

Guidance & Model Language for Amending a Shoreland Ordinance for Consistency with Minnesota’s Buffer Law – For Permitted Agricultural Uses

If a local government’s shoreland ordinance currently requires a 50-foot or greater buffer on parcels with permitted agricultural uses, the local government can keep this standard or amend its ordinance to be consistent with the 50-foot average/30-foot minimum in the Buffer Law (Minn. Stat. § 103F.48). A local government may also amend its shoreland ordinance to incorporate the use of “alternative riparian water quality practices” consistent with the Buffer Law. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) finds these amendments to be substantially compliant with the statewide shoreland rules. There are two steps for amending a shoreland ordinance, each explained in more detail in this document:

- 1) amending the ordinance text (per model language), and
- 2) receiving DNR approval of the proposed amendment.

Note: *The DNR and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) have worked jointly to develop a comprehensive package of guidance and model ordinance language for implementing the Buffer Law. The intent is to provide communities with a menu of implementation options and model language that is simple, consistent, and complies with state law on buffers, shorelands, and public ditches. This guidance and model language is not intended to provide legal advice. Local governments are encouraged to consult with their own legal counsel regarding any ordinance language for implementing the Buffer Law. Check with your local BWSR Board Conservationist or DNR Area Hydrologist for more information.*

Step 1: Amending the Shoreland Ordinance Text – Model Language

The DNR will accept the following model language as being substantially compliant with the statewide shoreland rules. Additions and deletions shown are to language in Minnesota Rule, part 6120.3300, subp. 7:

- A. *The shore impact zone for parcels with permitted agricultural land uses is ~~equal to a line parallel to and 50 feet~~ an area with a 50-foot average width and a 30-foot minimum width, as measured from the ordinary high water level if identified, or the top or crown of bank or normal water level as provided in Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.48, subd. 3(c), whichever is applicable.*
- B. *General cultivation farming, grazing, nurseries, horticulture, truck farming, sod farming, and wild crop harvesting are permitted uses if steep slopes and shore and bluff impact zones are maintained in perennial ~~permanent~~ vegetation or operated under an approved conservation plan (Resource Management Systems) that includes alternative riparian water quality practices* consistent with the field office technical guides of the local soil and water conservation districts or the Natural Resource Conservation Service United States Soil Conservation Service, and as approved by the local soil and water conservation district.*

* Communities may prohibit or place restrictions on the use of alternative practices, such as requiring a minimum buffer. Goodhue County has done this using the following language:

Incorporation of approved alternative practices may reduce the overall buffer width, however the minimum width cannot be less than 30 feet.

This model language only affects agricultural land in shorelands. It does not affect land within a designated Wild and Scenic River District or the National Lower St. Croix Riverway. Required buffers and vegetative cutting restrictions in these areas may be more protective than the 50-foot average/30-foot minimum buffer and also apply.

Step 2: DNR Approval of Proposed Amendment – Process to Be Followed

The process for receiving DNR approval of amendments to shoreland ordinances follows:

1. Notify the DNR of the proposed amendments. State rules and your shoreland ordinance require you to notify the DNR *ten (10) days prior* to the public hearing to consider ordinance amendments. Notify the DNR by sending the notice of public hearing to consider the amendment and the proposed amendment text to your local DNR Area Hydrologist.
2. DNR reviews proposed amendments. The DNR Area Hydrologist will review the proposed amendments for consistency with the Buffer Law and the shoreland rules. If the amendments are consistent, the DNR will send you a letter conditionally approving the amendments prior to the public hearing.
3. Local government adopts amendments. The county board or city council adopts the amendments conditionally approved by the DNR.
4. DNR gives final approval. State rules and your shoreland ordinance require you to send the DNR the ordinance amendments within 10 days of adoption. Send the approved amendment and resolution approving the amendment to your local DNR Area Hydrologist. The DNR Area Hydrologist will review the approved amendment for consistency with the language that was previously conditionally approved. If consistent, the DNR will send you a final approval letter.

Note: *If a community adopts the model language provided in this document with no other proposed amendments, DNR review and approval will be streamlined.*

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