

Creating a Healthy Shoreline

Natural shorelines are critical for the health of the Ottawa River. You can help be a steward to your river by following best practices on your shoreline.



Photos: Meredith Brown

A mowed lawn extended to the shoreline increases surface runoff and erosion along the Ottawa River

Shorelines are unique ecosystems that foster hundreds of species and serve as a vital connection between land and water. A natural shoreline filters pollution and surface runoff, protects the shore against erosion, and provides unique habitat for wildlife. When we alter our shorelines from their natural state, the health of our river is put at stake.

Here's how it often goes: a cottage owner gets the family together to tear out all those horrid trees and shrubs blocking the view to the water. Slowly, but surely, the shoreline is eaten away as the shallow roots of the new lawn fail to hold the shore in place. The owner erects a retaining wall thinking the problem is solved. But wave action causes the wall to crumble. What is left is a bare shore that has lost its important ecological functions and is now a pathway for polluted runoff to flow into the river.

You can help preserve shorelines by following best practices on your property. When completing any shoreline project, be sure to follow regulations and get the necessary permits. Remember that making good decisions on your shoreline means keeping our waters drinkable, swimmable and fishable so you can continue to enjoy what you came for in the first place.

Did you know?

90% of species found in a river depend on shorelines at some point in their lives.

*Defending the Ottawa River, protecting our Communities.
À la défense de la rivière des Outaouais. Pour la protection de nos communautés.*

10 Things You Can Do to Protect Your Shoreline

A guide for keeping your shoreline healthy and enjoying waterfront living at its best!



Illustrations and content adapted from Fisheries and Oceans Canada

- 1 Leave a buffer of shrubs and trees along the shore**
These form deep roots that prevent the shore from eroding while creating habitat for birds and wildlife.
- 2 Preserve at least 50% of vegetation on your property**
In addition to providing habitat, trees also generate natural cooling for your property.
- 3 Trim trees instead of cutting them down**
You can still create a gorgeous view of the water and keep all the benefits of a healthy shoreline.
- 4 Forget about the lawn**
Restrict the area of your lawn to allow room for native plants and shrub. These require less maintenance so you'll have more time to relax.
- 5 Leave the water clear of large structures**
Structures like large docks and boathouses damage aquatic life by preventing sunlight from reaching the water.
- 6 Avoid dredging or altering the riverbed**
This destroys fish spawning areas and ruins habitat for sensitive species.
- 7 Say no to fertilizers**
Fertilizers used on your lawn add phosphorous to the water which creates algal blooms. These kill fish and can make water unsafe for swimming.
- 8 Opt for a low impact dock**
Docks like pipe docks and floating docks allow free movement of water and aquatic life so they are less harmful than concrete docks.
- 9 Leave the waterweeds alone**
Some may find these troublesome when swimming, but they provide vital food and shelter for aquatic life.
- 10 Enjoy your shoreline!**
Take advantage of your healthy shoreline and share your passion for plants and animals with your kids!