

The benefits of healthy shorelines

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In Renfrew County, we are blessed with many streams, lakes and rivers and most of us are fortunate enough to enjoy life by water whether at a public beach, park, camping ground, cottage or waterfront residence.

We appreciate the aesthetic, social, and recreation value of being by the water.

But, in addition, healthy shorelines (the area where the water meets the land) also provide ecological and economic benefits.

Natural shoreline is the easiest and least expensive way to prevent loss of land and property from erosion caused by flooding, surface runoff, ice push and waves (including boat wakes).

Areas with a healthy shoreline sustain less damage than those without. The roots of plants, shrubs and trees form a web that holds the waterfront together.

A healthy shoreline also provides a visual screen, shade and shelter from wind and enables our watershed to better respond to future stresses associated with climate change such as heat waves, more frequent and intense storms, droughts and flooding, all of which we have experienced this past year.

Natural shoreline also helps to regulate water quality by acting as a barrier for 90 per cent of land-based pollutants such as seepage from septic tanks, fertilizers and pesticides, pet and animal waste, oil/gas and other spilled chemicals.

All or most of that service is lost when natural shoreline is converted to other cover types including lawn (which has increased substantially on waterfront property in recent years)



because much of the sediment, and often lawn chemicals, run off into the lake rather than being filtered by native, deep rooting plants.

One of the main pollutants of runoff from shoreline properties is phosphorous, a nutrient that can cause algae blooms and result in poor, sometimes toxic, water quality and increased cost for drinking water treatment.

Simple ways to decrease phosphorus and other nutrients are to retain natural vegetation along shorelines, reduce agricultural runoff, use phosphorus-free fertilizer on lawns, picking up pet waste, use phosphate-free cleaning products and maintain septic systems.

Shorelines are one of the most unique places on earth and our daily actions can have a huge impact on this delicate interface.

Each of us can help to preserve the water in streams, lakes and rivers, which not only helps maintain or improve property values, but also sustains the enjoyable waterfront lifestyle as a place to rest and relax, swim, fish, and play!

To better understand the health of our shorelines, a two-year, Renfrew County "Love Your Lake" pilot project, is currently underway through a partnership of the Bonnechere River Watershed Project, the Centre for Sustainable Watersheds (CSW), the Renfrew County Stewardship Coun-

cil and lake property owners' associations with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and local support in 2012 from North Algoma Wilberforce Township, Verheyen William G. & Sons Ltd., and ECO Canada. It is part of a larger "Love Your Lake" program being delivered by the CSW in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation and local lake associations across five regions in Ontario, including Renfrew County.

The purpose of the program is to assess shoreline properties and identify actions landowners can take to positively contribute towards the health of their lake.

Last summer, 539 properties were assessed on Lake Clear and Mink Lake in Renfrew County. Plans for this summer are well underway.

Each property owner receives a private, customized assessment report with a focus on features that are affecting lake health and recommendations for remedial actions.

Each property owners' association receives a summary report that provides a baseline for their lake.

For more information about the Love Your Lake program, contact Kelsey Jensen, Lake Stewardship Coordinator for Renfrew County at the Centre for Sustainable Watersheds, jensen@watersheds.ca, phone 613-264-1244 or 613-273-9121, or www.watersheds.ca

Visit www.bonnechereiver.ca for more information about the Bonnechere River watershed and related events including Celebrate Our River paddle excursions and performances of Bonnechere River: Future Tense, an original musical play by Stone Fence Theatre about the past, present and possible futures of our watershed.