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Landscaping at the Water's Edge: Challenges in Promoting Ecological Based Practices to Homeowners and Their Service Providers

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Abstract Text:

A newly developed education, outreach and training program focused on moving a homeowner's landscaping choices towards a more sustainable and functional design has been created by a multidisciplinary team of extension specialists ranging from environmental horticulturists and turf experts to water quality scientists. It has been piloted to mixed audiences (homeowners, community decision-makers and turf/horticultural/landscaping service providers) through a variety of means (short talks, one day and two day workshops). The centerpiece of this effort is a new manual: "Landscaping at the Water's Edge: An Ecological Approach" which includes an overview of the importance and functions of shoreland and upland vegetation in relation to water quality and ecological function, site assessment and protocols for dealing with runoff, 10 basic design principles to enhance water quality, design planning and progression, plant selection advice, planting and maintenance guidance (including integrated pest management) for shrubs, woody plants and turf. This presentation will provide a brief overview of the project, our outreach philosophy and the design principles, as well as discuss the challenges faced in the "social marketing" of the sustainable and functional elements. Early evaluations have been very positive for all audiences. The key to our varied approach for each audience is to positively focus on the benefits as opposed to the facts, and also include the messages in the context of our shoreline regulations. Thus, we have provided both the "carrots" and the "stick" to hopefully move our target audience from knowledge to behavioral change.

Impact Statement:

We address the critical problem of limiting the impacts of shoreline landscaping practices by homeowners and the persons they employ to manage their grounds. Through encouraging the use of vegetative buffer treatments and on-site runoff minimization and mitigation we are insuring reduced runoff quantities and resulting water quality and wildlife habitat improvements.