

FACT SHEETS

NATURAL SHORELINES

Through the Docktalk program, FOCA encourages landowners to maintain a natural shoreline.

WHY? The benefits include:

More time enjoying the outdoors

Low-maintenance natural shorelines mean less time spent on yard care and more time doing what you enjoy most about cottaging. Take this opportunity to do nothing to your property and reap the benefits.

Water filtration, improved water quality

Natural vegetation along shorelines catches rainwater runoff and sediment, and absorbs the pollutants it carries. Plants act as a physical barrier slowing water flow and redirecting it into the soil where their roots filter excess nutrients and other pollutants. Mowed areas act like hard surfaces from which rainwater runs off, flooding lakes and carrying pollutants straight into the water.

Protection from erosion

Natural shoreline vegetation is your first line of defence against soil erosion. The plants' extensive root systems hold the soil, keeping it where it belongs. Your property remains intact and fish spawning beds remain clear. Natural shorelines adjust to natural disturbances and are remarkably stable. Shallow-rooted species, like turf grasses, won't prevent erosion.

Less nuisance algae and aquatic plants

Natural shorelines don't need fertilizing. Nutrients from lawn and garden fertilizer are a significant cause of algal blooms and can increase nuisance aquatic plants. Too much algae blocks the sun from reaching organisms at lower depths. Massive weed beds can clog waterways. And the decay of so much organic material lowers the water's oxygen level, which affects fish and other wildlife.

Protect your investment

Natural shorelines contribute to water quality. Protect what you value.

Maintain recreation quality

Poor water quality and nuisance weeds affect swimming, fishing, and boating. A natural shoreline helps maintain water quality and control weeds and algal blooms.

Good for wildlife and the pocket book

More than 90 per cent of life in the lake begins along the shore. Your natural shoreline will provide shelter, travel corridors, and food for wildlife (e.g. dragonflies, frogs, turtles, fish, water birds). Retaining walls remove habitat and limit aquatic plants' ability to re-root. Retaining walls can be an expensive, temporary fix.

A natural shoreline includes an area of native flowers, grasses, shrubs, and/or trees extending back from the water's edge as well as fallen trees, logs, rocks, and plants below the water line.

Find out how you can have a natural shoreline...

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HOW?

FOCA encourages landowners to take the following steps for a healthy shoreline and lake:

Rely on nature and relax

Native plants are adapted to your area. They require little or no maintenance. That means you can eliminate the need to use fertilizers and pesticides on your land. You save money and the environment.

Preserve the natural shoreline

Leave an area (buffer) of natural vegetation extending back from the shoreline. A buffer 10 metres deep is a good start and 15 metres even better! Larger buffers provide more protection for your shoreline. Local conditions also influence buffer size, e.g. 30 metres for cold-water lakes.

Recreate a natural shoreline

Allow the shoreline to return to its natural state, or plant native species of flowers, grasses, and shrubs. Remove non-native species. Aim for a naturalized area extending at least 10 metres back from shore. Cottage shorelines with previously installed retaining walls can be restored (somewhat) by naturalizing the walls above and below the water line. For best results, remove retaining walls.

Keep natural contours

Avoid hard barriers such as concrete walls and gabion baskets. Erosion control can be accomplished with low-impact approaches that work with the shoreline to create a sloped shoreline integrated with aquatic plants. Successful approaches often mimic nature's own design.

Install low-impact docks

Impacts to shoreline habitat can be kept to a minimum with less intrusive structures, such as floating and cantilever docks, that don't touch the lake bed or disrupt currents, fish, or plant communities.

Build less, enjoy more

Limit shoreline alteration to no more than 25 per cent of your shoreline.

Check regulations

Keep a paper trail of plans, approvals, details, etc. Shoreline modifications may be subject to a number of regulations. Check the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' Operational Statements to find out if regulations apply to your project.

Resources online:

www.foca.on.ca

www.kawarthaconservation.com/projects_services/shoreline_naturalization/

www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans-habitat/index_e.asp

www.lrconline.com/Extension_Notes_English/pdf/shrlns.pdf

Your local contact: