



**Protecting the  
Water Quality  
in Burt Lake with  
Natural Vegetation  
along the Lake Shore**



*Burt Township is fortunate to have so much water. In fact, more than 50% of the Township's surface area is water, primarily Burt Lake. This handout describes the natural vegetation strip requirement in the Burt Township Zoning Ordinance that was adopted and designed to help keep Burt Lake clean and available for all residents to enjoy for recreation.*

## What is Runoff?

Runoff is excess water that comes from hard surfaces like roof tops, driveways, parking areas, patios, and compacted soils. Runoff water washes fertilizer, eroded soil, car fluids, and other pollutants into the lake. Polluted runoff is harmful to Burt Lake.

As the amount of hard surfaces increase within a watershed, there is less green space for water to soak into the ground, and polluted runoff problems increase. Reducing the amount of wetlands within the watershed and replacing natural shorelines with traditional manicured lawns increases polluted runoff problems (wetlands and shore lands act as natural pollutant filters).



## The Impact Polluted Runoff Has on Our Lake.....



Some of the negative effects polluted runoff may have on Burt Lake include excess nutrients (such as phosphorus) which:

- Cause algae blooms. Excess algae can block sunlight, deplete oxygen in the water, and contribute to fish kills.
- Cause excessive aquatic plant growth, which can impact recreational opportunities and increase lake management costs for local groups.

Sediments eroded from construction sites, developed areas (in particular, lawns), and croplands negatively affect our Lake by:

- Causing the water to become cloudy, or "turbid," and covering plant leaves which reduces the amount of sunlight reaching plants. Cloudy water also affects fish by damaging gills.
- Burying fish spawning areas and other valuable aquatic habitats.
- Picking up and transporting additional pollutants such as metal flakes, debris, and toxins into our lakes.



## What You Can Do to Reduce Polluted Runoff.....

Property owners can help reduce the amount of polluted runoff:

- Maintain or restore a buffer of (preferably) native vegetation along your shoreline.
- Never allow lawn fertilizer, soil, or grass clippings to wash into the lake.
- Reduce the amount of impervious surfaces (areas where water cannot soak into the ground) on your lakefront lot.
- Let water soak into the ground before it reaches the lake.
- Control soil erosion around your house.
- Inspect and maintain your septic system regularly.
- Get a soil test before applying lawn fertilizer. Your soil may have plenty of nutrients (especially phosphorus) already.



## From Burt Township Zoning Ordinance, Section 6.12 (exerted)

Within the waterfront setback, the following development or use restrictions shall apply:

1. No structures shall be allowed except for steps meeting the side yard setback for the district in which they are located.
2. No dredging or filling shall be allowed except where permitted by state or federal law, with appropriate permits.
3. The use of asphalt, concrete, wood or other similar surfaces shall be limited to walkways (4' maximum width) or stairs necessary for water access.
4. Within twenty-five (25) feet of the ordinary high water mark, a natural vegetation strip shall be established or maintained on a least seventy percent (70%) of the lake or stream frontage for any new construction or any renovation that results in an increase of the structure footprint by five hundred (500) square feet or greater. The natural vegetation strip shall consist of trees, shrubs or herbaceous plants, excluding lawn.
5. The use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers is prohibited in the natural vegetation strip (per item 4 above) or within twenty-five feet of ordinary high water mark for Burt Lake, except for the allowed limited use of herbicides for the eradication of poison ivy, poison sumac or poison oak. Fertilizer used in the waterfront setback (75 feet), shall be zero phosphorus fertilizers.



## How Do I Plant a Natural Vegetation Strip?

Establishing a shoreline natural vegetation strip can be as easy as stopping mowing or as elaborate as a highly designed garden. Below are a few approaches for ways to plant a natural vegetation strip that will match your style and still benefit Burt Lake.



**Stop Mowing:** This is by far the easiest and simplest way to reestablish a natural vegetation strip. When you stop mowing taller native grasses and wildflowers will establish. Eventually over years, small shrubs and trees will begin to grow. This approach requires virtually no maintenance.

**Limited Plantings (with no mowing):** Adding a variety of plants such as ferns, flowers, shrubs, and small trees within the 25 feet will provide some diversity and interest.

**Extensive Plantings:** This approach would require planting the entire vegetation strip with a variety of plants, including ground cover to insure coverage of bare soil. This will require the most maintenance to replace plants that may perish.

Nurseries can provide additional assistance with plant selection to best suit the soils, light, and wind conditions on your property. Landscape architects can be hired to develop and implement a design to suit the conditions at your property.



# What Constitutes a “Natural Vegetation Strip”.....

Meeting the requirements is easier than you think. Your natural vegetation strip must contain the following:

- Must be 25 feet in depth, measured from the Ordinary High Water Line<sup>1</sup>.
- The strip must extend for 70% of your frontage (e.g., on a 100' lot, 70 feet must have vegetation growing, either natural vegetation or plantings).
- The 30% that is not required to have vegetation, may contain a 4' maximum walkway and grass.
- Native and nonnative species are allowed, please avoid nuisance species (see box).
- No structures may be placed in the natural vegetation strip (e.g., storage shed).

Native plants are not required in the natural vegetation strip for Burt Township. There are advantages to using native species that you may want to consider when selecting plants for your property. They are generally better suited to the climate conditions of northern Michigan, requiring less maintenance and increasing the chance of survival, which reduces extra expenses for replacements costs. Native plants also provide the “up north” look. In addition, native species can provide better food and wildlife habitat.



## AVOID THESE PLANTS

Some non-native species can become nuisance plants or invasive. Invasive non-native plants to avoid planting include:

- Autumn olive - *Eleagnus umbellata*
- Barberry - *Berberis spp.*
- Buckthorn - *Rhamnus cathartica*,  
*Rhamnus frangula*
- Crown vetch - *Coronilla varia*
- Honeysuckle - *Lonicera tatarica*, *L. morrowi*,  
*L. x-bella*, other cultivars
- Maiden grass - *Miscanthus sinensis*
- Multiflora rose - *Rosa multiflora*
- Periwinkle (myrtle) - *Vinca minor*
- Privet - *Ligustrum vulgare*
- Purple loosestrife - *Lythrum salicaria*
- Reed canary grass - *Phalaris arundinacea*
- Russian olive - *Eleagnus angustifolia*
- Siberian Elm - *Ulmus pumila*
- Spotted knapweed - *Centaurea maculosa*
- Yellow water iris - *Iris pseudacorus*



(Source Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council)

For more information or assistance:

**Burt Township, Cheboygan County**  
**[www.burttownship.org](http://www.burttownship.org)**  
**Burt Township Zoning Administrator**  
**Dan Swantek, [burtza@straitsarea.com](mailto:burtza@straitsarea.com)**  
**or (231) 238-4818**

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<sup>1</sup> Per the Ordinance — The line between upland and bottomland which persists through successive changes in water levels, below which the presence and action of the water is so common or recurrent that the character of the land is marked distinctly from the upland and is apparent in the soil itself, the configuration of the soil and the vegetation.