

How you can help protect water quality in the Flathead

Protecting the water quality that makes the Flathead such a special place doesn't mean that development and other human uses need to be curtailed. It's a question of whether such activities are undertaken with an eye on using construction and land management techniques designed to protect this irreplaceable natural asset. Importantly, the protection and enhancement of property value is directly linked to maintaining a high level of water quality.

Living near water

Here are some essential landowner "Best Management Practices" (BMPs) to use:

- Maintain or restore a "buffer strip" of native vegetation along stream and river banks, lakeshores, and wetlands. Buffer strips help filter out sediments and pollutants before they reach the surface water. With buffer strips, the wider, the better, up to 300 feet. Conversely, avoid planting non-native plants and grasses that will require fertilizer, pesticides and watering to maintain.
- Build on upland areas, away from streamside riparian areas and lakeshores.
- Avoid activities that destabilize stream banks or lakeshores, such as clearing existing vegetation.
- If using a septic tank, make sure to pump as needed and inspect on a regular basis.
- Consider placing a conservation easement on all or part of your land to protect its riparian areas and sensitive lakeshore habitat.
- Be aware that such hardened surfaces as paved driveways and rooftops will exacerbate the harmful effect of runoff from rain, hail and melting snow. The more hardened surfaces present increases the need for an adequate buffer zone and setback from the surface water source.

Landscaping

- Avoid applying pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers near such surface water sources as streams, lakes and wetlands, and avoid over application that might seep into the groundwater.
- Don't dispose of yard clippings in the stream or lake.
- Avoid construction activities that will lead to soil erosion.

Farming

- Fence livestock away from stream and riverbanks and lakeshores.
- Use farming practices that reduce soil erosion and increase water infiltration.

Disposal of toxic materials

- Dispose of paints, thinners and other solvents at a household hazardous waste collection facility
- Recycle motor oil and antifreeze. Do not dump into waterways, septic systems or down storm drains.

For more information on these and other techniques to protect water quality, contact any of the agencies or NGOs listed in this document. The Flathead Basin Commission has a DVD on landowner Best Management Practices, *Healthy Lakes through Living Shores*, that is available from the FBC upon request.