
Buffer Options *for the* Bay

WHAT IS A BUFFER?

A buffer is something that reduces the shock of contact. A mediator is a buffer for people in conflict. An airbag is a buffer that cushions the impact of a crash. Likewise, the land running along the water's edge is a buffer against the impact of development on a water body. People apply the term *buffer* to landscapes with different characteristics, ranging from naturally vegetated, undisturbed areas to those where mowing is allowed. The BOB project uses the following definition:

A buffer is a naturally vegetated segment of land directly upslope of a water resource, such as a lake, stream, river, pond, estuary, or other wetland type.

This definition offers a uniform way of analyzing information from diverse disciplines, encompasses landscapes that support the range of benefits buffers provide, and is consistent with New Hampshire's regulatory framework. (Read more about defining buffers in BOB's coastal science literature review.) People often apply other terms to this definition, however, including *vegetated filter strip, riparian area, setback, and jurisdictional zone*. The latter two terms have distinct legal meanings and it causes confusion when they are used interchangeably with *buffer*.

What's in a Name? Buffers, Setbacks, & Jurisdictional Zones

A *buffer* is a naturally vegetated area. A *setback* is a specified distance from a water body within which certain activities are restricted. A *jurisdictional zone* is an area adjacent a water body over which a governing agency has regulatory authority.