

Got Geese?

If you live on a lake, pond or stream, the likely answer is, yes. Depending on your point of view these geese are either a blessing or a curse. What can you do about geese on your lake or property?

These big birds have a voracious appetite that in the end deposits an average of 28 droppings per day totaling 1 to 1 ½ pound of feces. Because these birds have a rudimentary digestive system, they eat frequently and expel their partly digested remains in short order. One estimate clocked the bill to butt time in just seven minutes. During mid-day and again at night these geese spend time within the relative safety of their local resting area or roost “the lake out your front window”. City parks and golf courses are often hard hit as small ponds surrounded by acres and acres of lawn provide ideal conditions for these adaptable turf moochers.

As a property owner your concern might be related to geese impacts on your lawn or how all that goose poop is impacting the water quality in nearby lakes other wetlands.

Geese and water quality. While studies have shown that the greatest impact is on small shallow lakes, the following actions are recommended to all lakeshore property owners.

Don't feed ducks or geese. What seems like great fun can easily turn into a nuisance problem quickly. Your lake doesn't need the small amount of extra imported nutrients from the corn, oats or even popcorn you are providing. Remember just seven minutes from bill to butt. The birds will do just fine on their own- we call them wildlife for a reason. Even if you view them as fantastic creatures to have on your front lawn many other folks may not see it that way. The Department of Natural Resources and local officials receive numerous complaints from goose weary property owners every spring, summer and fall.

Limit Lawns. With the loss of prairies and savannahs, lawns next to water provide ideal habitat for Canada Geese. Like all animals, habitat is the key for successful goose growth. While it's not the entire answer, goose-feeding habitat is something you can control on your lakeshore. A number of researchers have found that geese prefer new growth stimulated by frequent mowing – the same thing that turf experts recommend for managing lawns. As the grasses get taller they are less palatable. Geese also have a preference for fertilized grass over non-fertilized turf. Not fertilizing and allowing the grass near the waters edge grow taller and tougher will help discourage goose grazing. Geese get nervous in confined spaces without a good view at goose eye level. Planting patches of taller vegetation will help discourage goose use on you property. Vegetation management is the most frequent recommended practice for controlling goose use in parks, golf courses and lakeshore property.

Reconsider your view of the perfect shoreline. We are devoted to our lawns and for some very nice reasons. However, as they slowly blanket the natural landscapes of our shorelines they eliminate habitat for many lakeshore critters that live in this vital edge of our lakes. Think about a view to the lake through the trees rather than without them. Consider leaving an unmowed strip 35 feet or more in width - slowly this area will re-establish a vegetative zone of taller grasses, shrubs, saplings and eventually trees – just the kind of stuff that geese want to avoid. Leaving a mowed access path will provide a nice corridor for getting to and from the lake while minimizing the goose greens along the water. A serpentine path eliminates the direct view geese desire and will help discourage them from traveling to the turf area behind the taller vegetation bordering the shore. Turf behind this vegetative buffer can provide you enjoyment and is less likely to be used by geese as they ponder what unknown creature is lurking in the buffer.

Ultimately limiting the amount of suitable habitat and the size of the goose population will provide long-term solutions. Finally, most surveys of lakeshore owners suggest that viewing wildlife is a high priority. With this in mind perhaps a little tolerance for wildlife maybe the easiest solution in most situations.

