

## **Governor's Clean Water Initiative: Shoreland Rules Update Project Article Number 3**

**DNR NEWS**

**Summer 2005**

### **Your Lake, Our Lakes: Shorelands Deserve Conservation Designs for Subdivisions and Planned Unit Developments**

By Paul Radomski and Russ Schultz

Shorelands are Minnesota's greatest asset, and they are easily degraded. Traditional lot and block development and Minnesota's current planned unit development standards are not preserving our shoreland asset.

Conventional subdivisions with uniform lots and blocks spread development throughout a parcel of land without considering natural or cultural features. And planned unit developments (PUDs), which were encouraged under Minnesota's 1970s-era shoreland development standards, allowed greater home densities along the lake with the expectation of preserving open space. Unfortunately, these standards have given us higher densities near the water, with few useful natural features preserved for recreation or wildlife habitat.

One good development alternative is conservation subdivisions. This method of development is characterized by clustering homes adjacent to permanently preserved common open space.

Conservation subdivisions are similar to golf course developments. First, critical natural areas and community recreational areas are identified and protected. Then, buildable areas are identified and a majority of the lots and homes are clustered around these protected areas.

Developers can still build at full residential densities, and they often sell lots at a premium because many of us prefer living next to permanently preserved open space.

Conservation subdivisions have additional benefits. They create a greater sense of community and more interaction with the outdoor environment. Open spaces provide walking and biking areas, play areas, and community gathering places. Protected natural areas mean lower development costs, preservation of wildlife habitat, and less pollution runoff into lakes and wetlands.

All this leads to both higher property values and higher community value, which strengthens local economies. In addition, these developments do not require public entities or charities to establish open space areas for our communities.

Planned unit developments were envisioned to achieve the same benefits as conservation subdivisions, however, the 1970s-era open space standards were ambiguous and weak. Thus, many of the open space amenity benefits never were realized.

Many people are now seeking higher standards for planned unit developments that local communities can add to their ordinances. These new standards could define clustering, include both quantity and quality of open space, and use residential housing densities without density bonuses.

New standards could also include density disincentives for conventional subdivisions, so developers who do not include community open space would need to use significantly larger lots.

The Governor's Clean Water Initiative pilot project in the north central lakes area aims is bringing people together to create an alternative set of shoreland development standards in the lakes area. Citizens working on the Shoreland Rules Update project have been discussing the merits of these concepts, and are considering higher planned unit development standards and the use of conservation subdivision model ordinances to protect lake water quality. The updated standards developed by this project could serve as the foundation for local government administered ordinances.

Details of the Shoreland Rules Update project can be found at:  
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/waters> [click on the Governor's Clean Water Initiative link]. Email comments to [shorelandupdate@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:shorelandupdate@dnr.state.mn.us) .

Paul Radomski, research scientist, and Russ Schultz, hydrologist, both work at the DNR at the Brainerd area office.