

Where Landscape Becomes Habitat

A Sanctuary on the Water. Panacea or Pandora's Box?

Waterfront property intrigues us. But why? Is it the expansive views of the distant borrowed landscape? Or privacy? Are we drawn to the compelling nature of a landscape that magnifies the sensory perception of the weather? Or is it being in the midst of wildlife? Perhaps we welcome its open invitation to a spectrum of recreational possibilities or are motivated by a desire to protect, preserve and celebrate the natural heritage of the land. The personal appeal of shoreline living can vary as much as the personalities and objectives of their owners.



Whatever the reason, the aesthetic design and functional responsibilities of landscape elements can intertwine, just as the sunlight reflects on the water. As landscape architects, we plan for our clients' panaceas so waterfront investments do not become Pandora's boxes of unexpected problems.



At first glance, one might see native grasses swaying in the wind, colorful wildflowers sweeping toward the shore, or meandering pathways where wildlife flourishes and people find respite from hectic days. While natural beauty makes the first impression, it is often the integration of design and natural ecological systems that has the largest impact on environmental sustainability.

Putting systems in place that perpetuate themselves requires the right combination of flora where one species does not dominate another. The right buffer and edge treatments protect the land from the erosive forces of nature. By carefully orchestrating the materials we use, we can design landscapes that flourish with native wildlife, protect eroding shorelines, improve water quality, limit the need for pesticides and fertilizers, and contain the costs of property management.

The process starts with an understanding of the various influences on the land such as soils, drainage, vegetation, historical use, and regulatory guidelines. We are then able to conceive strategies to bring soils, plants, and wildlife into balance. Depending upon the types of wildlife that interest a property owner, it is even possible to create specific habitats that suit the soil and support the vegetation required by specific fauna.

Through environmentally sensitive design and the use of ecological principles, landscapes can be readily transformed into retreats rife with diverse habitats. Plan ahead, and enjoyment will abound for years to come. Plow ahead without the plan and you may be opening a box of costly surprises.

