



Aquatic Plant Management on City-owned Properties Policy

For River Corridors, Streambanks, Lakefronts, Pond Banks and Stormwater BMPs and Infrastructure
City of Watertown Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department and Public Works Department

1. Introduction

The City of Watertown recognizes the vital role that healthy shoreline and aquatic vegetation plays in sustaining the environmental quality, safety, and aesthetic value of its water resources. This policy provides guidance for the protection, restoration, and management of vegetation along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and infrastructure within city-owned lands. Proper shoreline and aquatic vegetation management improves water quality, controls erosion, enhances habitat, supports recreation, and contributes to overall ecological health of the water body.

2. Departments

- Public Works Department – Streets Division
Responsible for routine vegetation maintenance along riverbanks, drainage ditches, and select public stormwater best management practices (BMPs) to maintain drainage function and public safety. Tasks may include mowing, hand removal, mechanical cutting, and woody vegetation control in BMPs and around stormwater infrastructure.
- Public Works Department – Engineering Division/Stormwater Utility
Oversees long-term planning, regulatory compliance, and capital improvements for the City's stormwater system. Coordinates permitting, survey, and design standards related to stormwater systems, and advises on appropriate maintenance methods.
- Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department
Maintains vegetation at launch sites, access points, riverbanks and shoreline areas and stormwater BMPs within park properties. Responsibilities include routine

mowing, hand removal, and selective cutting to ensure safe public access and protect streambank stabilization plantings.

3. Purpose

This policy is designed to:

- Clarify management of city-owned properties
 - Protect and restore native shoreline vegetation
 - Prevent erosion and sedimentation
 - Improve water quality by filtering runoff
 - Manage invasive species
 - Balance ecological preservation with public access and recreation
 - Provide consistent guidance for city staff, contractors, and partners
-

4. Scope

This policy applies to all city-owned lands bordering:

- **Rivers and streambanks** (perennial and intermittent)
- **Lakefronts** (natural and artificial)
- **Pond banks** (emergent, submerged, terrestrial vegetation)
- **Stormwater BMPs, drainage ditches* and infrastructure** (emergent, submerged, terrestrial vegetation)

*Drainage District 80 and Dodge County maintain the agricultural drainage ditch on the northeast side of the City.

5. Guiding Principles

- **Ecological Integrity:** Protect the natural structure and function of shoreline ecosystems.
 - **Native Species First:** Prioritize the use and protection of native plant species adapted to local hydrology.
 - **Minimal Disturbance:** Limit soil disruption and vegetation clearing near water bodies.
-

- **Multi-Use Balance:** Allow responsible public access and recreation without degrading shoreline environments.
 - **Regulatory Compliance:** Align with state (e.g., WDNR), federal (e.g., USACE), and local waterway protection laws.
-

6. Shoreline Management Zones and Practices

A. Riparian Buffer Zone (0–35 feet from water’s edge)

Applicable to rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds

Objectives:

- Stabilize shorelines and prevent erosion
- Filter nutrients and pollutants from runoff
- Provide habitat for fish, birds, and aquatic life
- Maintain scenic natural views

Shorelines (emergent, terrestrial vegetation): routine and more substantial occasional maintenance may be needed in specific areas of shorelines along waterways in the City.

Native plantings are installed in specific locations to protect streambanks from erosion; native plantings require more attention during the first 3 years while they are becoming established.

Allowed Practices:

- Retention and planting of native grasses, sedges, shrubs, and trees
- Manual removal of invasive species
- Creation of narrow access corridors (e.g., trails, fishing spots) using natural materials
- Installation of low-impact erosion control (e.g., coir logs, native bioengineering)
- Routine mowing of trails/access to shorelines.
- Removal of hazardous or approved trees and shrubs.

