

# Assessing Your Property

## The First Step in Developing a Streambank or Shoreline Landscape.

A careful assessment of your property provides a framework for your landscape design by helping you make important decisions about your riparian restoration project. This fact sheet will help you develop a base map to assess your property. This is the first step in designing a streambank or shoreline landscape plan using native plants.

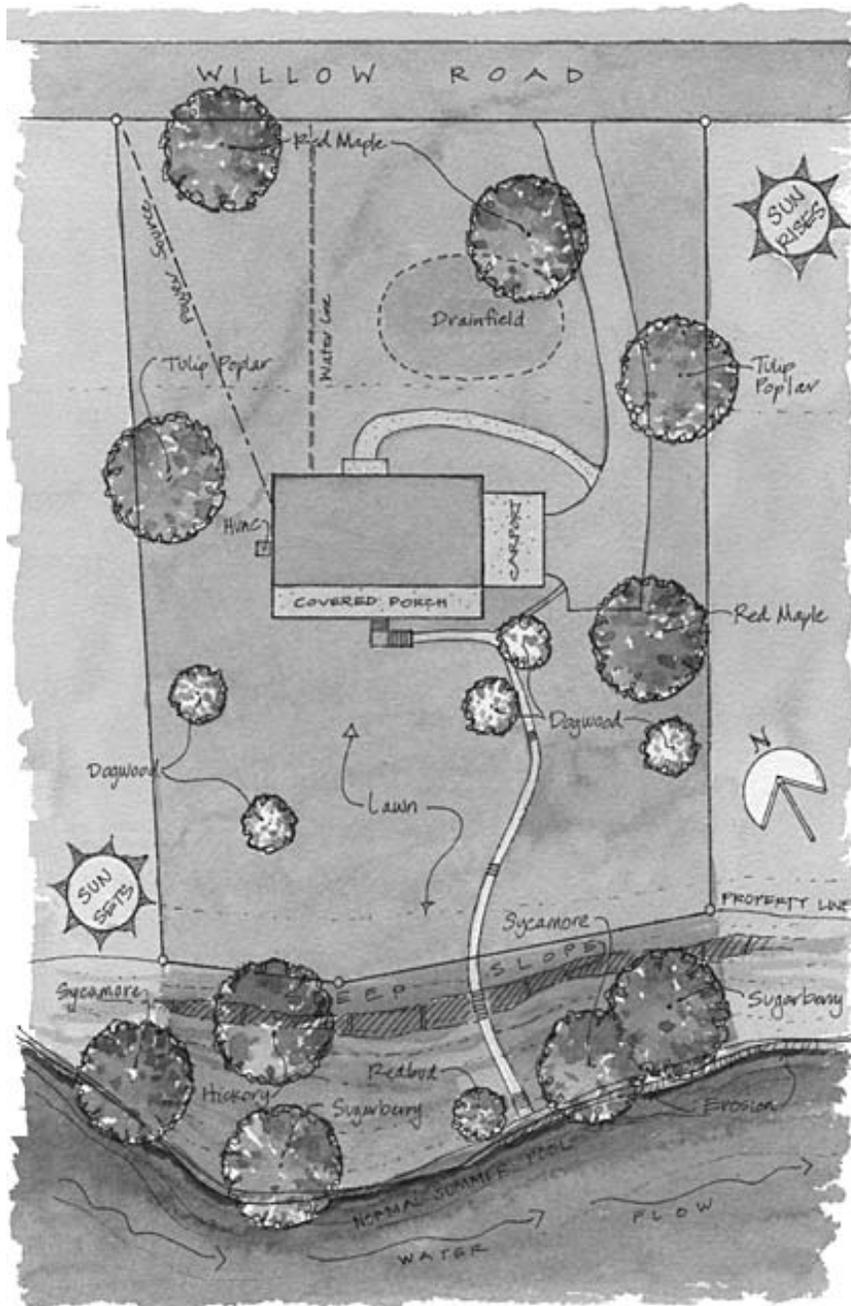
Before developing your landscape plan, it helps to have a map of your property. The map provides an overhead perspective of existing structures and conditions. You can draw your own map or hire a professional. Be sure any public land is clearly and accurately marked. Also indicate the flood line, or high-water mark, if applicable.

