

LAWN TO LAKE

The Nearshore Environment

When standing on the beach or shoreline and skipping rocks across the water, you are in the nearshore region of a lake. Nearshores include wetlands, beaches, and grass meadows. This environment extends indefinitely away from the shore but has been defined as ranging from the upland shore to as deep in the water as sunlight can reach. The nearshore is influenced by runoff from the land as well as the land-use practices in the watershed.



Life in the Nearshore

The nearshore is an incredibly unique environment that is essential to the health of your lake and local fisheries. Wetland plants and grasses provide food and shelter for many fish and shellfish species. At some point in their development, nearshores are an important habitat for many animals and commercial fish.



Water Quality in this Critical Area

Many natural surfaces in our watersheds have been covered with roads, parking lots, and homes. When water falls on hard surfaces, it runs off quickly. As it moves, it picks up pollutants. The result is the decline of water

quality of nearby lakes and rivers, especially the nearshore environment. Degradation of water quality eventually affects the habitat of the plants and animals living in these waters.

Why Does Degradation Occur?

Industrial and municipal stormwater, agricultural runoff, and the loss of wetlands are the main culprits in the reduction of water quality in the nearshore environment. Also impacting water quality are the nutrients from sewage, detergents, and fertilizers washing off the land. Too many nutrients can lead to too much algae. This can impact aquatic plants and animals, as well as your recreational enjoyment.



When it comes to lawn care, what can you do to improve water quality in the nearshore?

1. If possible, avoid using a fertilizer containing phosphorous.
2. Avoid letting fertilizer wash off the grass.
3. Don't fertilize when the soil is saturated.
4. Avoid getting fertilizer on driveways, sidewalks, and into storm drains. Sweep up any fertilizer that lands on the driveway or sidewalk so it won't get into the lake, stream, or pond.
5. Use a mulching mower to leave the grass clippings on the turf.
6. Cut no more than the top third of the grass or cut grass to a height of 3 inches.
7. Don't use pesticides on your lawn.

For more information on beach health, invasive species, and other aspects of the nearshore environment, visit iisgcp.org. To learn more about natural lawn care, visit lawntolake.org/GreatLakes/index.htm.



Photos provided by L. Thompson.