



# 2025 Morrison County Shoreland District Guidance

**Morrison County Land Services**  
213 1st Ave SE  
Little Falls, MN 56345

**Hours: 8am-4:30pm Monday-Friday**  
320-632-0170  
[www.morrisoncountymn.gov](http://www.morrisoncountymn.gov)

**This information is a summary of the key regulations and is not a complete copy of the Ordinance. Full language regarding shoreland regulations can be found in Section 700 of the Morrison County Land Use Control Ordinance.**

**This publication may be updated on the Morrison County Website. Please review yearly, as rules may change from the date of this publication.**



# Shoreland

## Natural Resource Protection

Whether you are a full-time or seasonal resident, living by the water provides a special opportunity to participate in water-related recreation such as boating, swimming or fishing, to observing wildlife in its natural habitat, or simply experiencing the serenity and sense of well-being around water and nature.

Morrison County has 76 protected lakes and many rivers, including the Mississippi River. These lakes and rivers not only provide for your enjoyment, they also draw visitors from all over the country and beyond to enjoy their beauty and recreational opportunities, provide a strong foundation for economic stability, provide habitat for many plants and wildlife, and enhance the quality of life for all who live and play in Morrison County. When you own shoreland property, you do have certain riparian (near the water) rights and privileges, such as the right to put a dock out to a navigable depth, to take water for domestic and agricultural purposes, and to fish, boat, hunt, and swim. However, these rights must be exercised in compliance with local rules and regulations and those of the State of Minnesota. Rules are in place for the benefit of your health and safety and for the health of the adjacent lake or stream. With the use of these lakes comes the responsibility to protect, improve, and enhance the quality of these waters for future generations, keeping in mind that the water itself is a public resource for everyone to utilize and enjoy.

### Shoreline Buffers

Research shows that the way we treat our shorelines affects lake water quality and fish & wildlife habitat. To protect and improve our lakes, we need to protect and improve our shorelines. The best way we can do that is by adding or keeping a buffer strip of natural vegetation along the shore. Buffer strips of native wildflowers, grasses, trees, and shrubs protect water quality and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. If you have lawn to the water's edge, lawn behind rip-rap, steep slopes, or little vegetation near the shore, consider a natural shoreland landscaping project to restore the native vegetation by creating a shoreland buffer zone. Creating and maintaining a natural buffer zone along your shore does not mean your property has to look messy, but it may mean you have to re-think what your shoreland should look like.



Photo of a native buffer on a shoreline

### Benefits of a Buffer

- **Enhances water quality.** A good buffer protects your lake, stream, or wetland by slowing runoff and allowing it to soak into the ground.
- **Stabilizes shorelines.** Buffers prevent fluctuating water levels, moving ice, flooding, surface runoff and wave action from eroding your shoreline.
- **Provides fish and wildlife habitat.** The shoreline buffer provides habitat for fish and cover for birds, butterflies, turtles, and other wildlife.
- **Enhances aesthetics.** Beautify your yard with a variety of colorful wildflowers, create a natural screen for privacy, and enhance that “Up North” feeling.

# Shoreland

## Natural Resource Protection

### Runoff and Impervious Surfaces

Snow melt or rainwater that does not soak into the ground and instead runs off impervious surfaces (hard surfaces that water doesn't penetrate such as roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and compacted soils) or washes off lawns and steep slopes is called runoff. It is also referred to as stormwater. When runoff reaches the lake, it can carry with it nutrients, eroded soil sediments, toxic materials, bacteria and other pollutants that can be detrimental to water quality and fish & wildlife. Reducing runoff decreases the pollutants that can eventually reach the lake. Managing stormwater on your property so it soaks into the ground rather than running off is the best way to reduce runoff and filter out pollutants before they reach the lake. Any green space, including gardens, trees, shrubs or landscaping allows water to infiltrate slowly down into the soil and roots.

