

What are “Living Shorelines?”

Living shorelines are an increasingly popular approach to erosion control that use strategically placed plants, stone and sand to deflect wave action, conserve soil and simultaneously provide critical shoreline habitat. Living shorelines often stand up to wave energy better than solid bulkheads or revetments, which add to the problem by amplifying waves on neighboring shores. Ironically, these hardened structures often increase the rate of coastal erosion, remove the ability of the shoreline to carry out natural processes, and provide little habitat for estuarine species.

On the other hand, Living Shoreline management techniques can prevent shoreline erosion while maintaining the benefits to wildlife and water quality that a natural shoreline provides. Jeff Opel, district manager of the Anne Arundel County Soil Conservation District in Maryland, saw dramatic evidence of this during Hurricane Isabel in 2003:

“We flew most of the county shoreline by helicopter shortly before the hurricane hit, and we flew it again about 90 days later. There was really significant damage along walls and bulkheads, and along riprap,” Opel said. “But when we looked at where we’d done nonstructural work, and at wetlands along the main front of the Bay, we saw very little damage to the shoreline itself. We were very surprised. It told us we were on to something.”

Other benefits from living shorelines include:

- Less bank erosion and property loss, especially during storms
- Lower erosion control construction costs
- Natural and visually pleasing views
- A beach for boat launching, sunbathing and swimming
- Restored marine habitat and spawning area for fish and shellfish
- Improved water quality

Support for Living Shoreline management has grown over the past several years and many environmental agencies and groups now offer both technical and financial support for their construction. There is a wealth of information about Living Shorelines on the Internet. The following links are good places to start:

NOAA’s “Living Shorelines Portal”

http://habitat.noaa.gov/restorationtechniques/public/shoreline_tab1.cfm has info

on implementation techniques, current NOAA shoreline projects, federal and state contacts, and links to other resources and publications.

Maryland Shorelines Online is maintained by Maryland's DNR and the Maryland Coastal Program, and provides FAQs about Living Shorelines and information about available technical and financial assistance for communities and homeowners interested in these restoration techniques.

<http://shorelines.dnr.state.md.us/living.asp>

Fact sheet about Living Shorelines produced by the Virginia Dept of the Environment (pdf doc may take a while to load):

<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/documents/lfactsheet.pdf>

An article from *The Bay Journal* (published by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and the Chesapeake Bay Trust) on Living Shorelines:

<http://www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article=2651&print=yes>

This website provides restoration information and online tours of Living Shorelines implemented at the Patuxent River's Jefferson Patterson Park. ("Tours" may take a while to download.)

<http://www.jefpat.org/Living%20Shorelines/lsmainpage.htm>