

Optimizing Lake Access While Promoting Good Lakeshore Stewardship

By Brittany Lenzmeier, Stearns Co. SWCD

Brad and Nichole Matuska had a vision when they bought their house on the Chain of Lakes: to prioritize lake access and be responsible lakeshore stewards. Adopting this mindset meant they had to reconsider how they managed their shoreline and stormwater runoff.

“After we bought the house, we noticed we had a babbling brook from our driveway down to the steps and would wash out to an area around our patio,” said Brad. “The questions were how are we going to stabilize stormwater and reduce runoff into the lake?”

With Brad’s tenure with the Sauk River Chain of Lakes Association, he has acquired a wealth of knowledge regarding the Chain’s water quality as well as solutions to protect and improve it. “There is a need to reduce the nutrient load in the lakes,” he said. “The best tool for a long-term solution is to restore the shoreline. In addition, it prevents erosion and provides habitat for all kinds of critters.” Combining Brad’s knowledge and tools, the solution was simple – restoring the shore back to its natural habitat.



The Matuskas sought technical and financial assistance from the Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) to address their concerns. The Stearns County SWCD provides free technical assistance and up to 75% cost-share for shoreline restoration projects that meet the standard requirements.

Working closely with Greg Berg, SWCD’s Riparian Resources Specialist, the Matuskas received comprehensive assistance from the beginning to the end of the project. As a result, 75% of their shoreline was successfully restored to its natural habitat, and stormwater runoff problems were addressed. “It was easy and fun,” said Brad about the project and process. “Greg is knowledgeable and great to work with.”

The project consists of a few different components, including a break for stormwater. The break was designed at the point of the washout area and consists of a rock bed that absorbs and slows the stormwater flow and then follows a berm that directs the stormwater into a buffer of native plants. Additionally, a buffer zone of native plants was installed on the opposite side of the property that absorbs the stormwater coming off the roof via a downspout. Brad, a plant enthusiast, took this project one step further and not only restored the shore with a buffer, but continued the project upland, creating an additional habitat area for pollinators and wildlife.





The Matuskas get to enjoy the best of both worlds – keeping some lawn for paths and play areas, but also enjoying the beauty that native grasses and wildflowers provide. “We are excited to see the critters it will attract like birds, butterflies and honeybees,” said Brad. “In addition, it will be fun to see the flowers and seed heads from the various plants throughout the growing season.” Not only will the shoreline restoration project beautify their property, it will also help protect the lake's ecosystem, improve water quality by filtering pollutants and reduce erosion. “I’ve done a lot of direct research and ecological work over the years around the value and role of native plant life in habitats,” said Brad. “There is so much evidence and science that supports the concept of shoreline restoration. It’s just that our cultural practices such as manicured lawns and landscapes need to meet the science.”

With the shoreline restoration project complete, it allows the Matuskas to spend less time mowing and maintaining their yard and more time on things that they love and enjoy doing – water skiing and playing chess.



Brad and Nichole Matuska

“It makes so much sense, is so easy and affordable, with so many options, all while adding value to your property and positively influencing the water quality of the Chain,” said Brad. **“It was a no-brainer for us.”**

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