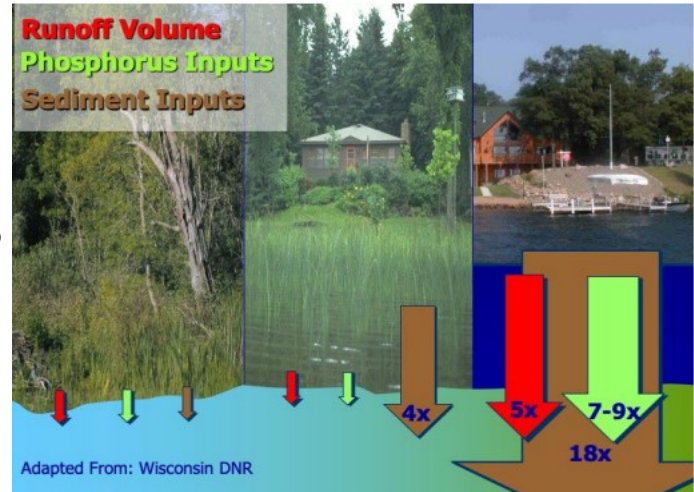
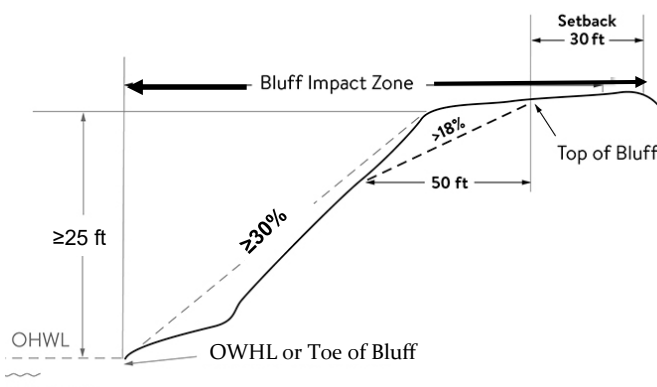


Diagram of runoff volume based on land development.

### Steep Slopes & Bluffs

Steep slopes and bluffs are vulnerable to erosion and slope failure. Setbacks and restrictions on alterations within these areas help protect shoreland resources. Only stairways, lifts or landings are allowed to be placed in the bluff impact zone to achieve access to the waterbody. No excavation is allowed in this area and vegetation best management practices are required when installing stairs and lifts. Licensed Land Surveyors are required to determine if these conditions exist on the property.

Bluff Impact Zone and Top of Bluff



### Wetlands

Many shoreland properties are located in areas containing or adjacent to wetlands. Minnesota wetlands are regulated by the Wetland Conservation Act. Setbacks, alteration restrictions, and other requirements apply to wetlands on shoreland property. The **Morrison County Soil and Water Conservation District** is the local contact for all wetland activities.

**Their phone number is: 320-631-3551**



Photo of a wetland



# Shoreland Structures & Construction

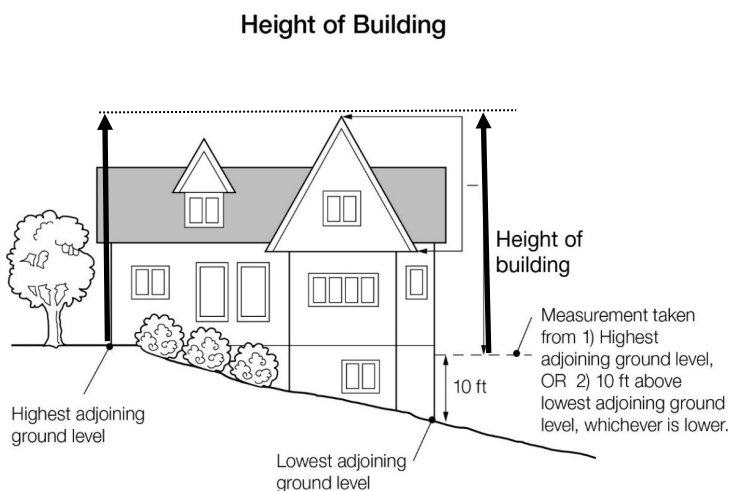
## Permits are required for the following:

- Building or moving a structure, including decks, portable structures/structures on skids, patios, rip rap, retaining walls, and topography & vegetation alterations.
- Additions to existing structures.
- Structural alterations including excavation for footings, foundations, slabs, basements, walls, or other parts of a structure including, dormer, roof line, height, and roof pitch changes.

