



# Establishing No-mow Zones

## Preventing erosion, intercepting runoff and protecting lake habitat

Lake friendly living  
means using lakeshore  
BEST MANAGEMENT  
PRACTICES

### BMP

Establishing No-mow Zones

### STANDARDS

#### Shorefront

- Natural conditions
- Clean runoff to lake
- Shallow water areas natural and not "cleaned up"
- Minimum of 15 ft wide vegetated zone for existing developed sites

### LAKE BENEFITS

Establishing no-mow zones naturally stabilizes the shore, filters and cleans dirty runoff, maintains greater privacy, increases property value, enhances scenic beauty, prevents erosion and allows for healthy habitat for fish, birds, and other important species. Furthermore, it is the best practice for protecting your property against storm damage.

## Establishing No-mow Zones

**Description:** A mix of trees, shrubs, and groundcover between the lake and camps or houses which is not mowed.

**Purpose:** To allow shoreland vegetation to maintain lake quality and wildlife habitat. A naturally vegetated zone along the shore builds up a duff layer, which is a spongy, absorbant layer of decomposing leaf and twig litter. Duff is essential for healthy lakes because it naturally filters storm runoff by intercepting and absorbing pollutants, and it provides a protective ground cover, preventing erosion. No-mow zones stabilize banks with roots from native species that grow up, and these zones benefit all wildlife.

#### How to:

1. **Stop mowing** a zone adjacent to the shoreline as wide as feasible for your property. Prioritize lawn areas and move them back from the shoreline wherever possible. For sloped banks, the no-mow zone should extend beyond the top of a bank because research shows that a minimal of 15 feet of vegetation will stabilize the shore. A "no-mow" zone allows native plants to colonize the area, but jump-starting the vegetation by planting a few favorite native species, like blueberry bushes, alternative leaf dogwood, beautiful white flowering viburnums, etc., can also help maximize the benefits of this important zone along the lakeshore.



The water quality is protected by this beautiful no-mow zone.



This photo shows several decades of natural re-growth of native species on a shore that had previously been cleared of all its vegetation; it now serves as a family picnic grove for the shoreland owners.

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2. You can then **selectively prune out** the species you don't want and encourage those you do. Woody plants (trees and shrubs), groundcover, and wildflowers all hold the soil together better than mowed grass, which has shallow roots.
3. **Add desired plants** to a no-mow zone (see the lakeshore BMP on *Planting and Maintaining Vegetated Areas* for a listing of beautiful native species that grown naturally along lakeshores).
  - ◆ Select native species to avoid spreading aggressive exotic (invasive) species.
  - ◆ Select plants based on their mature size and characteristics. For instance, choose shrubs if you want to be able to see over the top of them. Or select trees for privacy and shade, and as the tree grows prune off some of the lower branches so you can see the lake to the extent desired.
  - ◆ Select species that provide fruits for birds or yourself to eat, or shrubs with attractive flowers.
  - ◆ Transplanting plants from farther uphill on your property to the lakeshore saves nursery costs and you can be sure the species grows well in your area. Late fall or early spring before the buds open are the best times to transplant.

*By coordinating these no-mow sections with your neighbors, you can provide greater sized areas of good fish and wildlife habitat and stable banks.*



These photos show two very differently managed properties on the same lake. Although by today's understanding, both camps were situated too close to the lake, the lakeshore owner on the left has allowed the native cedar trees to stabilize the bank, and with a little pruning, has a wonderful view.



In the photo on the right, the camp owners choose to clear their shore and plant grass, which has lead to costly repairs to stabilize their bank with a sea wall. The property continues to have sink holes, erosion, and runoff problems. Even after building a sea wall, the benefits of a no-mow zone on the top of the bank would not only help protect this property, but would help protect water quality as well.