

LNCC-sponsored erosion workshop outlined lakefront buffers

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Want to control erosion at your lakefront property? Plant blueberries. That was one of many tips those in attendance at the Shoreline Erosion Workshop were offered on June 24. The event, sponsored by Lake Nokomis Concerned Citizens (LNCC), was open to the public and was held at the Town of Nokomis town hall.

The LNCC membership chose to hold the workshop because member residents need to replace existing seawalls and wanted to learn ways to prevent minor soil erosion.

Blueberries, according to Tom Girolamo, are a perfect shoreline plant as they are a buffer between land and water, attractive in appearance and produce edible fruit.

Girolamo is the owner of Eco-Building and Forestry in Mosinee and says his company strives for organic solutions in sustainable landscaping. He urges caution to former city dwellers bringing metropolitan landscapes to lake properties. Perfect weedless lawns right down to the water may mean phosphorus fertilizers washing into the lake, increased sediment and erosion, he says.

"Everyone wants quiet, serenity, green. In order to achieve that, I recommend three "P's": Ponder the plantings, prepare the site, and protect the environment," Girolamo explained. Certain sites may require specific erosion control, for instance in high boat traffic areas, or more open wind swept areas, he added.

LNCC's consultant

Erosion in all types of shore-land areas may not be controlled with simple plant transplants, according to Environmental Consultant Joseph Dorava. LNCC hired Dorava of Vierbicher Associates, Inc. of Reedsburg, to advise them of water and land management concerns.

He said specific factors to consider are waves or currents, including high boating traffic areas, slope of the land, soil characteristics and cost. Bioengineering in minor erosion control instances utilizes vegetative and natural materials for stabilization and protection of shorelines. Like Girolamo, Dorava also recommends planting blueberries at the shoreline, along with willow trees, and iris.

He said erosion restoration issues may involve governmental agencies, with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co. (WVIC) ultimately in control. According to Dorava, the first 30 feet of Lake Nokomis shoreland is owned by WVIC. Dorava said it's been difficult to get WVIC to come to private residences.

"Four or five sites have been protected by WVIC in instances of endangered resources or as an archeological site," he noted.

DNR weighs in on permits

DNR Water Management Specialist James Grafelman outlined the background and legislative history of human influence on Wisconsin shores. Recently enacted Act 118 revises Chapter 30 of the Wisconsin Statutes protecting state waters.

One example of the revision is to permit seawalls in certain sites, which weren't previously allowed. A property owner must go through a process, however, to get an exemption. Act 118 covers bridges, boat ramps, boathouse

repairs, piers, diversion of water, grading in excess of 10,000 square feet and fish cribs.

Grafelman explained the importance of the littoral zone – property abutting a lake, river or pond - and shoreland wetlands. In a healthy ecosystem, 80 percent of wildlife is found in the littoral zone. It is the fish spawning and animal habitat. Invertebrates such as dragon and May flies are eaten by small fish which are then food for larger fish.

If the vegetation in the littoral zone is removed, aquatic life relocates or dies, and songbirds, which are migrant species, will be replaced by grackle, catbirds, chickadee, blue jays and goldfinch. The DNR recommends planting indigenous vegetation to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Without prior approval, however, a property owner could face heavy fines and be required to remove unapproved shoreline structures or erosion control methods.

“As passed by the legislature, Act 118 makes things less clear to homeowners,” Grafelman said.

He strongly recommends contacting the DNR prior to completing an application, paying a fee, or beginning any shoreline work. DNR staff, for example, can determine if a desired rip rap erosion project would fall under an individual permit (\$500 fee), or a general permit (\$50 fee). If a permit for an erosion control project is denied, a property owner can appeal in Madison.

Permits for many erosion control methods involve a fee set by the legislature and a permit from the DNR, which can be applied for on its web site www.dnr.state.wi.us.