### Principal Structure Height

Maximum principal structure height is 30 feet unless otherwise exempted.

**Building height:** the vertical distance between the highest adjacent grade at the building or ten (10) feet above the lowest ground level, whichever is lower, and the highest point of a flat roof or height of the highest gable of a pitched or hipped roof.



### Guest Cottage or Guest Quarters

In order to have a **Guest Cottage** your lot must meet the duplex lot size and area standards shown on the next page. The cottage cannot exceed 700 sq.ft. and 15 feet in height.

**Guest Quarters** are permissible within an accessory structure if the lot meets the minimum single lot width and area standards **and**:

- A. In the case of contiguous tax parcels/lots making up the lot size standard, they shall be combined for zoning purposes with the Auditor/Treasurer's Office,
- B. No guest cottage or recreational vehicle exists on the property,
- C. The maximum square footage of the guest quarter is no larger than 10% of the floor square footage of the accessory structure; the primary use of the structure must continue to be that of an accessory structure,
- D. The guest quarter must be counted as a bedroom for septic system sizing,
- E. The onsite septic system must be adequately sized for the number of bedrooms on the property, and
- F. The building must meet all setbacks.

### Decks

Decks must meet all structure setbacks, unless being attached to dwellings constructed before May 16, 1995 with no current deck. Also, no additions have been added waterward on the structure. Other conditions apply. Please contact Land Services with questions about deck additions.

# Shoreland Structures & Construction

## Accessory Structures

All accessory structures must not exceed eighteen (18) feet in height, twelve (12) foot side walls and 1,300 square feet, unless the following standards are met:

- The accessory structure is at least twice the structural setback from the ordinary high water level and side lot lines. In that case, the accessory structure may have a peak height of up to twenty-five (25) feet and be up to 3,000 sq ft.
- The accessory structure is at least four times the structural setback from the ordinary high water level and twice the side lot lines. In that case the accessory structure may have a peak height of up to twenty-five (25) feet and be up to 6,000 sq ft.

There shall not be any decks, balconies, or direct exterior access to or from the upper-level area of a detached accessory building.

## Boathouses and Water- Oriented Structures (Structures located within lake setback)

Boathouses, gazebos, decks, fish cleaning sheds, etc., and additions or alterations thereto are prohibited within the lake setback, unless they are legal nonconforming structures. Legal nonconforming structures are allowed to be repaired or replaced in the exact same place, size and height. There can be no change in the use of the legal nonconforming structure (e.g. changing a boat house into a guest house or sauna).

## Lot Size Standards & Setbacks from Water Bodies for Riparian Lots (touching water)

Lakes that have a shoreland designation are broken down into classes. These require different setbacks and minimum lots sizes to aid in orderly development. Most of our developed lakes are classified as General Development. These are: Shamineau, Crookneck, Fish Trap, Alexander, Round (Cushing & Scandia Valley Townships) Placid, Camile, Green Prairie, Pine, Cedar, Pierz, Peavy, Long, Platte, Sullivan, Larson and Polander.

