

Several hundred letters sent to landowners in Olmsted and Dodge counties have brought strong compliance with state rules about vegetation along streams. In Olmsted County, the letters were prompted by a complaint by Dr. Terry Klampe, who said too many landowners didn't have the mandated 50 feet of grass or trees along streams. That in turn, leads to more sediment and chemicals getting into the streams, he said. The county planning department sent out about 300 letters, said Phil Wheeler, Rochester-Olmsted Planning Department director. In Dodge County, the county decided to look at what was happening said Peter Otterson, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources shoreland management manager. If found not all landowners were following the rules and sent out a few hundred letters to those who appeared to not be complying. In both cases, compliance was exceptional, they said. While the first round in Olmsted involved about 300 letters, a second round now being sent will be about 10 percent of that. "Things are going well," he said. "We've had a high level of compliance." In many cases, the owner was renting out land and didn't know the person working the land wasn't complying, he said. Besides telling owners about the law and a potential violation, letters also suggested they contact the local soil and water conservation district for advice or financial help. In Dodge, compliance was about 66 percent, said Otterson, who used that county as an example of how the rules can be implemented. "A lot of farmers didn't even know they existed." The county didn't threaten legal action but suggested ways to come into compliance. In the future it's possible there could be legal action. The DNR is looking at changing the 1989 regulations as directed by the Minnesota Legislature. The draft rules maintain the 50-foot rule but are more specific about what is or isn't allowed. For example, it might be possible to cut hay or biofuel trees in the 50 feet long as there is enough vegetation to hold back some water, sediments and chemicals. It's hard to say how many people living along streams and lakes violate the regulations. But we know we can do a better job. Finding that better way is the whole idea behind the rule updates.