

# The Buffer Zone

Is that strip of vegetation located between developed land and a lake, stream or wetland. A good buffer protects the water, adds beauty and provides habitat for wildlife!

## Lawns and Shoreline do not mix!



The most common mistake is planting lawn to the water's edge. Turf grasses have shallow roots, increasing the risk of shoreline erosion. Also, lawns provide limited habitat for wildlife.

## Protect the Water, provide a Buffer!



It is not necessary to turn your entire yard into a natural prairie or forest to protect a body of water. It is easy to reach a balance between a high quality buffer along the shore and a functional yard closer to our house.

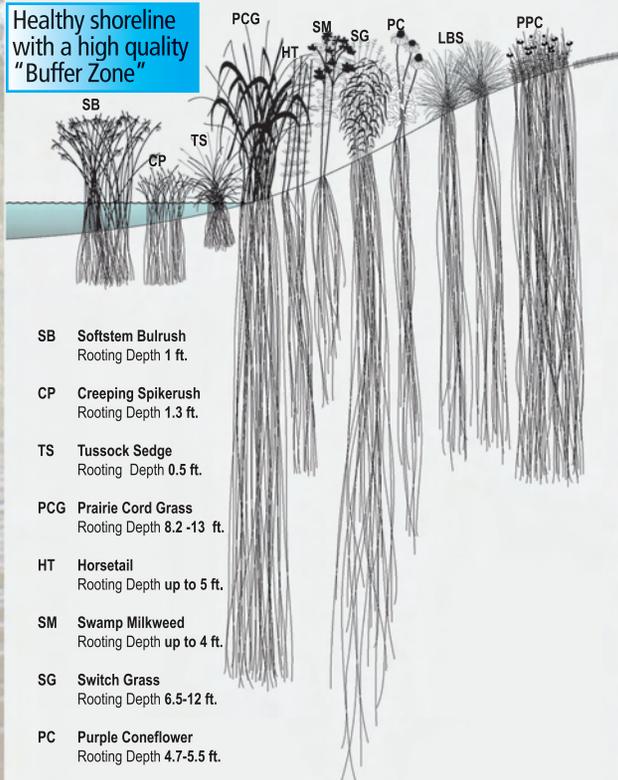
# Native plants protect your shore

Turf grass has a shallow root system. Shorelines with turf grass commonly erode. Native plants compose a high quality buffer. Their deep root systems resist erosion and stabilize shorelines.

Unhealthy "turf grass only" shoreline

Eroded Bank

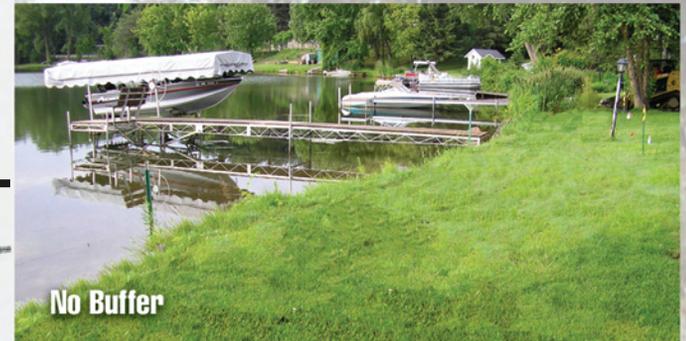
Healthy shoreline with a high quality "Buffer Zone"



- SB Softstem Bulrush  
Rooting Depth 1 ft.
- CP Creeping Spikerush  
Rooting Depth 1.3 ft.
- TS Tussock Sedge  
Rooting Depth 0.5 ft.
- PCG Prairie Cord Grass  
Rooting Depth 8.2 -13 ft.
- HT Horsetail  
Rooting Depth up to 5 ft.
- SM Swamp Milkweed  
Rooting Depth up to 4 ft.
- SG Switch Grass  
Rooting Depth 6.5-12 ft.
- PC Purple Coneflower  
Rooting Depth 4.7-5.5 ft.
- LABS Little Bluestem Grass  
Rooting Depth 5.25 ft.
- PPC Purple Prairie Clover  
Rooting Depth 5.5-6.5 ft.

# The Buffer Zone

(that area along the water's edge)



No Buffer



Buffer

# It's real estate worth protecting!

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# Six reasons why a buffer makes for a better wetland

## 1. What does a Buffer do?

Slows and filters runoff.

A good buffer protects your lake, stream, or wetland by slowing runoff and allowing it to soak into the ground.

## 2. Stabilizes shoreline.

Buffers prevent fluctuating water levels, moving ice, flooding, surface runoff and wave action from eroding your shoreline.

## 3. Provides habitat.

The water's edge provides food and cover for birds, butterflies, turtles and other wildlife. It is one of the most diverse habitats in the Midwest.

## 4. Enhances aesthetics.

Natural buffers beautify your yard with a variety of colorful wildflowers that bloom throughout the season. Buffers can create a natural screen – increasing privacy.



## 5. Increases property value.

A high quality buffer is a natural resource asset that can add resale value.

## 6. Limits nuisance wildlife.

A native plant buffer creates a natural barrier to Canada geese.

## What makes a good buffer?

**Wider is better** – The wider the buffer the greater the benefit. But even a 10-foot buffer is better than no buffer at all.

**Natural Vegetation** – A mix of native plant species – trees, grasses, and wildflowers – adds to buffer quality and improves wildlife habitat. Deep-rooted native plants are best adapted to hold soils in place.



**Weed management** – Like any urban landscape your buffer needs maintenance. Without periodic weeding, invasive species such as purple loosestrife, buckthorn and reed canary grass can take over your buffer, compromising wildlife habitat.

**Spreads or diffuses runoff** – Buffers treat water effectively when they receive runoff that flows naturally off the land, rather than being concentrated by ditch or pipe. Water bypassing or moving quickly through buffers eliminates the potential for water quality treatment.



**The ideal buffer has a mix of native species in all four plant zones.**

## How to create (or enhance) your own buffer

There are three main steps to creating or enhancing your own buffer. We recommend that you use the resources listed below before you start

### 1. Study your property –

Evaluate and learn about your shoreline or wetland edge. What type of plants are growing there – turf grass, invasive weed species, native wildflowers, shrubs or trees? Do you have an undisturbed buffer? How wide is it? Are there signs of erosion?

### 2. Create a plan –

Determine your buffer area. Research ways to remove invasive plant species. Decide on methods to increase native plant species diversity – for example stop mowing, seed selected areas, and plant along the water's edge. Select plant species that will work well in your buffer. If erosion is a concern, choose appropriate methods of soil stabilization, which may include regrading.

### 3. Implement your plan –

Prepare your site. Stop mowing. Spread out and slow down water flow – minimize erosion. Remove invasive weed species and turf grass. Plant or seed your buffer. Maintain your natural buffer – for example water the first year, weed, and fill in bare spots. Enjoy your buffer. Spot new native plant species becoming established. Record your observations. Share your knowledge with others!

## Resources and additional information

[www.crestoniowachamber.com/mckinleywatershed/](http://www.crestoniowachamber.com/mckinleywatershed/)

*“The Buffer Zone” was originally written and designed by the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District.*  
[www.rwmwd.org](http://www.rwmwd.org)