Lake Classification	Natural Environment- Single		Recreational Development- Single	General Development- Single	General Development - Duplex Lot
Lot Width (ft.)	200		175	120	180
Lot Area (sq. ft.)	80,000		50,000	30,000	50,000
Structure Setback (ft.)	200		100	75	75
Impact Zone (ft.)	100		65	50	50
Septic Tank (ft.)	150		75	50	50
Drainfield (ft.)	150		100	50	50
River Classification	Forested	Transition	Agricultural	Urban, Tributary	Mississippi River
Lot Width (ft.)	200	250	150	120	330
Lot Area (sq. ft.)	80,000	80,000	40,000	30,000	5 acres
Structure Setback (ft.)	150	150	100	100	150
Impact Zone (ft.)	100	100	65	65	100
Septic Tank (ft.)	100	100	75	75	125
Drainfield (ft.)	100	100	75	75	125

# Shoreland Alteration Permits

<b>Topographic Alterations</b> (Grading and fill)  *This does not include work for permitted structures*	<b>Minor Alteration Permit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to ten (10) cubic yards of fill deposited, removed, or graded on steep slopes or within shore or bluff impact zones</li> <li>Up to 100 cubic yards located between the shore impact zone and required setback</li> <li>Topographic alterations located beyond the required setback</li> <li>Projects overseen by SWCD, NRCS, DNR, or Watershed District</li> <li>Emergency stabilization</li> </ul>	<b>Major Alteration Permit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All grading or filling not meeting minor permit limits.</li> <li>Projects with increased environmental impact potential due to slope, amount of material, or other factors</li> </ul>
<b>Retaining Walls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permitted when a documented erosion problem exists</li> <li>Walls not visible from the shore by virtue of topography or vegetation, are permitted</li> <li>Replacement of nonconforming walls authorized under State Law, with a permit</li> </ul>	<p>*****</p> <p><b>Be sure to obtain a permit and share the details and conditions of the work authorized with your contractor.</b></p> <p><b><u>You are responsible for ensuring the permit is followed and any violations resulting from not following the permit conditions.</u></b></p> <p>*****</p> <p><b>Shore Impact Zone:</b> Area between OHWL and 50 feet from the water on a General Development lake (different on other lake classes).</p> <p><b>OHWL:</b> Ordinary High Water Level</p>
<b>Rock Riprap</b>	Rip-rap to control erosion when approved by Morrison County and an erosion issue is documented	
<b>Impervious Surface/Patios</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be placed between the lake setback and the shore impact zone</li> <li>Must not have any feature above 12 inches from grade</li> </ul>	
<b>Sand Blankets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On residential lots, the sand or gravel layer may be up to six (6) inches thick and may not be wider than 25% of the lot width at the water or fifty (50) feet wide whichever is less, and 10 feet landward from the ordinary high water level</li> <li>Maintenance and/or replacement of existing sand blanket is limited and requires a permit</li> </ul>	
<b>Water Access Ramps</b>	Only permitted on private residential lots on lakes without public access and if the site is not a federally designated wild or scenic river	
<b>Ice Ridge</b>	Permits are not required for any grading associated with removing or grading soil material due to ice action on a shoreline, provided that : A. The ice ridge resulted from ice action within the last year B. Not more than 200 feet of shoreline is affected	
<b>Historic Ice Ridge</b>	An ice ridge that has existed for over one (1) year requires a permit to modify <u>for lake access only</u> and must meet other standards	

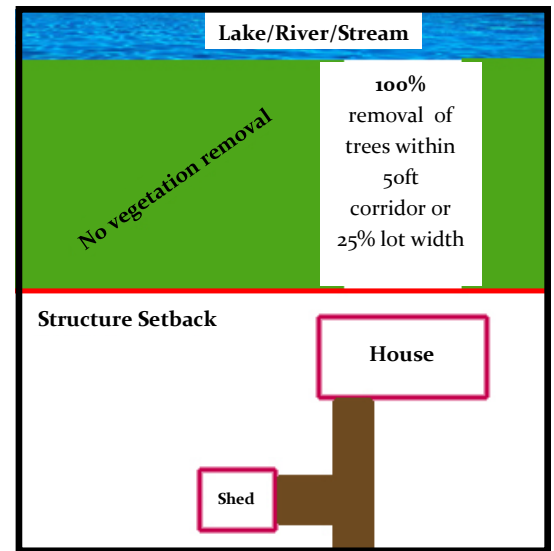
# Shoreland Vegetation, Stormwater, & Erosion Control

## Shoreland Vegetation

Native vegetation, including trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers, and sedges, play a key role in reducing erosion and protecting water quality by filtering and infiltrating runoff before reaching water resources. Vegetation removal is regulated on all shoreline properties.

