



## LANDSCAPING BY A LAKE, RIVER OR STREAM

If you own shoreline property in Spokane County, then you hold an important responsibility to protect and maintain it. Shoreline landscaping can have a big impact on water quality and affect the enjoyment of all waterfront property.

In recent years the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has mandated state and local governments to adopt regulations and guidelines to protect lakes, rivers, and streams. In the state of Washington, the Department of Ecology (DOE) is responsible for enacting the EPA mandate. The DOE adopted a Shoreline Master Program (SMP) and further required certain cities and towns, and all county governments to adopt a local Shoreline Master Program. These are local land use policies and regulations designed to manage shoreline use and protect water quality. All SMPs have a section dealing with private property hardscaping and landscaping.

So before you change your waterfront landscape or begin a new landscape project read through the landscape section of the state SMP as well as the appropriate local SMP for your area. These can be found on the Department of Ecology web site: [Shoreline Master Programs](#). These shoreline programs are updated and changed every few years, so always check to make sure you have the current version for your location before you begin a project.

In general, the single most important thing you can do to protect water quality is to create what is called a riparian or buffer zone of plants between your property and the lake, river, or stream. Riparian areas stabilize shorelines; reduce downstream flooding; improve water quality by filtering out sediment, excess nutrients, pesticides and pathogens; and enhance wildlife habitat.

Creating a riparian zone normally requires leaving some native vegetation along your shoreline, as required by most local shoreline master programs and if native vegetation is gone, replanting it. Plant native perennials that tolerate wet soil for long periods in this buffer area and those that have deep root systems to minimize erosion. Low-growing plants are best, so the view from your home or deck is unobstructed. For more information on native aquatic plants and why they are important go to: [Washington Native Plant Society, Northeast Washington.](#)

“Lake-and-River-Friendly” landscapes often also require reducing lawn areas, especially near the water’s edge. Downsizing lawn areas minimize harm to surface water because there is a potential for excess fertilizer and/or weed killers to ultimately end up in the water, especially if the property has a slope. Decide how much lawn area you and your family really need for recreation and avoid lawn that reaches all the way to the water’s edge.

You don’t have to give up a beautiful landscape to naturalize your shoreline. If you’re ready for a more sustainable shoreline landscape and implementing a riparian zone with native shrubs and trees, a good first stop resource is the [Spokane Conservation District](#). They can help with landscape design and can advise landowners on how to qualify for financial incentives and tax breaks for restoration of riparian areas.

If your shoreline has aquatic weeds, a state permit will be required before applying any herbicide. Only licensed applicators can obtain this permit and applicants must obtain coverage under a discharge permit called a National Pollutant Elimination System Discharge (NPDES) permit. Therefore, **you must hire a professional to deal with aquatic weeds**. Never attempt to do this yourself. And always check to make sure your contractor is in full compliance with all DOE permits and regulations.

Other resources:

What are Riparian Areas? [Department of Ecology](#)

[Field Guide for the Identification and Use of Common Riparian Woody Plants of the Intermountain West and Pacific Northwest Regions](#)

Aquatic Plants and Fish - [Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife](#)

A list of native plants appropriate for the Spokane Area can be found at [The Lands Council](#)

Learn about your local lakes and what you can do to help lake water quality in your area. This **is** especially helpful to check out **before** you buy lakefront property.

List of Eastern Washington native plants from the [Washington Native Plant Society](#)