

Restore the Shore with Greenbelts

Begin by Creating a No-Mow Zone

One of the most important things a Chain of Lakes shoreline property owner can do to protect water quality is to maintain or re-establish a native greenbelt along the shoreline of a lake or river. From Torch Lake to Elk Lake and Elk River, many shoreline owners are making this important transition. A greenbelt is a buffer of native vegetation between the water's edge and a waterfront owner's lawn.



Not only do greenbelts protect water quality, they also add beauty and value to shoreline properties and are much less costly to maintain than traditional turf lawns. Native vegetation running along rivers, streams and lakes is essential for protecting water quality by controlling runoff, minimizing soil erosion and absorbing nutrients.

Natural buffers also provide vital wildlife habitat, increase privacy and greatly lower lawn care costs. The wider the greenbelt, the better. An effective greenbelt should span at least 75 percent of the shoreline length and be twenty to fifty feet wide. Appropriate widths can depend on many factors such as slope and soil type.

One quick and easy way to start a greenbelt is to create a no-mow zone. Native grasses and wildflowers will be some of the first plants to appear. Local nurseries can help with planning this process. Nursery experts say greenbelts should have diverse and densely placed plantings that take into consideration site characteristics such as slope and topography. These buffers can include many interesting plants such as: Juniper, Birch, Dwarf Lilacs, Goldenrod, White Spruce, Wintergreen, Bracken Fern, Bunchberry and many other varieties, including native shrubs, trees and flowers.

Other benefits of greenbelts include:

- Attracting butterflies and birds
- Encouraging fish spawning
- Deterring geese
- Controlling noise
- Providing privacy

According to lake experts, many of the shoreline areas lost their native greenbelts decades ago--but they also note a growing movement by shoreline property owners to return to more natural buffer zones and greenbelts along the lakes and rivers in northern Michigan. Local nurseries also confirm more and more people want to "go natural" and restore the shore to help improve water quality.