### Vegetation Alteration (Permit Required)

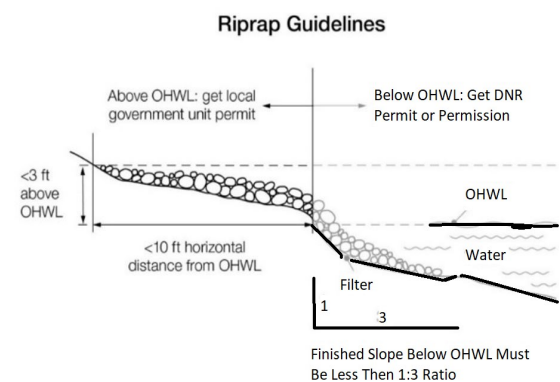
- Adequate vegetation shall remain from the ordinary high-water mark to the required building setback, except limited pruning, trimming, and cutting of vegetation is allowed to provide a view to the water from the principal dwelling, to create access paths, and recreational use areas. The maximum view corridor shall be less than 50 feet wide or 25% of the parcel width, whichever is less.
- A recreational use area at the shoreline cannot exceed a maximum width of twenty-five (25) feet or 25% of the lot width, whichever is less, and fifteen (15) feet in depth or, if located at least twenty-five (25) feet landward from the ordinary high-water level, fifty (50) feet in width or 50% of the lot width, whichever is less.
- Access paths from the principal structure to the shoreline are permissible, but shall not exceed four (4) feet in width and shall be oriented generally perpendicular to the shoreline.
- Any time there is significant vegetative removal, in the opinion of the zoning administrator, on steep slopes for a permitted use, the zoning administrator may require a vegetation restoration plan prior to permit issuance.



Depiction of view corridor allowances.

## Natural Shorelines & Vegetation

Waters in Morrison County and across the state have lost miles of natural shorelines over time. This has serious implications for water quality. In Morrison County, shoreland lots must meet minimum native vegetation standards before additional shoreland alterations will be permitted. For shoreland alterations, a site assessment will determine if, and how much, native plant area will be required. Rip rap, for example, is only permitted when active erosion is present and no other alternatives are feasible. A native grass buffer of at least ten (10) feet is required behind all newly permitted rip rap, where none existed prior.



## Stormwater & Erosion Control

- Impervious surfaces shall not exceed 25% of the lot area.
- An erosion control plan is required prior to construction of any commercial or industrial facility.
- Land-disturbing activities shall not cause channelized erosion, unstable slopes, or negative off-site impacts. Activities requiring a permit will include conditions to prevent erosion problems.
- Permanent or temporary soil stabilization shall be applied to disturbed areas. Permitted work may include more restrictive conditions. Disturbed areas shall be stabilized and protected as soon as possible. Sediment control is required to retain sediment on the project site.



# Shoreland Septic Systems, Rentals, RVs & Floodplain

## Septic Systems

- A compliance inspection of existing sewage treatment systems must be conducted prior to the issuance of any structure permit for property located in the Shoreland District. This excludes some items such as grading, stairways, rip rap, retaining walls, etc.
- In areas without public sewer facilities, no land use permit requiring on site sewage treatment shall be issued until a septic design has been reviewed and approved.

