



Building Better Buffers

Alternative Practices

What are Alternative Practices?

Alternative practices provide comparable or sometimes better water quality benefits than a full-width buffer and apply to property used for cultivation farming. The use of alternative practices is determined in consultation with local soil and water conservation districts, landowners and/or drainage authorities to meet the conservation goals Minnesota's buffer law without a 50-foot maximum or 30-foot minimum width buffer.



Decision Support Tool

The Decision Support Tool was developed by the Minnesota Corn Growers Association and the University of Minnesota Extension to recommend an appropriate buffer width. The tool is based on scientific research, and takes into account site-specific considerations and best management practices to recommend an appropriate buffer width. Find the [Decision Support Tool](#) on BWSR's website.



Alternative practice #2 (NRCS Filter Strip Standard: MN Practice #393) shown above is an example of a buffer reduced to 30-feet based on the practice standard. This alternative practice takes into account farming practices, soil types and slopes to determine a required width to effectively filter sediment and nutrients from runoff.

Buffer Law Requirements

- ◆ **Public Waters:** 50-ft average, 30-ft minimum width buffer
- ◆ **Public Ditches:** 16.5-width buffer
- ◆ **Alternative Practices:** Practices that provide water quality benefits comparable to full-width buffers may apply in some situations, along with reduced width buffers.
- ◆ **Buffers must consist of perennial vegetation, not row crops or noxious or invasive weeds**

ABOUT THE SERIES: Building Better Buffers is a series of guides offering voluntary options to landowners who want to improve their existing buffers. They provide information about improving buffers for increased water quality, enhanced habitat, and forestry, plus ideas for buffer maintenance and alternative practice options.



Contact your Local Soil and Water Conservation District

SWCDs can provide technical assistance and let you know if alternative practices can apply to your land. They may also be able to provide locally approved alternative practices or provide funding to implement practices.

Alternative Practice Types

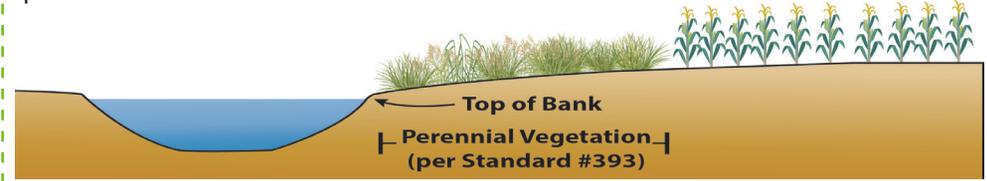
Conservation Tillage/Cover Crops Public Waters

This alternative practice implements tillage management and/or cover crops with a vegetated filter strip and NRCS standards to provide water quality benefits comparable to a full width buffer.



NRCS Filter Strip Public Waters

This alternative practice for public waters implements NRCS filter strip standards and takes into account farming practices, soil types, and slopes to determine a required width to effectively filter sediment and nutrients from runoff before entering the watercourse. This alternative practice also addresses areas of concentrated flow and erosion.



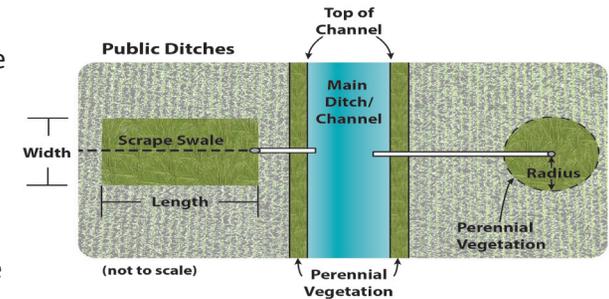
Grassed Waterways/Cultivated Watercourses Public Waters

This alternative practice may be applicable where there is no clearly defined bed or bank and no normal water level; and a resource concern has been identified. It implements NRCS standards to stabilize flows and address resource concerns.



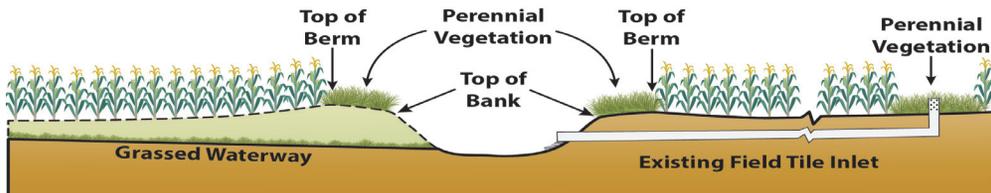
Negative Slopes/Concentrated Inflow/Glacial Lake Plain Areas Public Ditches

These alternative practices may be applicable when the land slope is away from the top of the bank of public ditches or there is an existing berm preventing flow from uniformly entering the waterbody. Water must be treated prior to entering the ditch (side water inlets, open tile intakes, concentrated flows).



Negative Slopes/Concentrated Inflows Public Waters

This alternative practice may be applicable where the land slope is away from the top of the bank of public watercourses or there is an existing berm that prevents flow from uniformly entering the waterbody. Water must be treated prior to entering the public ditch. A 16.5 ft minimum buffer is required with this alternative practice.



Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program Public Waters/Public Ditches

Landowners who are certified under the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program are considered compliant under the buffer law. This program, administered by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), is a voluntary program for landowners who implement best practices throughout their entire operation to protect water quality. Contact MDA or your local SWCD office for more information.



*Diagrams are not drawn to scale