Your map needs to include the following:

### 1. Existing structures, including:

- Property lines
- House, garage and other structures
- Driveway
- Swimming pool
- Patios/decks
- Paved and unpaved walkways
- Water use facilities

*Your house, garage, driveway and patio are impervious surfaces – they do not absorb water. Water that drains over land to another location is called runoff. Designing your landscape to manage runoff will help prevent erosion.*



## 2. Utilities and infrastructure, including:

- Municipal sewer lines, septic tanks, and drain fields
- Natural gas and water lines
- Overhead and under ground utilities, such as electric, telephone, and cable lines

*If you want to plant in a utility right of way, contact the appropriate utility provider. Keep in mind, if you do plant in a right-of-way, the utility company may have the right to cut or remove any vegetation.*

## 3. Existing natural features, including:

- Trees, shrubs, flower beds, and other plants
- Lawns and other vegetated areas
- Any features that may require special attention such as hills, bluffs, rock outcroppings, steep slopes, etc.
- Existing or potential erosion problems
- Wet areas or wetlands
- Bare or sparsely vegetated areas
- Existing vegetation you want to preserve
- Drainage patterns

*Identifying existing plants will help you decide which ones to keep and which ones to remove. Plant guides and tree identification books can help you identify your plants. Most guides will note if a plant is native. Another alternative is to consult with a local expert such as a botanist, forester, LWRD personnel or landscape designer.*

#### 4. Light patterns

- Locate north, south, east, and west on your map. This information will help you decide particular areas. If a shoreline faces south or west, it is usually drier and hotter; if it faces north or east it will more likely be damper and cooler.
- Note patterns of sunlight and shade every three hours. If possible, note summer and winter sun/shade patterns on your map. Think of these areas of sunlight and shade in terms of the three categories below:
  - Full sun – sites that receive at least 8 hours of direct sunlight each day
  - Partial sun – sites that receive 3 to 6 hours of direct sunlight each day
  - Full shade – sites that receive less than 3 hours of direct sunlight each day



## Areas used by wildlife



#### 5. Areas used by wildlife

View your property in the morning, afternoon and evening and observe the visiting wildlife. Mammals may be hard to spot, but you can walk your property and look for telltale signs such as tracks, burrows, and dens. Think of the wildlife in the following categories:

- Birds – Songbirds, ducks, hawks, owls, herons, etc.
- Small mammals – Chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, etc.
- Large mammals – Deer, foxes, etc.
- Insects – Butterflies, moths, mayflies, dragonflies, etc.
- Amphibians – Frogs, toads, salamanders, etc.
- Reptiles – Turtles, snakes, lizards, etc.

*Note whether the animals use your property for food, cover or nesting. Make a list of the ones you have seen and mark the areas they visit on your map. If you see very little wildlife, make a list of the kinds you would like to attract. When choosing your plants, you can select species that provide food and shelter for the animals you like to watch.*

## 6. Moisture conditions

Look at your land and decide which of the descriptions below best fits the area. These conditions will help you decide which plants are suited for those areas. You may have a combination of site conditions on your property. Be sure to mark these on your map.

**Dry upland** – Upland sites with soils that are normally dry and well drained. Examples include dry woodlands, dry grasslands and sandy, graveled slopes.

**Moist upland** – Upland sites with rich, fertile soils that are typically moist but not saturated. Examples include rich, moist woods and moderately moist grassland areas.

**Water's edge** – Sites that are temporarily saturated or shallowly flooded during the growing season. Examples include streambank, shoreline or floodplain areas prone to occasional flooding.

**Wetlands and standing water** – Sites that are saturated or shallowly flooded for most of the growing season. Examples include shallow water along the margins of reservoirs, streams, or wetlands that have standing water for most of the growing season.

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## 7. Nearby features

Make note of features you would like to screen with vegetation (houses, roads, utility lines, etc.) and scenic views you would like to frame (streams, river, reservoir, etc.). Note the plant height and spread necessary for screening or framing. Mark them on your map.

### Other Considerations

**Soil Testing** – Soil pH, a measure of acidity, is not something to include on your map but it is a good idea to have it tested. Whether your soil is acidic, neutral, or basic will be a determining factor in preparing your site and choosing your native plants. Testing the soil pH will help you select plants that are properly suited to your site. Many plants will survive outside their preferred pH range; however they will not flourish and may be more sensitive to other pressures such as drought or pests.

**Budgeting** – Converting property to a more natural state may seem expensive at first, but the long-term benefits of less maintenance and lower costs can outweigh the initial investment. Several approaches to developing a native landscape are available. Letting nature take its course is less expensive than buying trees, shrubs and other vegetation, but it takes longer to establish an effective native landscape. Sowing seeds is less expensive than landscaping with container-grown plants but seed-grown plants take longer to establish. Choose a plan you can afford and remember: you don't have to do it all in one year.

**Permitting** – Before disrupting any shoreline, please contact your local DNR, Zoning or LWRD office.