

# Beach Building Blues

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The dream: You're lying on a sandy beach with a glass of lemonade in one hand and a juicy book in the other. The sun is shining and a cool breeze is a wonderful contrast to the warm sand beneath you. You are at the cottage– the one you have been dreaming about all winter long.

The reality: Only a small percentage of waterfront properties in Canada have a natural beach. Is your property one of them? In Muskoka, the answer is likely not. So how can you make your dream a reality?

While you might think that creating a little beach on your waterfront property does no harm, nothing could be further from the truth. Not only are you setting yourself up for potential failure, but you can also reduce the quality of water in your waterbody and destroy important fish habitat in the process.

Shoreline areas provide habitat for a variety of aquatic organisms, including fish. The nearshore area is where many fish species lay their eggs, feed and seek protection from predators. Changes to this important area can threaten their survival.

If you build a beach without the necessary approvals and permits, you may find yourself in violation of the federal *Fisheries Act* and be faced with substantial fines and possibly even imprisonment.

Creating a sand beach where one does not naturally exist is a losing battle. Wind, currents, ice and other erosive forces will work to remove the sand over time. In order to keep your beach, you will need to add more sand to it every year. Not only does this represent an ongoing financial cost, but also an environmental cost as the sand erodes away and covers fish spawning beds and damages drinking water quality.

Imported sand can carry with it plant seeds and animals that may be inappropriate for the area. Clearing away shoreline vegetation to make way for a beach will contribute to runoff and erosion problems, as well as decrease the amount of wildlife habitat on your property.

So what can you do if you want to relax on the beach at your cottage? Consider creating a dryland beach well above the high water mark and landscape it with logs, rocks and native plants to keep it from washing away. Using pea gravel in place of sand will minimize any impact on water quality and fish habitat if some gravel finds its way into the water.

Another alternative is to anchor a swimming platform offshore to create an area where you can relax in the sun. Also, a sandbox placed near the cottage for young children allows you to keep a close eye on them more easily than if they were at the water's edge.

Follow nature's cue and leave the sand where it belongs.

