



# The Sucker Series

## FORESTS

### Buffers: A Last Defense

A buffer is a transitional zone between a developed area and a stream or lake. Benefits of buffers include flood control, critical habitat for wildlife, wetland protection, pollutant reduction, and even increased property value.

If the area between a house and stream is entirely lawn, mowed right down to the stream, the banks can erode due to lack of a root system to hold soil together. A bad buffer is a headache for the stream, not to mention the landowner!

An ideal buffer on a property would give the homeowner a view of the water, but also maintain the natural vegetation near a stream. This helps prevent shoreline erosion, and removes pollutants and provides shade to keep the stream cool for trout.



Photo: A good buffer—protects the stream and gives you privacy!

The next FACT SHEET in the Sucker Series will be on:

### Building and Construction

- What kind of permits do I need?
- Driveway building tips— how to keep your gravel in place
- Tips for dealing with water drainage around your home

### Role of Forests in the Watershed

Forests are a natural and healthy land cover for watersheds. When it comes to quality of water, forests are the best use of the land. There's no pavement to speed up or contaminate runoff to streams. There are no failing septic systems and there is very little erosion in a forest.

Forests act almost like a sponge, as they soak up water and trap sediment and other pollutants.

Forests prevent erosion, by slowing down rain water runoff. This also helps prevent flooding. Water quality benefits



How forest fragmentation starts...

aside, forests also provide important wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and renewable building products.

Proper stewardship of forest land is essential to sustaining and restoring the health of watersheds. Forests and forestry practices are critical components of healthy watersheds. Turn to the back of this fact sheet to find out how the County plans for forestry management and learn what you can do on your land— through forest stewardship planning and caring for trees around your home!

### WHAT'S A RAIN GARDEN?

The [North Shore Community School](#) is planting a garden, and its not just for pretty flowers! Rain gardens look like regular gardens, but they also control erosion and clean stormwater runoff. The rain garden was planned by the school's watershed class, led by parent volunteer [Mike Nordin](#) and curriculum coordinator [B.J. Kohlstedt](#). The South St. Louis Soil & Water Conservation District will provide technical support. The garden will be planted in May, and includes a rain barrel to keep plants happy!

COUNTY FOREST MANAGEMENT:  
**THE CHALLENGE OF OLD TIMBER**

The largest percentage of land ownership in the Sucker River Watershed is that managed by the County. In plat books, these lands are listed as "State of MN - Tax Forfeited". They were forfeited to the State in the 1930's, but are administered today by St. Louis County. The Land Department is responsible for managing these forest resources in a sound and sustainable manner.

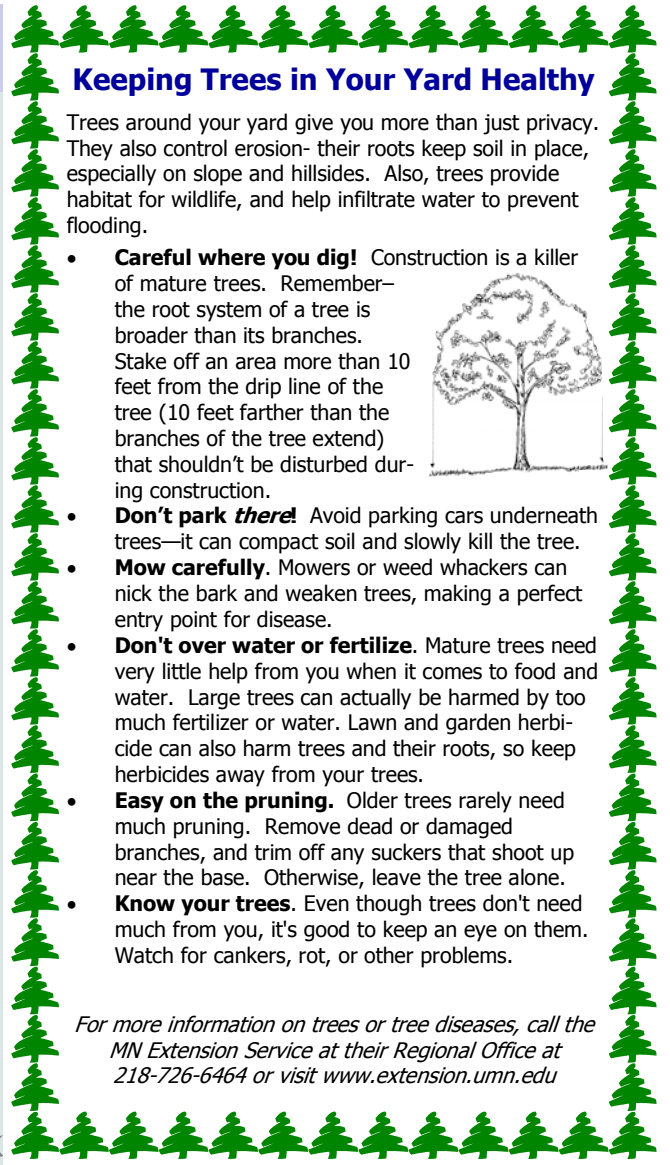
County forest lands within the Sucker watershed are dominated by aging birch and aspen forest stands. The majority are second-growth stands, which resulted from pine logging days of the early 1900's, followed by extensive forest fires in the 1920's and 30's. This history is why most of the aspen and birch are reaching old age at the same time.

