



<https://chautauquawatershed.org/>

The Lake's Masked Defense

By Carol Markham, CWC Conservationist

All our lives have drastically changed. COVID-19 has been with us for more than a year now. Who would have thought that the activities we do daily would ever have been affected in so many ways? Not traveling (even locally), spending more time at home, social distancing, washing and sanitizing hands constantly, and wearing face masks...all new and different daily routines that we now do to stay healthy and stop the spread.



We have all probably wondered at some time...how does a face mask actually protect us? A COVID face mask is intended to trap respiratory droplets that are released when the wearer talks, coughs, or sneezes. It also acts as a barrier to protect the wearer from inhaling droplets released by others. The most effective cloths masks are made of multiple layers of tightly woven fabric, like cotton. A mask with layers will stop more droplets from getting through your mask or escaping from it.

This oddly sounds familiar when thinking about our Chautauqua lakeshore area. As a lakefront homeowner or someone who enjoys and values the areas in and around the lake, you have probably heard once or twice about the importance of lakefront buffers or vegetated lakeshores. Sometimes it's difficult to understand the importance of and science behind certain things. To the unknowing eye, tall shoreline grasses and plants around the lake may seem like an unnecessary nuisance that impedes views of the water, but this vegetation actually serves an important purpose.

Simply put, a lakefront buffer is a lake's COVID face mask.

Shoreline trees, shrubs, and perennial plants trap soil and pollution before it reaches the lake. Trees and shrubs intercept raindrops and reduce their impact on the soil while low growing plants and dead plant material layer filter runoff. The deep tangled root system of trees and shrubs hold soil in place and absorb water and nutrients. Lakeshore buffer strips act as a barrier to protect the lake from “inhaling” too many nutrients or soil and perfectly filter runoff from rain, nearby streets, and neighboring yards. The most effective buffers are made up of multiple layers of different kinds of plants that are woven together and enhance privacy, filter noise and wind, plus attract birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. This layered shoreline vegetation, just like your face mask, will stop more nutrients, soil, and debris from getting through the buffer and escaping to the lake.

Landscaping and managing your lake shoreline to protect and/or restore buffer vegetation, like diligently wearing your face mask, is the most important way you can help keep the lake healthy and clean and still have a low-maintenance, great-looking property. Unfortunately, there are no vaccines for the lake, so these vegetative masks are necessary for optimal lake health and safety.

For all the things you love, wear a mask, both cloth and plant...for yourself, your community, your yard, and the lake!

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams, wetlands and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. For more information, call 716-664-2166 or visit www.chautauquawatershed.org or www.facebook.com/chautauquawatershed.



71 East Fairmount Avenue, PO Box 45

Lakewood, NY 14750

info@chautauquawatershed.org

716-664-2166