natural ground cover A lush Shoreline Zone of native plants prevents harmful runoff of silt and nutrients from entering the lake. Natural ground cover includes: vegetation consisting of unmowed grasses, wild flowers, and forbs; and ledge rock, rocks, and sand not placed by humans.

Average landward extent of shoreline buffer that includes trees, shrubs, and natural ground cover The deeper and more extensive the shoreline buffer, the better it protects lake water quality. If you have an especially deep or diverse buffer, thank you! If not, consider building a protective buffer by starting small... Just stop mowing!

Storing docks and lifts on shore The creation of a large area on shore for docks and lifts storage eliminates area for an effective shoreline buffer to infiltrate runoff and trap pollutants.

Aquatic Zone

The Aquatic Zone begins at the land-water edge and includes the lake or river area immediately adjacent to the lakeshore lot. It begins at the land-water interface and includes the shallow water where rooted aquatic plants grow. A wide variety of aquatic plants may grow at the water's edge and gradually change as the water gets deeper.

Dead trees in lake Trees and tree branches provide habitat for fish and wildlife. They can be left in the lake.

Lake plants are removed As with shoreline plants, aquatic plants protect the shoreline, as well as provide habitat. It is acceptable to remove the least amount of plants that will allow them to enjoy the lakeshore for swimming or boating (state rules apply).

Docks and lifts Clustering docks and lifts in one area of the shoreline, rather than scattering them across it, reduces breaks and paths through the shoreline buffer and minimizes aquatic habitat loss.

Thank you for being thoughtful about the management of your shoreline! By displaying a Lake Steward sign, you are part of shifting the social norms around natural shorelines and protecting water quality for future generations!