What is a living shoreline?

“Living shoreline” is a broad term used to describe a range of nature-based approaches to reduce erosion and protect property. In the right location, living shorelines can be used instead of seawalls or bulkheads to stabilize a shoreline. While there are different types of living shorelines, projects are made up of mostly natural materials, such as native wetland vegetation, natural fiber logs, or oyster reef breakwaters, thus maintaining natural shoreline features.

For more detailed information, see Natural and Structural Measures for Shoreline Stabilization at https://tinyurl.com/y5ao6tsb.

What are the advantages of installing a living shoreline compared to bulkheads or seawalls?

In areas that don’t usually get large waves or a lot of wave activity, living shorelines can be effective at stopping, and even reversing, erosion over time. Living shorelines are often a more economical option to install and maintain compared to bulkheads and seawalls. Additionally, shorelines protected using living shoreline techniques can adapt to future environmental changes, such as rising sea levels and increased storm events. Because bulkheads and seawalls are static features that do not move, they can be severely damaged during strong storms.

Living shorelines maintain the natural features that make coastal properties so desirable and may improve property values. They allow easier access to the water for activities such as kayaking, paddleboarding, and swimming. Living shorelines also create wildlife habitat, providing more opportunities for birdwatching and fishing. Depending on the approaches used, living shorelines can also make the surrounding water clearer.

For more detailed information, see Living Shorelines Academy at https://www.livingshorelinesacademy.org/.
Are there any financial incentive programs or grants that could help pay for living shoreline projects?

Cost-share programs and other financial incentives have been implemented in some areas to help pay for living shoreline projects.

For more detailed information, see Living Shorelines Academy at https://www.livingshorelinesacademy.org/.

Do property owners need to maintain a living shoreline after it is installed?

Minimal maintenance may be necessary. Keeping any eye on, or monitoring, a living shoreline project will help property owners identify maintenance needs.

Depending on the type of project, monitoring a living shoreline is similar to monitoring a coastal habitat restoration project. For more detailed information, see Effective Monitoring to Evaluate Ecological Restoration in the Gulf of Mexico at https://tinyurl.com/y2sbucbj.

How do living shorelines fit in with water bottom property laws, and are there regulatory benefits of living shorelines?

Property lines for most waterfront properties on tidal waters are considered ambulatory, or not fixed. In most areas, the mean high tide line is the boundary between state-owned submerged lands and upland private properties. Waterfront property owners retain special riparian rights to tidal areas, which often include the right to build piers or docks and access the water for fishing or other recreation. Legal property boundaries can shift with changes in the shoreline due to erosion or accretion. The cause of these changes dictates how new ownership boundaries are determined.

For more details, including general information that applies in any state, see Living shorelines: A Guide for Alabama Property Owners at https://tinyurl.com/yy6v5o59.

More resources can be found in the Living Shorelines Resource Catalog for your state. Visit www.gulflivingshoreslines.com.