

Working Around Water or Wetlands



Illustration by Landowner Resource Centre, www.lrconline.com

Let's Talk

- ① Hardened, artificial shoreline with concrete wall
- ② Drainage ditch – poor design accelerates water flows and carries sediment and contaminates to river
- ③ Poor nutrient management – manure spreading on field too close to watercourse with no buffer
- ④ Erosion – no buffer, plowing too close to waterway and in wrong direction
- ⑤ Runoff/Seepage – water quality issues
- ⑥ On-stream pond – warming of cold water stream – cattle access, no buffer
- ⑦ Cattle in water – erosion and water quality issues
- ⑧ Buildings too close to a watercourse – potential flooding and surface water impacts
- ⑨ Illegal dumping of fill and alteration of a watercourse – increases flooding and erosion and disturbs aquatic habitat
- ⑩ Clear cut operations – loss of habitat and exposed soil

Let's Protect

- ① Natural shoreline with recreational access
- ② Protection of wetlands and natural drainage systems
- ③ Proper nutrient management – preparation of a plan and correct application methods
- ④ Excellent buffer – filters impurities and keeps shoreline intact
- ⑤ Contained manure storage using proper facilities
- ⑥ A natural waterway
- ⑦ Livestock kept away from watercourses – fencing and natural vegetation
- ⑧ Protection of floodplain lands – development set back from watercourse, pond collects stormwater runoff
- ⑨ Houses set well back from shoreline – natural vegetation and habitat left intact, no filling
- ⑩ Good forest management – tree planting, habitat protection, soil conservation

Why protect life along the water?

Clean water, healthy, natural waterways and protected water sources benefit us all in so many ways; our health, our economy and our society. Through the years, we have learned there are consequences for us as individuals and as a society when we do not respect our waterways, shorelines, floodplains and wetlands.

We now understand that a healthy fish population is an indicator of a clean, healthy waterway and that benefits us all, not just the fish! Laws are in place, like the Federal Fisheries Act, to protect fish habitat.

We have learned that building on floodplain lands puts people's lives and property at risk. Not only that, but flooding and flood damages place an unfair burden on our taxes when emergency services and financial relief are required. That is why conservation authorities have regulations in place to control activities like construction, filling and other development on, and adjacent to floodplain lands.

We now appreciate the very important role of our wetlands. They benefit us by reducing the threat of flooding, providing habitat for wildlife, helping to maintain the water table, and improving water quality. Unfortunately, over 80% of southern Ontario's wetlands have been lost to filling, draining and degradation.

We now know that proper municipal planning can direct development in the appropriate areas so that environmentally sensitive lands are protected. Many agencies, including conservation authorities, provide input and comments on changes to official plans, zoning by-laws, severance applications and plans of subdivision.

We now understand that sound conservation practices on agricultural land not only protects wetlands and nearby waterways, but saves soil increasing yields and contributes to the long-term success of farm operations.

We have learned about the many benefits of natural shorelines in preserving a healthy environment. For our shorelines, the best approach is the natural approach.

Finally, we know that caring for the environment on a watershed basis makes good sense. What happens upstream affects what happens downstream. Ontario's 36 conservation authorities are setup to care for the environment on a watershed basis. Contact your conservation authority for more information.

Working Around Water or Wetlands... What You Need to Know...

What do you mean by 'work' near the water?

'Work' is considered to be placing of fill, construction of any kind, or any alterations to waterways, wetlands or shorelines. This can include construction of buildings, boat houses, bridges or culverts; straightening, deepening, dredging, or creation of ponds along waterways; removal of vegetation; installation of docks or the creation of a beach or boat launch; and filling or regrading. Before you begin work near any watercourse or wetland, call your local conservation authority.

You need to know...

Working near the water or a wetland without the proper approvals, permits or reviews, could result in legal action. If found guilty a person can be required to pay substantial fines, cover the costs of site restoration or be required to fulfill other court ordered remedies.

A permit? Sounds complicated and costly...

You may need permits from the Conservation Authority and the Ministry of Natural Resources, as well as approval from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Approval from one agency does not guarantee approval from another agency. Sound complicated? It doesn't need to be. Your local conservation authority can advise you of the relevant regulations and laws, guide you through the process and offer helpful technical advice. The cost is reasonable. Contact your conservation authority for the fee schedule. Most straightforward conservation authority permits can be processed within a few weeks. Approvals from other agencies may take longer.

"I've lived here for a long time and I've never seen it flood..."

Floods can happen at any time. Conservation authorities have maps that clearly define floodplain areas. Most new construction is no longer permitted in the floodplain. Many buildings, including some homes, were constructed prior to floodplain regulations taking effect – alterations to these buildings require a permit. Knowledge of, or genuine concern for the environment does not mean that work you have planned along your waterfront will not require a

permit or prior approval. Your local conservation authority can advise you regarding the approval process and the location of regulated lands.

"Looks like a great building lot..."

It would be great to live near the water... but if your building lot is near the water or bordering a wetland, there will be setback requirements and restrictions on where your home or business may be located. Not every picturesque piece of shoreline property is suitable for building. Your local conservation authority can provide the specific information you need. Have the property location, including address, lot, concession, and municipality handy when you call.

Planning a large development?

You may be planning a commercial or residential development near the water or a wetland. Stormwater runoff from these developments can cause both water quality and quantity concerns. New developments must address stormwater management. To ensure all environmental concerns are dealt with upfront, it is important to contact the conservation authority early in the planning phase of your development. Your local conservation authority can provide information regarding stormwater management requirements, environmental planning, floodplains, and the environmental permits and approvals required for development.

The best approach is the natural approach...

A natural shoreline has many benefits. It protects and enhances fish habitat, provides habitat for wildlife, reduces erosion, contributes to improved water quality, is aesthetically pleasing and provides a barrier to pollutants (that may be coming from your own yard!). A natural shoreline with an associated band of natural vegetation or buffer strip will also help to protect against erosion and sedimentation, which can be harmful to fish habitat. Your conservation authority has information on the benefits of natural shorelines and how to naturalize your shoreline.

What about erosion?

Erosion occurs when unprotected soil is washed away by precipitation, runoff or wave action. Erosion can result in loss of property, reduce property value and increase sedimentation. Erosion can be made worse or occur when shoreline vegetation is removed or any work is done near

the water. Waterfront property owners, including those on the Lake Erie shoreline, should contact the conservation authority before beginning any work.

What about sedimentation?

Sedimentation occurs when soil gets into the water. Any disturbance to the land in or near a waterway can cause sedimentation and erosion. Work near or in the water that causes sedimentation can result in harm to fish habitat. Charges may be laid, for which there can be substantial penalties, under the Fisheries Act. There are ways to reduce the impacts of sedimentation during and after a work project near the water. Helpful information is available at your local conservation authority.

Plan ahead. Contact us!

Before you begin any work along or near a waterway or wetland, contact your local conservation authority.

We can provide you with advice on the required permits or approvals and information to help best plan the project and protect water and wetlands.

For more information contact:



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