

Dos, don'ts of messing with the shorelines



Professor and Horticulturist Cathy Neal of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension explains the best types of plants and vegetation that homeowners can install to protect their shorefront properties from erosion and potential water pollution. Neal was among a panel of experts present at a workshop co-hosted by the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance and the Town of Wakefield Conservation Commission.
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By LARISSA MULKERN

Sunday News Correspondent

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As one speaker pointed out, when the original Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act, now called the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act, was passed in July 2008, misinformation spread rampantly.

“We're here to help get the story straight,” said Jay Aube, the outreach coordinator with the State of New Hampshire Shorelands Program, a part of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Aube was among a panel of experts at a workshop co-hosted at the Wakefield Opera House by the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance and the Wakefield Conservation Commission.

“We're here to show what the real intent of the law is ... it's not just about a bunch of crazy environmental folks who want to save the shoreline,” said Aube in front of an audience of about 50 attendees.

With that, Aube and other experts, including Linda Schier and Dustin Johnson of the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance; Dave Mankus, Wakefield Conservation Commission; Tom O'Brien, President, NH LAKES; Arthur Capello, Wakefield Code Enforcement Officer; Bob Craycraft, UNH Lakes Lay Monitoring Program; and Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension, talked about management practices for landscaping and hardscaping at water's edge, and what actions require state or local permits.

Aube said after the second-home market skyrocketed in the 1980s, many homeowners were tearing down old seasonal camps and building much larger year-round homes. “After that, we started seeing decreased water quality,” he said. “What was once natural groundcover was now a lawn, or you'd have a gravel driveway that serves as a boat launch. In a severe storm event, there would be a big flush of stormwater into the lakes,” said Aube.

“What the law is trying to achieve is to restore those regions that need a buffer and to maintain many of those existing buffers,” he said. You have many gems up here,” he said, listing the local Pine River Pond, Great East and Lovell lakes.

The state and local economic health depends upon clean lakes and rivers, he said, adding the water bodies contribute \$1.8 billion annually in tourism dollars.

Panel members fielded numerous questions about erosion control and what permits are needed and when.

Rules in some towns, like Wakefield, are more stringent than state law. For instance, the setback requirement per the state is 30 feet, but the town rule is 50 feet.

Wakefield Code Enforcement Officer Arthur Capello said he's often asked if a camp can be torn down and rebuilt. "Yes, if its within the 50-foot setback requirement you can rebuild on the same footprint and the second floor can't be extended outward," he said. The re-build would also require having a state-approved septic system on file. Any excavation or work within wetlands would require a state permit.

Several attendees asked if they could replenish sand at their beaches. A short answer is "yes," every six years with a wetlands permit on file with the NHDES. However, installing a new beach d is not a best management practice — a natural vegetative buffer does a better job of keeping pollutants and runoff out of the lakes. Phosphorous from septic systems and lawn fertilizer tends to cling onto sand and soil particles and hitch a ride downstream with the rain, said the panelists. On the other hand, a homeowner can get a permit for a perched beach, where sand is contained within a retaining wall, said Aube.

Accessory buildings, such as sheds, can also be built using a formula based on the setback and the length of shorefront. As an example, experts said a shed with a 20-foot setback would have to be 150 square feet or less.

One item on the "not allowed" list is new boat ramps.

"Private boat ramps today are not permissible, period," he said. "The reason is they impact sensitive areas. When you create a new launch, you create a funnel that allows massive amounts of runoff into the lakes."

Professor and horticulturist Cathy Neal gave many suggestions of landscaping at water's edge. The rule of thumb is to "vegetate and infiltrate," she said. Buffers protect banks from soil erosion, intercept and infiltrate stormwater runoff and provide wildlife habitat. She said a mature tree could absorb 300 gallons of water a day.

Ideal plants for the shoreline include native species such as willows, blueberry bushes, shrub dogwoods, grasses, ferns, winterberry, marsh marigolds and summer sweet. Upland plants include red maple, white oak, Eastern hemlock, balsam fir, Virginia creeper and witch hazel.

She has written a 100-page manual available through the UNH Cooperative Extension.

The meeting was videotaped by Wolfeboro Community Television, Channel 3 for Time Warner Cable subscribers.