



# Blue Earth County Shoreland Buffer Initiative

August 2011

## Local Partnership Working To Establish Vegetated Buffers

Blue Earth County is working in partnership with the County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) on a new local initiative to ensure there are 50-foot, vegetated buffers along all rivers, streams and lakes in agricultural areas. This 50-foot buffer is required by State Rules and County Ordinance.

With 43 lakes, 368 miles of rivers and streams and 186 miles of unnamed streams in Blue Earth County, it has been impossible to determine how many parcels have the required buffer since it became a requirement more than 20 years ago. Advancements in mapping and aerial photos in recent years now provide the tools needed to

determine areas that lack the required buffer. The County Environmental Services Department completed an inventory of all shoreland areas to determine compliance with the buffer standard. The next step is to work with landowners to achieve compliance.

Rather than immediate enforcement, the County Commissioners decided it would be better to start with a targeted, direct education project to inform land owners of the buffer requirement. The SWCD is a partner for this project because of their experience working with landowners to establish buffers and other best management practices and their knowl-

edge of financial incentive programs available.

The County is notifying owners of cropland that appears to lack a 50-foot buffer. Notification letters are being sent out in small batches every two to three weeks. Those who receive letters are asked to contact James Fett, (507) 345-4744, at the SWCD to discuss steps towards compliance and available management options.

Blue Earth County is among five counties working toward compliance with these rules. Dodge, Grant, Olmsted were the first counties to enforce the rules. Blue Earth and Winona Counties are just starting.

### For More Information:

#### James Fett

Blue Earth County  
Soil and Water  
Conservation  
District

507-345-4744



## Most Blue Earth County Farmers in Compliance

Using computerized mapping and aerial photos, the County identified areas that appear to lack a 50-foot buffer. The County estimates that 94.3% of the 6,970 acres where the 50-foot buffer is required in shoreland areas has the required 50-foot buffer. Just 398 acres need a 50-foot buffer in accordance with the shoreland rules. There are 375,702 total acres of crop land in the County, according to 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture. Just .11% need a buffer.



Photo Source: USDA NRCS

# Benefits of Vegetated Buffers

**Blue Earth County  
PROJECT GOAL:**

Vegetated buffers established on 100% of streams, rivers and lakes in agricultural areas.

Buffers and filter strips along the banks of lakes and rivers provide multiple benefits.

**Soil Conservation:**

- Buffer strips slow runoff, trap sediment, and reduce sheet and rill erosion.

**Water quality protection:**

- Vegetated buffers intercept and filter out much of the overland flow of water, nutrients, pesticides, sediment, and other material.
- Deep rooted plants and wider corridors are more effective at protecting water quality and promoting ground-

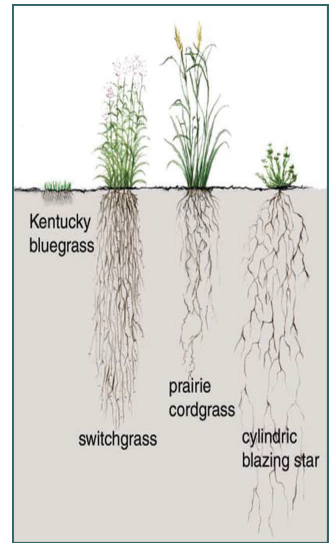
water recharge.

**Streambank and lake shore stabilization:**

- Native vegetation has dense, deep, intertwined root systems that physically strengthen soils.
- Root systems remove excess moisture from the soil, making banks more resistant to erosion or slumping.

**Habitat benefits:**

- Buffers can provide shade, shelter, nesting cover for many wildlife species.
- Continuous buffers also provide connecting corridors allowing wildlife to move from one habitat to another.



Graphic Source: MN DNR

## CONSERVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Program	Agency	Details
<b>CRP</b> <i>(Conservation Reserve Program)</i>	USDA FSA (Farm Service Agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10–15 year contract</li> <li>▪ Annual payments based on soil type from \$145– \$220 an acre</li> <li>▪ Signing Incentive \$100 per acre</li> <li>▪ Pays up to 90% to establish and maintain buffer</li> </ul>
<b>EQIP</b> <i>(Environmental Quality Incentives Program)</i>	USDA NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One-time payment for up to 100% of the cost of designing and installing a filter strip</li> </ul>
<b>Local and Regional Programs</b>	Blue Earth County SWCD (Soil and Water Conservation District)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Cost Share Program covers 75% of the costs for filter strip installation</li> <li>• Check with SWCD for other available programs</li> </ul>
<b>RIM/WRP Perpetual Easements</b> <i>(Reinvest in Minnesota and Wetlands Reserve Program)</i>	Blue Earth County SWCD and USDA NRCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pays up to \$5,500 per acre to permanently restore wetlands, floodplains, and buffers</li> <li>▪ Program covers the costs of wetland engineering/design, and native plant plantings</li> </ul>

## Shoreland Buffer Initiative Goals

The County and SWCD are hopeful landowners will voluntarily establish the vegetated buffers needed to achieve 100% compliance with State Shoreland Rules and County Ordinance.

The County estimates there are 400 property owners who need to establish a 50-foot buffer on at least one parcel. Ranging from .1 to 10.7 acres, the average number of buffer acres each landowners will need to establish is .84 acres.

The County and SWCD received a Clean Water Fund grant from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment so SWCD staff can be devoted to this project working with landowners from July 2011 to December 2012.

