

News Release

BACKGROUND MID YEAR RESOLUTION

RIDEAU VALLEY, May 28, 2009 — Now here's a mid year resolution to consider: spend more time in the hammock this summer. Read more. Sleep more. Leave the lawnmower and chainsaw in the shed. Remove less vegetation. In fact, let your shoreline revegetate itself. Let nature take its course. Relax. Both you and your lake will be healthier for it.

After all, Mother Nature knows what she is doing. Those soggy shorelines you see along the creeks, streams and lakes of the Mississippi and Rideau valleys are mixtures of alder, bulrush, sedge, cattail, pickerel weed, Virginia creeper and mud sometimes called "wet scrub". These streambank areas are also known as the "Ribbon of Life" because about 90% of the plants and animals living in the water need these scruffy-looking areas at one time or another in their life cycle. And they are as essential to the health of the river as your kidneys are to you.

Plants are right at home here. Insects, fish, birds and mammals move in where the plants are. These rich areas are nurseries, food cupboards, hiding places and hunting grounds. They are a buffer against floods, wind and erosion. They filter out large quantities of nutrients washing in off the land. Vegetated shorelines are small pieces of ecological heaven with the best of all worlds: heat, light, water, land and food.

These fragile areas are under siege in the urban and rural parts of our local watersheds. People cut and fill in and "clean up" and "harden" the shorelines with little thought for the health of the stream or lake. Those types of old-fashioned practices have let us down badly. Clean water, lots of wildlife and stable shorelines are at risk in many parts of the Mississippi and Rideau valleys.

That's not to say that we can't use and enjoy our rivers, lakes and streams. We can but it does take a little shift in attitude towards the unique and fragile Ribbon of Life. It costs nothing and it pays huge dividends in terms of a healthy river system for future generations.

It is time to start respecting our alders. Leave the natural vegetation along the shore alone. It has been there through thick and thin for the past 10,000 years and is in perfect harmony with the river environment. If it's already gone or substantially changed, let it grow back by not mowing within five metres of the shoreline (ten metres is even better). Mother Nature will do the rest.

Avoid using fertilizers and other chemicals on your property. Common sense tells us that liquids do find their way into either the groundwater (which we drink) or lakes and rivers (which age faster with chemical boosts). Check that your septic system is up to scratch. Check with your municipality, Conservation Authority or Parks Canada about permits needed for any shoreline projects such as docks. A good first step is always the helpful folks at the LandOwner Resource Centre at 613-692-3471 or 1-800-267-3504 ext 28 or ext 32 (or info@lrconline.com).

The battle for healthier waterways will be won by thousands of people staying in their hammocks longer on the shorelines of every lake, river and creek in Eastern Ontario. Power to the people indeed!

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