

Healthy Lakes & Higher Property Values

Facts and resources to help real estate professionals protect our nation's lakes and lake shorelines

Real estate professionals are important partners in maintaining and restoring the quality of our nation's lakes. "Lakeshore property is in demand because of the amenities or benefits [it] provide[s] its owners, such as water based recreation possibilities, an aesthetic setting for a home, tranquility away from urban and commercial life, and perhaps the privilege or esteem of owning an increasingly scarce and valuable resource."¹ Since the value of lakeshore property is tied to the quality of the adjacent lake, real estate professionals have a vested interest in helping homebuyers and communities restore and protect their lakes.

In April 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published the National Lakes Assessment (NLA), the first-ever baseline study of the condition of the nation's lakes. The NLA finds that 44% of U.S. lakes are in fair or poor condition, and that, of the problems assessed, poor lakeshore habitat has the greatest impact on lake health.

Lakeshore habitat refers to the trees, shrubs, and tall grasses that grow along the shore of a lake and overhang the water. Poor lakeshore habitat occurs when native trees and shrubs are removed from around the lake and replaced by manicured lawns, armored bulkheads, paved areas, buildings, and docks. Healthy native vegetation strengthens and preserves the lake shoreline, provides shelter, habitat, and food sources for lake fish and wildlife, and helps protect the lake from the impacts of pollution, such as runoff from paved surfaces or erosion from construction sites.

Clean lakes with healthy natural shorelines are good for everyone. They provide aesthetic value, recreational opportunities, higher property values, jobs, and a higher tax base.² Maine and Minnesota conducted two studies linking the high quality of lakes with higher property values. The 2005 Maine study found that good water quality on lakes can increase recreational revenues by millions and individual property values by billions over time.³



Photo courtesy of John H. McShane

Resources for Real Estate Professionals

EPA Clean Lakes
www.epa.gov/owow/lakes

Choosing the Right Waterfront Property
Wisconsin DNR & UW Extension

www.uwsp.edu/cnr/uwexlakes/publications/choosingProperty/ChoosingRightWaterfrontProperty.pdf

Protecting Your Waterfront Investment- 10 Simple Shoreland Stewardship Practices
Wisconsin DNR & UW Extension

<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/shore.waterfront.pdf>

Lakeshore Property Values & Water Quality: Evidence from Property Sales in the Mississippi Headwaters Region
Mississippi Headwaters Board and Bemidji State University

www.friendscvsf.org/bsu_study.pdf

The Economics of Lakes- Dollars and Sense
Maine Bureau of Land & Water Quality

www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/doclake/research.htm

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Both the Maine and Minnesota studies found that there is a positive relationship between water clarity and property values. In Minnesota, the study found that if lakes experienced a one-meter change in water clarity, the “expected property price changes for these lakes are in the magnitude of tens of thousands to millions of dollars.”⁵ The study also found that homebuyers are influenced by water clarity when making purchases and are willing to pay more for a better environment.



Manicured lawns require lawn chemicals that can wash into the lake. Shallow grass roots and decorative rocks do not stabilize the shoreline or provide habitat for lake fish.



Deep-rooted native trees and shrubs stabilize the shoreline, provide a buffer against pollution, and improve habitat for lake fish and wildlife.

Lakes Protection Tips for Real Estate Professionals

1. Educate yourself about clean lakes and environmentally-friendly lakescaping techniques
2. Encourage homebuyers to learn about the health and water quality of the lakes where they are interested in owning property
3. Provide homebuyers with contact information for nurseries or landscapers who sell or plant **native** trees, shrubs, and flowers
4. Encourage homebuyers to minimize the size of their lawns and to keep trees and natural shoreline vegetation
5. Provide homebuyers with information on local ordinances, policies, and zoning restrictions regulating lake shorelines and lakes to better serve your customer
5. Recommend that homebuyers use “lakescaping techniques” that will reduce runoff and improve the health of lakes
6. Encourage homebuyers to use environmentally-friendly building techniques
7. Share information with homebuyers about local lake clean-up and protection programs
8. Get involved in lakeshore communities to help homeowners increase their property values and protect their lakes

Additional resources on clean lakes are available at
www.epa.gov/owow/lakes/

¹ Krysel, Charles, Elizabeth Boyer, Charles Parson, Patrick Welle (May 2003). “Lakeshore Property Values & Water Quality: Evidence from Property Sales in the Mississippi Headwaters Region.” Mississippi Headwaters Board and Bemidji University, pgs 9-10.

² “The Economics of Lakes- Dollars and Sense. (2005). ”Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Land & Water Quality, pg 1.

³ Ibid, ⁴ Ibid, pg 2.

⁵ Krysel, Charles, et al., pg 34.



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