

The View

There are few sights more peaceful and inviting than looking out over your favorite body of water. We who are lucky enough to live in lake country have gone to great lengths to get our view. Long ago we started building roads into the forest and we cleared the land so we could build our driveways, homes and garages close to the lake. In many cases we cut down and cleared many of our native trees so we could enjoy an unobstructed view of the lake from our homes. We removed native shrubs, forbs and grasses between our homes and the lakeshore so we could put in our lawns and enjoy our time close to the water. Life was good and the view was great.

Time went on and much more building happened at the water's edge. We were now sharing the lakeshore with many neighbors and we started to notice some changes. We noticed that the animals near and in the lake, the same ones that we enjoyed watching so much when we first came to the lake, were less plentiful. Unforeseen by us, we had removed so much of their habitat that they were forced to go elsewhere to make their homes and hunt for their food. We noticed that quality of our lake water had decreased and that it was not as clear as it used to be. Unforeseen by us, when we removed the native trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses from the land close to the lake and replaced it with turf grass it allowed many more sediments to be washed into the water. When we put fertilizer and herbicides on our turf to keep it green and weed free they too found their way into the water. We noticed that we were having soil erosion problems at the shore. The affects of water runoff from uphill sources and wave action from the lake side were starting to take their toll on the shoreline. Unforeseen by us, when we removed the native vegetation from the land adjacent to the shore there were no deep roots to hold the soil in place anymore. But we still had our view.

The above scenario is being played out all over the world but has only recently been brought to the forefront in Minnesota. Now that we are starting to recognize some of the mistakes we have made in the past the question becomes "What are we going to do about it and what are we willing to give up to address these problems?" We can choose to do nothing and of course nothing will change. We will see fewer and fewer animals, our water quality and clarity will continue to degrade (and being that property values are tied directly to water quality, our property values will continue to fall) and we will continue to have soil erosion problems which will further reduce our property values. Those who choose to do something about it might start with installing a buffer area adjacent to the lakeshore. Installing a buffer area will not only increase habitat for the animals but sediments, fertilizers, herbicides and other contaminants will be trapped and absorbed before they reach the water. Shoreline erosion will be reduced as the deeper roots of the native plants will hold the soil in place. And you can still have most of your view!