

NATURAL FEATURE SETBACK



PURPOSE & HIGHLIGHTS OF ORDINANCE

- In general, the purpose of a natural feature setback is to minimize the potential impacts of adjacent land uses on the natural feature and maximize the long-term viability of the natural feature. The setback area is often vegetated and in many cases left in its natural state. Setbacks are commonly used to protect a community's water resources such as rivers, lakes, streams, marshes, etc. but can be used for any type of natural feature.
- Setbacks perform a number of significant functions including reducing water temperature; filtering sediments and other contaminants from stormwater; reducing nutrient loads to lakes; stabilizing stream banks with vegetation; providing riparian wildlife habitat; maintaining and protecting fish habitats; forming aquatic food webs; and providing a visually appealing greenbelt and recreational opportunities.
- Establishing the width of a setback so it is effective depends on the type and sensitivity of the natural feature and the expected impacts of surrounding land uses. The twenty-five (25) foot setback established by this model ordinance represents a compromise between scientific evidence, experience, and practicality. As a result, the ordinance is less restrictive on property owners, yet provides some measure of environmental protection. It is up to individual communities to develop setback requirements for varying natural features.
- For the purpose of this ordinance the definition of a natural feature means wetlands or watercourses, as they are defined by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). However, natural features can be more broadly defined to include, but not limited to, endangered species habitat, 100-year floodplain, landmark trees, steep slopes, and woodlands.

