

Stearns County SWCD Protects Shoreline Areas Long-Term

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) hired a full time Shoreland Specialist in 2000, to focus on shoreland restoration projects. The Shoreland Specialist began working with lake associations and other groups to complete shoreland re-vegetation projects, otherwise known as lakescaping or shoreland buffers. Shoreland buffers protect aquatic ecosystems, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. They make use of deeply rooted plants to keep soil in place, filter nutrients and pollutants from stormwater runoff, and reduce flooding. Shoreland Buffers also discourage nuisance geese, provide privacy, and require low maintenance, while adding beauty and diversity to the landscape.

As the Stearns County SWCD shoreland restoration program evolved, it became apparent that many waterfront owners were finding the value in planting or protecting native vegetation along shorelines, and the number of landowner requests continued to grow. As the number of shoreline re-vegetation projects and the associated cost share monies increased, the Stearns County SWCD Board wanted assurance that the projects would remain in place for the long-term, as intended, even if the properties changed ownership.

To protect shoreline areas long-term, the Stearns County SWCD Board initiated a process in 2006. Staff from the Stearns County SWCD, Environmental Services, Auditors/Surveyors Office, Recorders Office and Attorney's Office advised the SWCD Board regarding the logistics of protecting shorelines in perpetuity. In April 2007 the Stearns County SWCD Board adopted procedure for these shoreline areas to ensure long-term protection. Through the new process, most shoreline projects with the SWCD along lakes, rivers, and streams in Stearns County require a permanent deed restriction to be signed. As a result, project documentation must include a cost-share agreement, an as-built drawing of the area of the project, vegetation plan details, operation and maintenance requirements, and a recorded deed restriction through the County Recorder's office. Once the project is complete and the landowner(s) has signed all the required paperwork, the document is recorded. After the recording is complete, the SWCD pays the cost share to the landowner.

In 2009 the Stearns County SWCD took the process a step further. The SWCD had requests from developers working on sub-divisions with Stearns County Environmental Services, landowners who worked with the SWCD on shoreline projects prior to 2007, and landowners who wanted long-term protection for their vegetated shorelines. As a result, the SWCD developed a Shoreland Deed Restriction for prior projects, subdivisions, and for landowners who simply want to protect their shoreline properties.

As a part of the Stearns County SWCD Shoreland Deed Restriction process, locations of the restricted properties are scanned and linked to a GIS-based map of the County where the restricted properties are located. In addition, the Stearns County Environmental Services Department and municipalities within the county have created databases that "flags" these

properties as being restricted, so that no permits are issued for work that would violate the deed restriction.

All shoreland restoration projects are required to have a native buffer in existence or planted as part of an approved Stearns County SWCD plan. The native buffer on the property shall require at least 75% of the shoreline length, with a maximum traffic area of no more than 25 feet along the shoreline. Properties in public and commercial ownership can be given exception to this policy, but will have to adhere to having a 75% buffer of native vegetation on the length of shoreline owned. Public and commercial properties will have to provide a needs and suitability request for a larger traffic area to the SWCD Board. Traffic area is defined as any area not containing a majority of native vegetation, ie: mowed grass, areas with retaining walls, steps, paths, buildings, other topographic alterations or man made structures. The existing and new buffer areas shall extend at least 25 feet landward of the Ordinary High Water Level of the lake/river or to the top of the nearest slope (12% steepness or more) whichever is greater. This shall be applied to the watercourse of all properties where projects are proposed and implemented.

If you have interest in learning more about the Stearns County SWCD Shoreland Deed Restriction process you can contact Greg Berg, Shoreland Specialist with the Stearns County SWCD at 320/251-7800 extension 143, or greg.berg@mn.nacdnet.net.

Example Projects:



Before Project



After Project

Stearns County SWCD
110 Second Street South, Suite 128
Waite Park, MN 56387
Phone: (320) 251-7800, Extension # 3





Before Project



After Project



Before Project



After Project