

Governor's Clean Water Initiative: Shoreland Rules Update Project Article Number 5

DNR NEWS

Summer 2005

Your Lake, Our Lakes: Resorts are important to Minnesota

By Paul Radomski and Russ Schultz

Minnesota is blessed with hundreds of lake resorts. Families from across the country and abroad spend time at these wonderful places to connect with nature and reaffirm family ties.

Resorts provide us the opportunity to live near a lakeshore, even though it is usually for only a short time. And given the increasing cost of lakehome ownership, resorts represent an affordable way for many of us to explore our lakes. Minnesota resort vacations offer a range activities, from viewing wildlife, swimming and waterskiing, catching fish, exploring nearby small communities, playing golf, to getting away from the daily routine. Accommodations range from suites to rustic cabins.

Minnesota resorts have adapted to changing vacation styles and demands. In the early 1900s, lake resorts hosted vacationing families and were often retreats for wealthy city dwellers. In the mid part of the last century, the typical up north resort consisted of small lakeside cabins to serve the simple and rustic needs of fishermen. Today, resorts cater both to middle-class and wealthy families seeking recreation in natural environments. Resorts have also adjusted to different lengths of vacation, from several weeks to the average of four days today.

Resorts are also vital to our north central Minnesota economy. Resort visits annually generate millions of dollars to local economies. And their guests contribute to the success of other businesses when they explore restaurants, shops, and local entertainment.

While there are several large resorts in the state, many of which are located in the Brainerd Lakes Area, 90 percent of the resorts in north central Minnesota have less than 20 cabins. About half the resorts are 10 acres or less in size, and most resorts are seasonal, being fully operational from May to September. Most resorts are also family businesses. Many of these entrepreneurs have gross sales between \$25,000 and \$100,000. While it is a hard job, there are considerable lifestyle and family benefits of owning a resort.

The increasing value of lakeshore property negatively affects resort properties. For some resorts the land value of the resort exceeds the value of the business. Add this factor to increasing operating costs from higher insurance and the necessity for more amenities for guests, resort owners face issues of sustainability.

Resort owners have told us about the need for flexible shoreland development regulations for Minnesota's resorts. Currently, resorts are classed as planned unit developments within Minnesota's shoreland development standards, and thus, they are similarly classed in many local ordinances across Minnesota. However, 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.

Such changes, while needed to address shortcomings of existing planned unit development standards, are not appropriate for resorts. Given their cultural and economic value to the state, creating standards specific to resorts that give flexibility, while improving rainwater management and promoting natural shorelines, would be beneficial.

Governor Pawlenty's Clean Water Initiative pilot project in the north central lakes area aims to bring 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 need for specific resort standards that offer protection to lake water quality, while addressing the interests of resort owners. The updated standards adopted in this project could serve as the foundation for local government 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 .

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

#####