## Vacation/Private Home Rentals

Short-term rentals are licensed through Morrison County Health and Human Services. **Ph: 320-632-7800**

Other standards include:

- Must be connected to an approved sub-surface sewage treatment system and have a current compliance inspection
- Water test for nitrate-nitrogen and coliform bacteria
- Occupancy limits based on number of bedrooms and septic system sizing

## Recreational Vehicles

**Temporary-** RVs on a property for fewer than 16 consecutive days in a year.—**No permit is required.**

**Permanent-** RVs on a property more than 16 consecutive days in a year — **Requires a permit.**

- Must meet structural setbacks & a septic management plan is required

No property owner shall allow recreational vehicles **requiring permitting** on the property in a number greater than allowed according to the chart below:

Lot Use	Less than 20,000 sq. ft.	Greater than 20,000 sq. ft.
Vacant	1 R.V.	2 R.V.
1 Dwelling	No R.V.	1 R.V.

## Floodplain Areas and Minimum Elevations Required

- Mapped floodplain areas exist around many lakes, rivers, and streams. All structures, new or altered, located within a 100-year floodplain must meet elevation requirements using fill, alternative methods, or be flood-proofed to meet state building code and federal requirements. FEMA recently updated the county mapping in 2024.
- Elevation certifications prepared by an engineer, architect, or surveyor may be required to show the lowest floor elevation of any dwelling unit is placed no lower than the regulatory flood protection elevation or at least three (3) feet above the highest know water level.

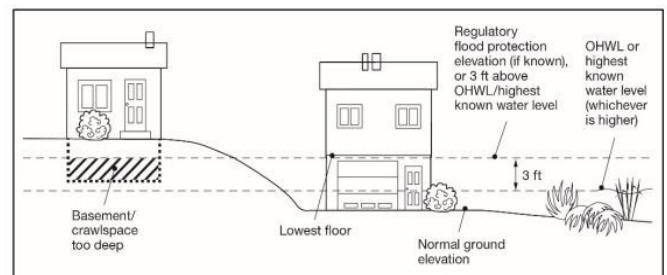


Diagram of lowest floor requirements.





# Shoreland Nonconformities

## **Nonconforming LOTS—(does not meet width or area requirements)**

1. A nonconforming single lot of record as of May 17, 1995, located within a shoreland area may be allowed as a building site without variances from lot size requirements, provided that:
  - A. All structure and septic system setback distance requirements can be met;
  - B. A Type 1 sewage treatment system consistent with Minnesota Rules, chapter 7080, can be installed or the lot is connected to a public sewer; and
  - C. The impervious surface coverage does not exceed 25 percent of the lot.
2. In a group of two or more contiguous lots of record under a common ownership, an individual lot must be considered as a separate parcel of land for the purpose of sale or development, if it meets the following requirements:
  - A. The lot must be at least 66% of the dimensional standard for lot width and lot size for the shoreland classification consistent with Minnesota Rules, chapter 6120;
  - B. The lot must be connected to a public sewer, if available, or must be suitable for the installation of a Type 1 sewage treatment system consistent with Minnesota Rules, chapter 7080, and local government controls;
  - C. Impervious surface coverage must not exceed 25 percent of each lot.
3. Contiguous non-conforming lots of record in shoreland areas under a common ownership must be able to be sold or purchased individually if:
  - A. Each lot contained a habitable residential dwelling at the time the lots came under common ownership and;
  - B. The lots are suitable for, or served by, a sewage treatment system consistent with the requirements of section 115.55 and Minnesota Rules, chapter 7080, or connected to a public sewer.
4. Lots not meeting the criteria above must be combined with the one or more contiguous lots so they equal one or more conforming lots as much as possible.

## **Nonconforming STRUCTURES (does not meet the setbacks or current ordinance)**

- A nonconformity, including the lawful use or occupation of land or premises existing at the time of the adoption of an official control under this chapter, may be continued, including through repair, replacement, restoration, maintenance, or improvement, but not including expansion.
- If a nonconforming building or structure is destroyed by fire or other peril to the extent of 50 percent or more of its market value, as established by an appraisal submitted by the property owner and a land use permit has been applied for within 180 days of when the property was damaged, the County may impose reasonable conditions upon a land use permit in order to mitigate any newly created impact on adjacent property
- Change in roof pitch on a principal dwelling that increases overall height but does not result in a gain in living space shall be allowed with a permit if it meets the height allowance of the shoreland district.
- A nonconforming structure (e.g. boathouse) cannot be changed to another use (e.g. guest cottage or sauna).