Birch and aspen are old trees when they are 70+ years. After this, they begin to show distinct decline and mortality. Take a close look at the tops of the trees in many (if not all) of the birch stands in the watershed, and you will see clear indications of dieback: sparse foliage, dead branches, and standing dead trees. Both aspen and birch are "pioneer" species, they rely on site disturbance to regenerate.

Fire and early logging historically provided this disturbance factor, yielding the forest mix we see today. Without these disturbances and the open sunlight they provide, we see declining stands being replaced largely by brush species such as hazel, mountain maple, and alder, with spotty tree growth of aspen and balsam fir. This yields undesirable, low density, brush-filled forest stands.

The County's challenge with dominant aging aspen/birch timber types is to carefully provide the disturbance factor needed to promote healthy regeneration and healthy forests. We accomplish this through well planned and carried out forest harvest. The Land Department works to protect water, wildlife, and aesthetic values through sale design and administration. We follow Forest Management Guidelines (<http://www.frc.state.mn.us>) to assure all stands are regenerated to young, healthy forest.

If you have questions, contact Randy Roff, St. Louis County Land Dept. at 218.625.3700 or visit <http://www.co.st-louis.mn.us/land.htm>



**Keeping Trees in Your Yard Healthy**

Trees around your yard give you more than just privacy. They also control erosion- their roots keep soil in place, especially on slope and hillsides. Also, trees provide habitat for wildlife, and help infiltrate water to prevent flooding.



- **Careful where you dig!** Construction is a killer of mature trees. Remember- the root system of a tree is broader than its branches. Stake off an area more than 10 feet from the drip line of the tree (10 feet farther than the branches of the tree extend) that shouldn't be disturbed during construction.
- **Don't park there!** Avoid parking cars underneath trees-it can compact soil and slowly kill the tree.
- **Mow carefully.** Mowers or weed whackers can nick the bark and weaken trees, making a perfect entry point for disease.
- **Don't over water or fertilize.** Mature trees need very little help from you when it comes to food and water. Large trees can actually be harmed by too much fertilizer or water. Lawn and garden herbicide can also harm trees and their roots, so keep herbicides away from your trees.
- **Easy on the pruning.** Older trees rarely need much pruning. Remove dead or damaged branches, and trim off any suckers that shoot up near the base. Otherwise, leave the tree alone.
- **Know your trees.** Even though trees don't need much from you, it's good to keep an eye on them. Watch for cankers, rot, or other problems.

For more information on trees or tree diseases, call the MN Extension Service at their Regional Office at 218-726-6464 or visit [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu)

**Forest Stewardship: A plan for your land-management goals**

If you own 20 acres or more in the Sucker River watershed, you are eligible for Forest Stewardship Plan assistance. With Forest Stewardship, you will get a practical plan to help manage your land, and a plan to keep your forest healthy into the future. You can specify goals you have for managing your property and map out the action steps needed to meet those goals, all while helping protect the Sucker River.

A professional forester will write a plan for you at NO cost or obligation. The forester will conduct an evaluation of your forest's condition, and provide recommendations to keep your forest healthy and meet your goals as a landowner.

Phil and Babs Strom, Sucker River watershed residents since 1977, had many goals in mind as they went through the planning process. "The privacy and independence we

get from our land is a reward, and being a good steward of our land is a responsibility.", said Phil.

Enhancing wildlife habitat was a goal of the Stroms, along with protecting the white pines on his land. They created a wildlife pond on their property, and recently saw a brood of 9 mallards being raised near it. They plan on adding wood duck houses this summer. The forester also showed the Stroms where there was blight in their white pine stands. The forester showed them which trees need to be taken out to prevent spreading to the rest of the white pines.



Managing land to enhance wildlife was a priority for Phil Strom in his 2003 Forest Stewardship Plan

"The Plan is an ongoing benefit", said Phil. "I consider my Forest Stewardship Plan a work-in-progress. There's always more I can do. Twenty-five years after I retire, I'll still be busy!"