



# Accessing Information to Protect Water Quality

SHORELAND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

NUMBER **16** IN THE SERIES

## What Are Shoreland BMPs?

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are actions you can take to reduce your impact on the environment. BMPs have been described for agriculture, forest management, and construction. This fact sheet describes BMPs you can adopt on your shoreland property to help protect and preserve water quality. In many cases, the best management for shorelands may be retaining the natural characteristics of your property.

## Information and Assistance Available

Information and assistance are available from many public agencies and organizations that work in partnership with shoreland property owners, lake associations, public officials, and private enterprises to protect water quality. This fact sheet is intended to direct you to the appropriate source of information as you undertake protection strategies or adopt BMPs on your shoreland property.

Assistance may be in the form of:

- information and education on water quality issues
- technical and planning consultation for your parcel of property
- issuing permits, requirements, guidelines for developing your property
- enforcement of regulations affecting the water quality of lakes and rivers
- cost-share assistance and project funding for individual projects
- testing and monitoring of water

## What to Expect When Contacting an Agency

- The agency may have office hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- Some may require fee-for-service; others may be available at no direct cost to the user.
- The person you want to speak with may be out of the office, as that is the nature of his or her work—to be out meeting with people or conducting site visits or inspections. It is best to call ahead for an appointment if you want to meet with the person. If you don't reach him or her by phone, leave your name, phone number, and a specific message.
- On some issues you may be given several alternatives to help you make a decision. You may also need to be referred to a more appropriate agency.

## Questions You May Have

Listed below are some common questions people have and which agency would be the most appropriate to contact. Locations, addresses, and telephone numbers are listed later in this fact sheet.

### **Is my water supply safe for an infant to drink?**

MN Department of Health or County Health Department

### **How do we keep exotic species out of our lake?**

MN Sea Grant Extension Program or MN Department of Natural Resources – Exotic Species Program

### **Do I need a permit to install a new dock?**

MN Department of Natural Resources – Division of Waters

### **How can I keep the lake from washing away my yard?**

Soil and Water Conservation District or MN Board of Water and Soil Resources or county planning and zoning department

### **How many fish can my family eat without getting mercury poisoning?**

MN Department of Health or MN Sea Grant Extension Program

### **How do I know if I have a wetland on my property?**

Soil and Water Conservation District or MN Board of Water and Soil Resources

### **How can I get rid of weeds in my swimming area?**

MN Department of Natural Resources – Section of Fisheries

### **Where can I buy 100 trees to plant on my property?**

Soil and Water Conservation District

### **Where can I get information on building a compost heap?**

University of Minnesota Extension Service or Western Lake Superior Sanitary District

### **What can I do about the beaver dams flooding my property?**

MN Department of Natural Resources – Section of Wildlife

### **How can I make sure my septic system keeps working?**

County Health Department or University of Minnesota Extension Service

### **Who controls the water levels in our reservoir lake or river?**

MN Department of Natural Resources –  
Division of Waters or local power utility

### **What are the guidelines and regulations for paving my driveway?**

Soil and Water Conservation District or  
county Planning and Zoning department

### **To whom do I report a violation such as dumping into a lake or river?**

MN Pollution Control Agency

The following list is categorized by the level at which you might best access information and assistance—local, state, or federal. A brief description of services is given, as well as how to access either by telephone or in writing.

## **Local Resources**

### **Water Plan Coordinators**

Your county water plan coordinator is a good place to start because she or he has knowledge of, and access to, many other resources. The Water Management Act of 1986 (Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 110B) encouraged counties to develop and implement comprehensive local water management plans. In Minnesota, all non-metro counties have completed and adopted water plans, and are now in the process of implementation. The responsibility for implementation varies by county. In some counties, the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has the primary responsibility, and in others it is the responsibility of the county planning, zoning, or environmental services.

Access: Call your county SWCD or University of Minnesota Extension Service office for help identifying your county water plan coordinator.

### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

SWCDs were formed nationwide to conserve soil and water resources, and are local units of government within each county. Their objective is the control and prevention of soil erosion and water pollution. This is carried out through:

- technical and planning assistance to landowners on conservation practices
- cost-share assistance (50 to 75%) to landowners to install erosion control practices, such as on roadsides and shorelines, or control barnyard runoff
- printed information and presentations to landowners and groups
- forest stewardship assistance to landowners and communities (this may vary by county)
- service of selling trees (this may vary by county)

Access: Look in the phone book under county office listings.

