

Mitigation

Mitigation – What is it?

Mitigation is a restoration strategy for protecting water quality of Vilas County's surface water resources. Mitigation requires owners of waterfront properties to provide water body protection measures in exchange for being able to construct or expand structures or uses on the shoreline property. The level of protection measures are influenced by the sensitivity and existing development levels of the particular water body, and where the existing principal structure is located on the parcel.

Goals of Mitigation

Restoration of shoreland buffer zones is a primary goal of the mitigation strategies. Shoreland buffer zones are the last opportunity for detention or infiltration of pollution-laden runoff before it reaches the waterway. When shoreland vegetation is disturbed or removed by human activities, runoff can affect aquatic plants and animals by carrying elevated sediment, nutrient and toxicant loads to water bodies. Buffer zones also provide critical habitat for wildlife and provide for natural scenic beauty.

Background

Mitigation strategies are designed to:

1. Allow property owners a range of options to achieve the level of mitigation required.
2. Provide more environmental protection to more sensitive water bodies.
3. Provide higher levels of restoration to water bodies with more development.
4. Give credit to property owners who have maintained more natural environmental protective functions on their properties.
5. Promote removal of structures located within 75 feet of the ordinary high water mark.

Recent studies conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on Vilas County Lakes found that as lakeshore development increased, the abundance of green frogs (an ecosystem indicator species) declined, bird species changed, and natural vegetation decreased, especially the shrub layer. The size and composition of shoreland buffer zones are critical factors for protecting fish and wildlife.

How Does The Point System Work?

Vilas County implemented a point system where the property owners are required to achieve a certain number of points corresponding to the sensitivity and development level of the particular water body and whether primary structures are located within 75 feet of the OHWM of the water body. Property owners then choose strategies, with each strategy being worth a pre-determined number of points, to achieve the total number of points required for their properties. Once the points are achieved and the property owner agrees to implement and maintain the mitigation strategies into perpetuity, a zoning permit can be issued. In many cases where property owners have been good stewards of the land, no additional activities may be required. Should property owners change their minds or transfer the property to new owners, new mitigation plans can be filed and approved to meet those changed needs.

Mitigation – When does it apply?

