

Score the Shore: A Shoreline Habitat Assessment

Shoreline habitat is an invaluable component of every lake ecosystem.

Why is shoreline habitat important?

Shorelines are the primary habitat area for many of the animals that live on or near a lake. Birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and fish all rely on the shallow water and the aquatic and terrestrial vegetation along a lake's edge to find food and a safe place to rear their young. Healthy shorelines also help maintain water quality, limit erosion, and slow and filter rain runoff.

Unfortunately, some Michiganders are loving their lakes to death with excessive lakefront development. The construction of lawns, beaches, and sea walls remove optimal habitat locations along the shoreline. Foot traffic, docks, and the desire for an unobstructed view remove the vegetation that controls erosion.

Understanding where and how the lakeshore habitat is degraded is the first step in alleviating these problems. Lake residents can get this information by going through the Score the Shore process.



Manicured lawns and beaches are often the cause of degraded water quality.

How does Score the Shore work?

Volunteers in the Score the Shore assessment use aerial maps and GPS to divide the shoreline of their lake into 1,000 foot sections.

Volunteers then drive a boat around the edge of the lake, filling out an assessment form for each of the 1,000 foot sections. The assessment form contains questions on the

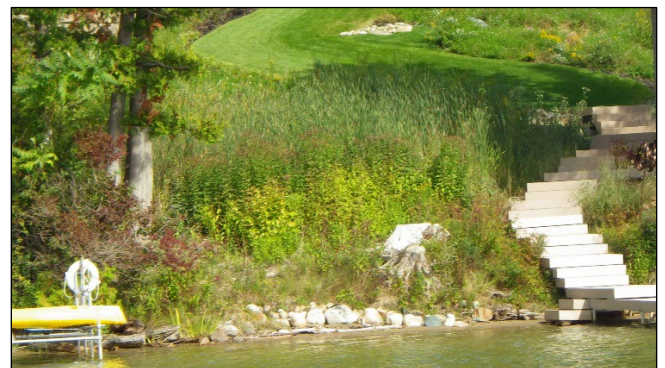
number of houses and docks, condition and amount of aquatic and riparian vegetation, and types of erosion control structures.

Each of the questions on the form provides a point value, either positive or negative, depending on the condition of the lakeshore. Each 1,000 foot section will have its own score and then an average score is also calculated for the entire lake.

How can the Score the Shore results affect lake management?

With results in hand, lake residents can identify the areas on the lake that are in the poorest condition and why they are in this condition. Residents and lake associations can start both formal educational efforts and informal conversations with neighbors about ways to improve the score. For example, when a shoreline section scores very poorly in woody debris habitat, the lake residents could make efforts to stop pulling out fallen trees or perhaps even place dead trees into the water.

Lake associations, non-profits, and local governments can use their results in writing grant proposals that would provide money for erosion control projects or habitat enhancement.



Lake residents can strike a balance between their needs and the lake's needs by creating a lakeshore garden.

For more information about the MiCorps Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program, visit www.MiCorps.net