

Protectors of the Shoreland

By Cathy Butcher

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I have experienced so many wonderful things during my visits to the Gile Flowage that I am bound by love to make the return trip every year from my home in Florida just for another chance to rejuvenate my soul and replenish my life energy in its magical beauty.

The rugged landscape carved out by the retreat of recent glaciers is unlike anything the Sunshine State can offer. Growing within its craggy surface, evergreens release their piney scent, refreshing the senses. The jingle of dancing birch leaves is music to my ears. The charming sight of dozens of tiger swallowtails lazily floating along the tree-lined shore or sleek otters stalking food among the lily pads intensifies my craving for more nature from this unique place.

I don't own property on the Gile Flowage. I'm just a visitor. But I do try to find ways to express my gratitude for the delight I receive from these visits by practicing acts of good stewardship. Some of the ways I achieve this are by removing litter left behind by other people, volunteering to scout for exotic, invasive plants, respecting fishing limits, and inspecting my watercraft and gear for unwanted aquatic hitchhikers that shouldn't be transported from one body of water to another.

Property owners have perhaps a greater opportunity than visitors to express good environmental stewardship of the Gile Flowage. Good choices in how you develop and use your shoreland property can protect the water quality, environment, and natural beauty for future generations. Being informed is the first step to making wise decisions.

Stormwater and melting snow and ice drain across the land picking up sediment and undesirable substances that could affect water quality and quality of lake life, including yours, if they make it directly to the lake. Think of undesirable substances as anything that you wouldn't want to drink such as fertilizer, pesticides, household cleaners, oil, gasoline, paint, sewage, etc. Left up to Mother Nature this runoff would be slowed by varied layers of native vegetation and would collect in the divots and depressions carved out by those recent glaciers I mentioned earlier. There it would slowly percolate down into the water table leaving behind sediment and filtering out undesirable substances.

Unfortunately, even the most simply developed property contains hard surfaces such as pavement, roofs, compacted gravel drives, or a lawn, all of which can intensify runoff. In those cases steps should be taken to capture and divert the runoff to an area where it can slowly filter into the ground.

Property owners can use a rain barrel to collect water from roofs and use for irrigation or direct the downspout onto the landscape. A lovely rain garden established in a natural or man-made depression

can receive water diverted from lawns and driveways. Using water-loving native shrubs and wildflowers will attract butterflies, dragonflies, and birds as an added benefit.

Don't allow pollution to enter runoff from your property to begin with. Inspect or pump septic systems every three years. Contact your county Land and Water Conservation Department to find out local options for safe disposal of hazardous household wastes.

Perhaps one of the most important good shoreland stewardship actions is to maintain as much native vegetation on your property as possible. If you desire a view of the water try living with a smaller view before cutting lots of trees and clearing out shrubs. Mow inviting pathways or maintain a small, private portion of lawn as opposed to a traditional expanse of chemical-laden, labor- intense lawn. Leaving a buffer of native plants along the shoreline will greatly benefit water quality and habitat by trapping sediments, stabilizing the shoreline, and providing a home for aquatic insects and frogs. Resist the urge to create a beach. Removing debris and plants from the area just beyond the shoreline will destroy habitat for many species and deprive you of wonderful nature observations as well as creating conditions for shoreline erosion. Do allow trees to fall into the water and contribute to the diversity of habitat necessary for aquatic life. Allow standing dead trees and fallen logs to remain on your property as well. They provide housing for an impressive array of living things.

More information about these management practices can be explored online. Search for Wisconsin shoreland stewardship. Publications include shoreline restoration, grant funding, zoning and permit requirements, fish sticks, rain gardens, and more.

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/shorelandzoning/Care/restoration.html>

<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/UWEXLakes/Pages/ecology/shoreland/background.aspx>

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/outreach/FishSticksBestPractices.pdf>

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Stormwater/raingarden/>