Beaini Associates and Engineers LTD
April 21st, 2021
Sayed Finianos

Ordinary High-Water Mark (OHWM)

What is it?

In simple terms, it is the mark between the aquatic and terrestrial environments. The boundary of public waters and water wetlands – these are of interest to us (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Ordinary High-Water Level).

The Ordinary High-Water Mark is the elevation in a body of water that is delineating the highest level of water maintained for an extended period of time – a period long enough for the water level to have an impact on the surrounding area. For example, it can be the point in which the vegetation changes from mostly aquatic vegetation to terrestrial. Other examples of this impact include "changes in the character of soil, destruction of terrestrial vegetation, and the presence of litter and debris" (Corps of Engineers Washington DC, USACE Internal Management Control Program, 1992).

What is it used for?

Ordinary High-Water level Mark values are important as they can be used to delineate shoreline jurisdictions; which are needed to determine the types of restrictions that apply to a development.

In terms of Sunny Point Lane, it is of importance as the building footprint may fall within the shoreline jurisdiction.

The jurisdictions are in place to highlight where it may be safe/unsafe to build – among other factors.

How is it determined?

Many factors come into play when determining the OHWM. First, there must be a field assessment which will help define the site conditions. The observations made during the field assessment can find indicators such as soil and vegetation to determine OHWM.

Next, the lower and upper boundaries of an OHWM must be identified using transects. You will be looking for soil and vegetation indicators to help define these boundaries.

Finally, use the data found to approximate the upper and lower values of the Ordinary High-Water flow This data can then be used to evaluate the discharge and stage data needed.

https://proprights.org/PDFs/workshop_2011/References/Manuals/OHWM/Draft%20OHWM%20-%20Ecology.pdf