

Lake Pocotopaug Notes and News

Take Action And Track Results.

Autumn 2005, Vol. 1, No1

Algae blooms affect your use of the lake, reducing water clarity and quality. You also may not realize that you can help solve these problems by following certain landscaping practices. Take the time this winter to plan how you will incorporate some of these ideas into your yard.

Residential development in East Hampton and around Lake Pocotopaug has increased over the past several decades. Much of the natural vegetation that protected the lake from run off has been replaced with new homes, impervious surfaces and cultivated grass lawns.

The natural vegetation in an undeveloped shoreline (known as a riparian buffer) plays an important ecological role, buffering the lake waters from activities in the surrounding landscape. The shoreline in Sears Park, north of the boat ramp demonstrates this type of undisturbed natural buffer. A demonstration-buffer garden that includes some of the recommended native plants was created in Sears Park in 2002. Buffers consisting of woody and soft-stemmed vegetation helps reduce nutrients and other non-



point source pollutants from reaching the lake, minimizes erosion, and provides critical habitat for birds.

Think of your property as a mini-watershed which it is, and consider what this land probably looked like 100 years ago. Perhaps it had a small cottage on the property overlooking the lake, with a dirt driveway, a small grassy area, with blueberry and blackberry bushes, used as a weekend-seasonal retreat. The surrounding land had dense woods, rich moist soil underneath several inches of leaves, branches and downed trees naturally composting. Now compare this to the significant landscape changes that we have today.

This comparison delineates the stressors impacting Lake Pocotopaug's water quality due to the changes in the natural processes at work in the watershed.

A simple way to help protect the lake is to allow the natural vegetation to come back. This does not mean having an unsightly yard. Taking steps to integrate a buffer area into your existing landscape begins with planning. Assess the physical characteristics of your property; slope, light, soil types. Decide which views you would like to preserve, perhaps frame or screen out altogether. Remember, wide-open panoramic views across cultivated lawns degrade both the water quality and aesthetic beauty of Lake Pocotopaug. A picturesque framed view of the lake could be designed to provide shade, and reduce noise pollution from recreational activity on the lake. Remember to put up a silt fence between the lake and the planting area if you are going to disturb the soil.

Vegetated buffers of 50 to 100 feet remove from 45% to 93% of incoming sediments. They also remove upwards to 80% of incoming total suspended solids, nitrogen and phosphorus in storm water.

From buffers for Wetlands and Surface Waters, 1997, by Audubon Society of New Hampshire, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, New Hampshire Office of State Planning and the Natural Resource Conservation Services

WHY INTRODUCE NATURAL VEGETATION AREAS BACK INTO YOUR LANDSCAPE?

Lawns provide poor quality habitat for most wildlife except Canada Geese, who are attracted to these open areas where they are close to water and relatively safe from predators. Canada Geese droppings not only create a mess in your yard, they are also a significant source of nutrients and bacteria in lakes and ponds.

A buffer can increase your privacy. Screen out a view that is undesirable. You can reduce noise from recreational activities on the lake, from surrounding homes, roads, etc. Planting trees provides shade for you and the lake, keeping everyone cooler.

A native landscape does not imply and unmanaged yard. Native plants generally require less maintenance than other plants. Native plants require fewer pesticides and less water than lawns. Rooted plants help stabilize the soils and absorb nutrients before they leach into the lake.

Before applying fertilizers to your lawn or gardens test your soil. Don't assume you need phosphorous, an application of lime may be all your soil needs. For your gardens top dress them in the fall and spring with hummus or compost. Garden centers and nurseries sell soil testing kits and natural products to amend your soil.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Turf managers employed at golf courses are responsible for both turf and aquatic management. Their challenge is to keep the turf healthy and green while keeping the ponds on the property clean, clear, free of aquatic weeds

and algae. The reason that ponds get hard to manage is due to the nutrient loading from fertilizer runoff. Once a pond loses it's "eco-balance" it can be hard to turn around on a tight budget.

The amount of time it takes to correct the problem is dependent on the severity of the problem. Poor conditions are symptoms of a problem that did not happen overnight. It took time to get this problem and it will take time to correct it.

A good turf manager knows that maintaining no fertilizer zones and vegetative buffer zones around a pond is a must. Preventative management practices like keeping mowing, weed whacking and fertilizing to a minimum around the watershed area considerably reduces these sources of nutrients from entering the water.

NATIVE PLANTS

The most effective buffers mimic the natural environment. Include trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. Overlap layers of plants to create a habitat and keeps soil moist. Canopy layers reduce rain impacting the soil. Deep roots systems of trees stabilization the soil. Low growing vegetation filter sediment and pollution.

Trees:

Green Ash, Paper Birch, River Birch Dogwood, Red Maple, White Cedar, White Pine, Norway Spruce, White Spruce

Shrubs:

Rhododendron, Mountain Laurel, Creeping Juniper, Winter berry, Azalea, Gray Dogwood, High Bush Blueberry, Sweet Pepper, Viburnum

Ground Covers:

Bugle, Ivy, Pachysandra, Periwinkle, Myrtle, Ferns, Snow on the Mountain

The newly formatted Lake Pocotopaug Notes and News will be published quarterly. In support of the concept that education and outreach about watershed management practices requires partnerships, this publication now has sponsorship opportunities. Businesses and individuals interested in more information can contact Ruth Plummer, Director, East Hampton Parks and Recreation Department.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND RESOURCES CITED

- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Candlewood Lake Buffer Guidelines
- Connecticut River Joint Commissions
- Sportsturf Managers Association



Lake Pocotopaug Notes and News, Autumn 2005, Vol. 1, No. 1
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