### **University of Minnesota Extension Service**

University of Minnesota Extension Service provides education on protecting our water resources with an emphasis on reaching people with practical, understandable methods. These include:

- displays, publications, demonstrations, AV materials
- workshops, presentations to groups (may vary by county)
- coordination with other agencies to address water quality issues
- training on organizational and group process skills to assist groups in reaching their goals

INFO-U is a 24-hour service that gives you telephone access to University of Minnesota research-based information. Recorded information is available on environmental issues, safe drinking water, yard waste disposal, lawns, shrubs, and trees. Contact your county extension office to receive a brochure listing the topics and how to use this system.

Access: Look in the phone book under county listings for University of Minnesota Extension Service. Web address: <http://www.mes.umn.edu/>

The Minnesota Waterline, a toll free number with knowledgeable staff to answer your questions, is 1-800-455-4526.

### **Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program, University of Minnesota**

Lake Superior and Minnesota water resources are the focus of research and educational programs of the Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program located on the Duluth and St. Paul campuses of the University of Minnesota. Presentations, workshops, publications, and audiovisual materials are available on research findings and expertise in these areas:

- fisheries
- aquaculture
- recreation and tourism
- water quality
- economic development
- coastal management
- aquatic exotic species

Access: Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program

208 Washburn Hall  
University of Minnesota Duluth  
2305 East Fifth Street  
Duluth, MN 55812-1445  
(218) 726-8106

[www.d.umn.edu/seagr/](http://www.d.umn.edu/seagr/)

Exotic Species Information Center  
(address same as above)  
(218) 726-8712

### **County Health, Zoning, Planning, and Solid Waste Departments**

Health/environmental services departments enforce public health regulations and assist in areas that affect water resources and shoreland property owners. Many functions deal with individual septic systems. The county health department:

- issues permits and inspects the installation of septic systems
- inspects septic systems for observable failure during point-of-sale inspections
- licenses and monitors septic system contractors
- licenses and inspects septic tank pumpers and on-land septic disposal sites
- tests water from private wells for safety and at the time of property transactions
- tests surface water at public beaches for fecal contamination

The zoning department regulates land use to encourage the most appropriate use of land, while preserving economic and environmental values. It also administers and enforces the zoning ordinances, except in incorporated cities and townships that have their own zoning administration.

County governments carry out solid waste programs including management of landfills and transfer stations, collection of household hazardous waste, and coordination of recycling activities.

Access: Look in your phone book under county office listings for health, zoning, planning, or solid waste departments.

### **Lake Associations**

Lake property owner associations have been formed for many lakes in Minnesota. The purpose of a lake association can vary. They may be organized mainly for social and security reasons, around a specific issue such as weed control, for political purposes, or to encourage activities such as water quality testing or placement of navigational buoys.

Individual lake associations may join together to form county Coalitions of Lake Associations (COLAs).

Access: Contact your county water plan coordinator to find out about lake associations in your area. For assistance in organizing a lake association, contact your county water plan coordinator, county office of the University of Minnesota Extension Service, or the Minnesota Lakes Association at:

Minnesota Lakes Association  
P.O. Box 321  
Brainerd, MN 56401-0321  
1-800-515-5253  
(218) 825-1909  
[www.mnlakesassn.org](http://www.mnlakesassn.org)

## **State Resources**

### **MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)**

The BWSR works with local units of government to help them develop local resource management capabilities. Some of the areas it is involved in are wetlands, shoreland erosion, water quality education, feedlots, nonpoint source pollution and local water planning. Publications, slide presentations, and technical assistance are available. BWSR has regional offices in Bemidji, Brainerd, Duluth, Marshall, New Ulm, Rochester, and St. Paul.

Access: Look under the state government offices in your phone book or contact: Board of Water and Soil Resources  
One West Water Street, Suite 200  
St. Paul, MN 55107  
(612) 296-3767

### **MN Department of Health (MDH)**

Within the MDH, the Division of Environmental Health has these responsibilities related to water resources and shoreland property owners:

- regulating the construction, repair, and sealing of wells and borings
- licensing well contractors and well pump installers
- requiring well disclosure prior to property transfer
- licensing and regulating plumbers
- establishing health risk limits for contaminants in water
- establishing fish consumption advisories based on health risk limits

MDH issues permits for well construction and well sealing notification; a well may not be constructed or sealed until after it has received the appropriate notification. Publications and videos are available on well construction and abandonment, well disinfection, water quality, ground water contamination, water treatment devices, and well disclosure.

### **MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR)**

Within the DNR, three divisions deal most directly with water resources—Waters, Fish and Wildlife, and Forestry. The DNR has regional offices in Bemidji, Brainerd, Grand Rapids, New Ulm, Rochester, and St. Paul. The DNR has a Minnesota toll-free number to provide you with information on materials available and DNR facilities, services, and regulations: 1-800-766-6000 (TTD 1-800-657-3929).

