

Fishy signs in Jackson Hole indicate ‘Trout Friendly’ lawns

Clean water is so important for Wyoming that many communities have programs to help homeowners and landowners protect water sources.

Studies have shown that, acre-for-acre, more fertilizer and pesticide pollutants come from poorly managed lawns than from farms. Whether from landscaping or other sources, excess nutrients lead to increased algae and aquatic plant growth and can degrade the macroinvertebrate community, alter the food web, and cause an imbalance in the ecosystem.

Jackson Hole has implemented Trout Friendly Lawns, a program that has agencies and organizations working together to address water quality issues.

Nutrient pollution in waterways continues to be a concern as Jackson Hole grows. A recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey found residential landscaping could be one of the sources of nutrient pollution in the Fish Creek watershed; however, it’s not just homeowners along Fish Creek who are considering how their lawns are affecting water – other parts of Jackson Hole are seeing nutrient-loading issues as well.

The Jackson Hole Clean Water Coalition launched the Trout Friendly Lawns program to encourage water quality stewardship in local landscaping practices. Businesses and residents are placing “Certified Trout Friendly” lawn signs in their yards and greenspaces that show their commitment to water quality and to promote the program to passersby. The signs developed by local

artists Ben Roth and Abby Paffrath indicate lawns that reflect “trout friendly” landscaping practices. Importantly, the Trout Friendly Lawns program is not just about trout, it’s about clean water for all – trout are just a great mascot for Jackson Hole’s lakes and rivers.

Here are four easy trout-friendly (or ANY fish species) practices the program is promoting that can reduce lawn impact on water quality:

Limit fertilization. Send a sample of the soil in your lawn for testing to see if fertilizer is needed. (Contact your local UW Extension office for further information.) Use slow release or organic fertilizer only if needed, not

to exceed 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of yard (about 32 feet by 32 feet) per year. Note that 2 pounds of nitrogen is not the same as 2 pounds of fertilizer, and the directions on the bag should help you make the calculation. See sidebar page 17. Also, don’t fertilize within 20 feet of water.

Be water wise. Watering your lawn during the coolest parts of the day, dawn or dusk, reduces water evaporation. Don’t water when it’s windy or raining. Watering deeply enough to encourage healthy deep root growth will help your lawn stay green longer between watering, but don’t water so often or quickly water runs off the lawn or travels past the root zone. If your soil is not too rocky, use a long screwdriver to see how deep the water has gone – the screwdriver

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Courtesy Jackson Hole Clean Water Coalition

These steel “Certified Trout Friendly” signs are placed on the lawns of those in the Jackson Hole area who have committed to using the landscaping practices which are listed. Leslie Steen, the Trout Unlimited Snake River Headwaters Project Manager, says, “These beautiful trout signs are a great reminder that how we care for our lawns can affect the health of our aquatic ecosystems and the native cutthroat trout, mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies that call them home.”

will be harder to push when it reaches dry soil. Water not lost to evaporation or used by vegetation can runoff into nearby waterbodies or seep into the groundwater, carrying fertilizers, herbicides, and other chemicals with it. Raising your mower height to 3-4 inches will also improve drought tolerance of the lawn and reduce the need for fertilizers.

Plant and maintain streamside buffers. Maintain a 5-foot buffer of unmanicured landscaping around water to act as a filter between lawns and ponds, streams, and rivers. Native plants are great choices for buffers.

Use herbicides and pesticides appropriately. Only apply herbicides and pesticides for their intended use and at the rates listed on the label. When spraying for state and

county listed noxious weeds, use spot spraying or mechanical removal techniques where appropriate. Pesticide labels may list a specific distance a pesticide can be used around water, including well heads. Contact your local weed and pest district for invasive species management plan information.

In addition to businesses, three Teton County parks, four homeowners associations, and over 100 individuals have committed to Trout Friendly landscaping practices. Find out more about the program at www.jhcleanwater.org.

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Fertilizer calculation example

You can calculate the amount of fertilizer to apply to your lawn by knowing how much nitrogen you want to apply (from the results of a soil test) and then doing some simple calculations. Bags of fertilizer list three numbers such as 26-5-10. This tells the percentage of three of the nutrients it contains – N-P-K (Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium). In this example, it contains 26% Nitrogen, 5% Phosphorus and 10% Potassium by weight. If you’d like to apply 1.5 lb of nitrogen per 1,000 sq feet of your lawn, you can calculate the amount of fertilizer to apply with this equation:

$$1.5 \text{ lb nitrogen} / 0.26 = 5.76 \text{ lb of your fertilizer will be needed per 1000 sq feet of lawn.}$$

About the Jackson Hole Clean Water Coalition

The 10 Jackson Hole Clean Water Coalition partners include Teton County Weed and Pest District, Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited, Teton Conservation District, Friends of Fish Creek, Snake River Fund, Jackson Hole Land Trust, PAWS of Jackson Hole, Wyoming Nature Conservancy, Wyoming Ducks Unlimited, and Flat Creek Water Improvement District.