

MARATHON COUNTY ANIMAL WASTE AND CROPLAND MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE



All actions and requirements listed below will only go into effect if/when the Animal Waste and Cropland Management Ordinance amendments are adopted

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) -Buffers-

Q | How do I know if I am required to have a buffer on my property?

- A
- All cropland, pasture, and/or agricultural land that is adjacent to a DNR mapped stream and/or has been identified on the Buffer-Protection Maps will be required to have a perennial vegetated buffer. The map will be available on the Marathon County website. Farms that already have buffers in place need to take no action.
 - Landowners and/or operators can request Conservation, Planning, and Zoning (CPZ) Department verification for specific properties if they feel that there is an error on the Buffer-Protection maps.

Q | Can you describe what buffers are and what they do?

- A
- Buffers are an undeveloped, vegetated area along a stream, river, or other waterbodies that protect water quality and enhance the environment. They act as a transitional zone between land and water, filtering pollutants from runoff, reducing erosion, and providing habitat and food for wildlife.
 - It is estimated that in a dairy cropland rotation, that a 35-foot-wide buffer would reduce phosphorus runoff by an average of 59%, and soil loss/runoff by 81%.
 - It is estimated that in a cash grain cropland rotation, that a 35-foot-wide buffer would reduce phosphorus runoff by an average of 78%, and soil loss/runoff of 89%.

Q | What would need to be planted and established?

- A
- The buffer can be existing or native vegetation (i.e., if a natural buffer is already in place with at least 70% ground cover, no new buffer needs to be established).
 - The buffers should result in a minimum 70% ground cover, and if the buffer is being newly established, it needs to result in at least 50% perennial grasses.
 - Alfalfa **cannot** be planted in the buffer area.
 - Some **example** seed mixes would be (*this is not an exhaustive list of what can be planted*):
 - 1) Orchard grass (1 lb/acre), redtop grass (1 lb/acre), timothy grass (2 lbs/acre), ladino clover (0.5 lb/acre), and red clover (5 lbs/acre)
 - 2) Tall fescue (13 lbs/acre), perennial ryegrass (9lbs/acre), redtop grass (1 lb/acre), red clover (2 lbs/acre), and white clover (1 lb/acre)

Q

Can it be a harvestable buffer? How much vegetation has to be left?

A

- Yes, the buffer can be clipped or harvested. (It is recommended that the buffer can be clipped to no less than 4".)
- 70% ground cover needs to be maintained.
- The buffer can be lightly grazed by livestock as long as 70% ground cover is maintained and no animal waste is deposited in to surface waters.

Q

Where do you measure the 35-foot buffer width from?

A

- The 35 feet of perennial vegetation is to be measured from the top or the crown of the bank. Where there is no defined bank, the measurement must be made from the center of the concentrated flow channel.

Q

Is tillage and/or fertilizer allowed in the buffer area?

A

- A minimal amount of fertilizer is allowed to establish a new buffer seeding. If no soil test is available, apply 150 lbs/acre of 20-10-10 fertilizer. This is equivalent to 30 lbs/acre nitrogen, 15 lbs/acre phosphate (P₂O₅), and 15 lbs/acre potash.
- **After buffer establishment, no nutrients are to be applied in this area.**
- Tillage is allowed **only** for establishment or renovation of the buffer area.

Q

Can I enroll these buffer areas into governmental incentive programs?

A

- Yes, it is highly recommended that landowners explore the various options that are available through cost-share programs, and incentivize the establishment and management of buffers. Programs are available through the Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department, and the USDA-NRCS Field Office. However, there are criteria for eligibility for these programs, and not all will be eligible. Reach out to CPZ (715-261-6006) or you're the Wausau NRCS Field Office (715-848-2330) to explore eligibility for programs that cost-share and/or incentivize the implementation and management of buffers.

Q

How long would farms have to come into compliance with the new requirement?

A

- While the implementation date has yet to be determined by Marathon County's Environmental Resource Committee (ERC), it has been suggested by the Marathon County Animal Waste Management Ordinance Workgroup that there is a delayed implementation date of **January 1, 2030, for buffers.**

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO VIEW THE ENTIRE ORDINANCE WITH THE DRAFTED CHANGES, VISIT THE MARATHON COUNTY WEBSITE AT THESE LINKS!

<https://www.marathoncounty.gov/awnm>