Restricted Practices:

- Use of synthetic herbicides without proper approval
- Grading or excavation without permit

B. Lakefront and Pond Bank Specifics

Lakes and ponds often experience wave action, water level fluctuation, and aesthetic landscaping pressure. Additional management principles include:

Lakefronts:

- Use **deep-rooted native plants** to stabilize sloped shorelines
- Incorporate **buffer plantings** of at least 10–15 feet wide where feasible
- Allow designated swim or watercraft access zones, bordered by stabilized paths
- Avoid decorative rock or riprap unless engineered and permitted with native vegetation overstory

Pond Banks:

- Maintain a 3–5 foot no-mow buffer around the pond edge
- Use emergent plants (e.g., soft rush, blue flag iris) for bank stabilization and nutrient uptake
- Control algae and aquatic weeds through non-chemical means first (e.g., shading, circulation)
- Discourage waterfowl congregation through diverse shoreline vegetation to reduce waste and bank trampling

Launch/Access Points:

- both land (terrestrial) and water (aquatic) vegetation can be found at launches and access points. Management of aquatic vegetation, either emergent or submerged, may be regulated by WDNR. Upland or terrestrial vegetation is typically not regulated by WDNR, unless the area has been determined to be a wetland.

C. Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Infrastructure

Stormwater BMPs and Infrastructure require maintenance to function as designed, and as required by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit.

- Site-specific maintenance plans are required for all stormwater BMPs.
- Routine stormwater BMP and infrastructure maintenance is typically exempt from state and local permits.
- Routine maintenance of emergent vegetation may be needed around inlets/outlets, throughout the bottom of a dry pond, infiltration basin, or biofilter, and on the slopes and/or embankments of the stormwater ponds, infiltration basins, biofilters, etc.

Stormwater trees also require routine maintenance. While permeable pavement systems are not designed to include vegetation, routine maintenance is required to prevent vegetation from compromising the system.

- Occasional management of stormwater BMP vegetation may include dredging or more substantial vegetation removal and re-establishment. WDNR permits are required for dredging and sediment management for larger stormwater BMP management projects.

Occasional management may include stabilization of drainage ditch banks.

7. Invasive Species Management

The city will maintain an ongoing invasive species management program:

- Inspections as needed during growing season
 - Priority species include: buckthorn, Japanese knotweed, Phragmites, reed canary grass, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, yellow iris, cattails
 - Integrated management methods: mechanical removal, and replanting native species
-

8. Methods of Control

<u>Method</u>	<u>DPW- Engineering</u>	<u>DPW- Streets & Solid Waste</u>	<u>Parks, Recreation, & Forestry</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Regulating Authority</u>
Hand Pull:					
Stormwater BMPs		X			
Shoreline		X	X	As Needed	
In Water					WDNR
Drainage Ditches					
Launch/Access Points			X		
Mechanical/Cutting*:					
Stormwater BMPs		X		1-2 Times Per Year	
Shoreline		X	X	As Needed	
In Water					WDNR
Drainage Ditches					
Launch/Access Points			X		
Chemical**:					
Stormwater BMPs					WDNR, DATCP
Shoreline			X		WDNR, DATCP
In Water					WDNR, DATCP
Drainage Ditches					WDNR, DATCP
Launch/Access Points					
Burning***:					
Stormwater BMPs					City FD
Shoreline					City FD
In Water					City FD, WDNR
Drainage Ditches					City FD
Launch/Access Points					City FD

*Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) requires permits for some mechanical harvesting or cutting of submerged aquatic plants. These projects may require an aquatic plant management survey and plan to be completed prior to permit issuance.

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) requires permits for some chemical treatments of submerged or emergent aquatic plants. These projects may require an aquatic plant management survey and plan to be completed prior to permit issuance. Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) requires licenses for commercial (including municipal) applications of aquatic herbicides and algaecides.

***City of Watertown Fire Department policies *should be checked prior to burning vegetation within City limits. Coordination with City FD on training events may be an option to manage vegetation.*

9. Tree and Shrub Removal Guidelines

- Removal is permitted only when:
 - Trees are dead, diseased, or pose a safety hazard
 - Approved as part of an ecological restoration or natural resources management plan
- Removal must be approved by the Parks Supervisor or City Forester
- Replacement planting with native species is encouraged following removal