### **DNR – Division of Waters:**

The Division of Waters is a regulatory division that provides technical and educational assistance to local government units and citizens. It has regulatory jurisdiction over the alteration of protected lakes, rivers, and wetlands, and water use.

Shoreland property owners need to contact the division prior to altering lakes, rivers, or wetlands below the ordinary high water level to obtain information and to determine if a permit is needed.

Programs include:

- alteration of lakes, rivers, and wetlands
- water use, withdrawal of surface and ground water
- dam safety, water level control structures
- landuse management programs such as shoreland, floodplain, and wild and scenic rivers
- information on streamflow, lake levels, precipitation, and ground water levels
- publications, slide presentations, and displays
- advice on local landuse ordinances
- hydrologic data to provide information for decision making
- grant programs

Access: Contact Area Hydrologists in regional or area offices.

### **DNR – Division of Fish and Wildlife – Section of Fisheries/Section of Wildlife:**

The Section of Fisheries works in the area of fish management and water quality as it relates to fish and other aquatic life. It issues permits on aquatic plant management and fish stocking and transportation. Publications are also available.

Access: Contact the nearest regional office.

The Section of Wildlife can provide information on how to improve your wetlands for wildlife and the value of wetlands for wildlife. It can also give alternatives on the control of beavers and exotic species.

Access: Contact the nearest regional office.

### **DNR – Division of Forestry:**

The Division of Forestry provides service to landowners on tree planting and care. Although it usually deals with large stands of trees on an ecosystem basis, staff can give advice about shade tree management on smaller land parcels. This division issues burning and timber harvest permits.

Access: Contact the nearest regional office.

### **MN Pollution Control Agency (PCA)**

The PCA regulates what goes into our water and conducts water quality studies through its three divisions of Air Quality, Water Quality, and Ground Water/Solid Waste. PCA issues permits that deal with the discharge of pollutants into the air, water, or land. It also carries out the enforcement of local, state, and federal regulations that deal with pollution control.



The PCA has regional offices in Brainerd, Detroit Lakes, Duluth, Marshall, Rochester, and St. Paul.

Printed materials are available, as well as speakers on specific topics.

Access: Contact the nearest regional office or the PCA state information office at (612) 296-6300.

## Federal Resources

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Department of Agriculture**

The NRCS is a conservation-oriented natural resource federal agency. NRCS offices are often co-located with SWCD offices and the two work together closely. They can:

- help property owners prepare conservation plans to manage soils, water, plant, and animal resources
- conduct soil surveys
- assist local groups in planning and installing small watershed projects, such as watershed protection, erosion and sediment control, agricultural water management
- collect data to be used by organizations and individuals to make land use decisions
- provide technical assistance to implement the Conservation Reserve Program, Sodbuster, Swampbuster, and conservation compliance provisions

Access: Contact the field office in most counties, listed in the phone book under U.S. Government, USDA.

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Environmental Research Laboratory**

Minnesota is home to EPA's only Federal Freshwater Research Laboratory, located on Lake Superior in Duluth. This laboratory is the nationwide resource center of expertise on freshwater (lakes and streams) aquatic ecology and toxicology. Scientific publications on water pollution are available.

Access: EPA Environmental  
Research Laboratory  
6201 Congdon Boulevard  
Duluth, MN 55804  
(218) 720-5733

## PART OF A SERIES...

This fact sheet is one of a series designed to assist shoreland property owners in protecting and preserving water quality. The series includes:

- 1 Understanding Shoreland BMPs
- 2 Maintaining Your Shoreland Septic System
- 3 Installing a Shoreland Septic System
- 4 Ensuring a Safe Water Supply
- 5 Limiting Impact of Recreation on Water Quality
- 6 Developing Shoreland Landscapes and Construction Activities
- 7 Stabilizing Your Shoreline to Prevent Erosion
- 8 Minimizing Runoff from Shoreland Property
- 9 Caring for Shoreland Lawns and Gardens
- 10 Managing Your Shoreland Woodlot
- 11 Valuing Your Shoreland Trees
- 12 Preserving Wetlands
- 13 Managing Crops and Animals Near Shorelands
- 14 Reducing the Use of Hazardous Household Products
- 15 Preventing the Introduction of Exotic Species
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- 17 Shoreland Stewardship Scorecard
- 18 Conserving Water

This series of fact sheets is a cooperative effort of the following agencies:

University of Minnesota Extension Service of the Arrowhead counties  
College of Natural Resources, University of Minnesota  
Water Plan Coordinators of the Arrowhead counties  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
Minnesota Department of Health  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Division of Waters, Division of Forestry  
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency  
Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program  
Mississippi Headwaters Board  
St. Louis County Health Department, Environmental Services Division  
Soil and Water Conservation Districts of the Arrowhead counties  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Western Lake Superior Sanitary District

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