## **Nonconforming USES (not allowed in the current ordinance)**

- If the nonconformity or occupancy is discontinued for a period of more than one year, or any nonconforming building or structure is destroyed by fire or other peril to the extent of greater than 50 percent of its estimated market value, as indicated in the records of the county assessor at the time of damage, and no building permit has been applied for within 180 days of when the property is damaged, any subsequent use or occupancy of the land or premises must be a conforming use or occupancy.
- No such use shall be expanded, enlarged or altered, including any increase in the volume, intensity or frequency of use of the property where a nonconforming use exists. Expansions and additions to a structure devoted in whole or part to a nonconforming use are prohibited.

# Shoreland Variances and Land Use Permits

## Variances

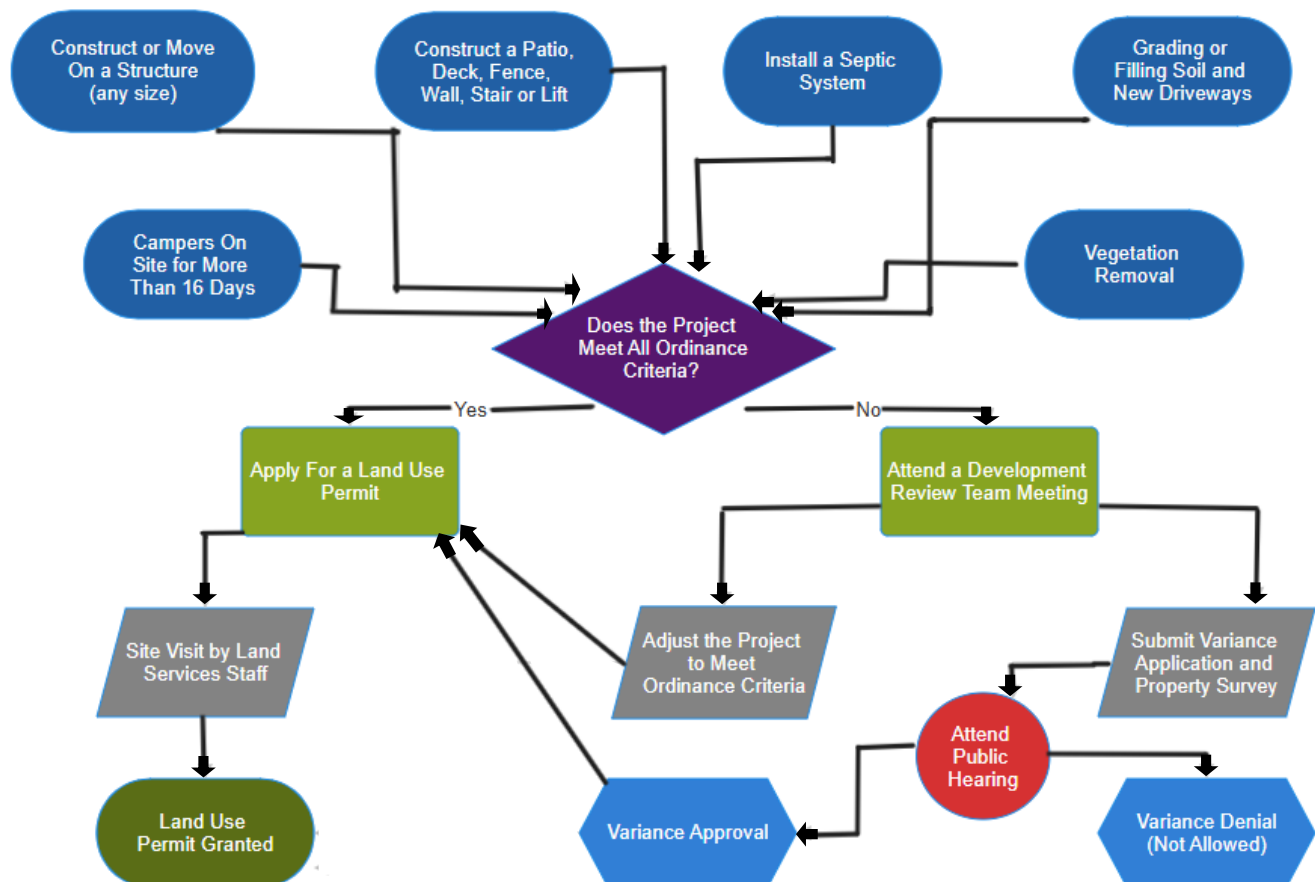
### What is a variance?

A variance is a modification or variation of the provisions of the Morrison County Land Use Control Ordinance. The Board of Adjustment shall not grant an application for a variance unless it determines that the strict enforcement of this Ordinance would cause a practical difficulty, because of circumstances unique to the individual property under consideration and that the granting of such variance(s) will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of this Ordinance.

The Board of Adjustment has the exclusive power to order the issuance of variances from the terms of any official control, including restrictions placed on non-conforming structures. Variances require a public hearing, with notice being provided to neighbors within a distance required in the ordinance.

Before applying for a variance, all applicants must attend a Development Review Team (DRT) meeting with the Land Services Office. This meeting is held virtually twice a month and will inform the applicant of the variance process and allow for any questions, prior to applying for a variance.

## Variance and Land Use Permit Decision Tree





# Aquatic Invasive Species

Invasive species are species that are not native to Minnesota and cause economic, social, or environmental harm, or harm to human health. Minnesota's waters are threatened by a number of invasive species such as zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, curly leaf pondweed, and spiny water flea, just to name a few.

## Clean, Drain, Dry, Dispose

**CLEAN** and remove visible plants, animals, and mud from the boat, trailer, and other boating equipment (anchors, centerboards, rollers, axles). On jet skis, clean out all water intakes and other parts before transporting.

**DRAIN** water from your boat, motor, live well, and bait containers before leaving the water access. You must remove the drain plug and leave it removed prior to leaving any water access and while transporting the boat.

**SPRAY, RINSE, and DRY** boats and recreational equipment before transporting to another water body. Spray/rinse with high pressure and/or hot tap water (above 140 degrees F). This is critical when leaving any zebra mussel infested waters. Or dry for at least five (5) hot, sunny days, preferably more depending on temperature and humidity. Between 60 - 80 degrees air temperature, the optimum drying time is fourteen (14) days above 80 degrees air temperature, seven (7) days

**DISPOSE** of unwanted bait in the trash. Never release live bait. When cleaning off fishing lines while fishing, collect plant fragments in a bucket and dispose of onshore.

## Pull the Plug

**In Minnesota it is unlawful to:**

- Transport aquatic plants, ruffe, round goby, zebra mussel or any other prohibited invasive species on any road.
- Leave any body of water before removing drain plugs and draining all water related equipment (including live wells and bait containers).  
Note: to keep unused bait, drain and replace with tap or spring water.
- Launch a watercraft with aquatic plants, zebra mussels or any prohibited invasive species attached.



Zebra Mussels on a dock wheel

## Current Infested Waters

### Zebra Mussels

Alexander  
Fish Trap  
Crookneck  
Cedar  
Mississippi River

### Eurasian Water Milfoil

Alexander  
Crookneck  
Shamineau



MORRISON COUNTY

Land Services  
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Morrison County is pleased to provide you with this shoreland owners guide. Information on common questions about shoreland property is summarized in this resource. Contact the Land Services Department for complete information or further shoreland questions.

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