

Application of environmental engineering in preventing eutrophication and protecting water species

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Abstract

Eutrophication is the addition of nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorus, to water bodies which is harmful for the aquatic ecosystems. It also brings about other challenges such as algal blooms, hypoxia, reduction in biodiversity, and degradation in the quality of water available in the ecosystems. Environmental engineering is pivotal in controlling eutrophication and the resultant impacts on aquatic ecosystems by implementing effective management practices and sustained treatment technologies. This document investigates major engineering methods such as advanced wastewater treatment and stormwater management, constructed wetlands, and nutrient recovery systems. Primarily the focus is integrated watershed management and the low impact development framework directed at controlling agricultural and urban nutrient inflow. Furthermore, the document describes the role of monitoring and modeling, and data enabled decision making in ecological equilibrium maintenance. Through adequate engineering, it is possible to greatly lower the nutrient entering water bodies and protect biodiversity alongside the sustainable availability of freshwater resources. Environmental engineering supported by policy and social awareness diverges the mitigation path for eutrophication. In conclusion, this document highlights the increasing role of environmental engineering in the protection of aquatic ecosystems and the proactive management of freshwater resources subjected to heightened environmental pressures.

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Introduction

Definition Eutrophication and Its Consequence on Water Species

Eutrophication is defined as the gradual increase in the concentration of nutrients in a water body due to the anthropogenic introduction of fertilizers, which cascade into sewage systems, industrial waste, and agricultural runoff. As unchecked aquatic plants or algae multiply in population, it leads to their overgrowth life sink (Smith et al., 1999). These essential nutrients lead to explosive cyanobacterial growth, which significantly reduces the amount of dissolved oxygen in water and perfuses dead zones (Heisler et al., 2008). Hypoxia describes the algal suffocation of organisms, severely disrupts the food web, and greatly decreases biodiversity. Ecosystems, especially lakes. extremely susceptible to nutrient-induced eutrophication. Much of the biotic community, including micoata, suffers from imblanced bait (Dodds et al., 2009). Toxin- producing harmful algae blooms (HABs) significantly worsen the quality of water and endanger the health of aquatic flora, fauna, and even humans (Chislock et al., 2013). The sociological effects are equally severe on the economy; such as tourism or fishing yields. Eutrophication is an unsolved global dilemma needing examination and immediate caring intervention (Carpenter et al., 1998; Arvinth, 2024).

Role of Environmental Engineering in Eutrophication Mitigation

application of environmental engineering in the prevention eutrophication is especially evident in the science-based approaches developed for managing and controlling nutrient loads to aquatic systems (Barhani et al., 2022). Effluent treatment processes Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) and membrane bioreactors are capable of reducing nitrogen and phosphorus contaminants to minimal concentrations prior to discharging effluent into the water bodies (Tchobanoglous et al., 2014). These systems are very crucial in metropolitan areas where the population and waste water generation is high. In rural and agricultural landscapes eutrophication is predominantly caused by non-pointsource farming activities Tanaka, (Moretti and 2025). Environmental engineers attempt to solve this problem with the help of green infrastructure and **BMPs** (Best Practices) Management such as vegetative buffer strips, retention ponds, and constructed wetlands (Glibert et al., 2005) In particular, constructed wetlands act as biological filters to remove nutrients by plant uptake, microbial activity, and sedimentation (Vymazal, 2011). The development of improved septic systems for rural populated regions also greatly helps to minimize the nutrient leaching to water bodies from these systems (Withers et al., 2011; Aswath al., 2019). Advanced etengineering methods such hydrological modeling, remote sensing,

and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are crucial in identifying nutrient hotspots, pollution transport pathways, and designing appropriate interventions (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2015; Chlaihawi, 2024). Moreover, there is an increasing

body of literature focusing on the microbial ecology of treatment systems, including the rhizospheres of wetlands, to optimize nutrient removal (Zhang *et al.*, 2007).

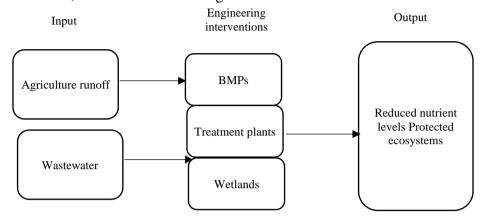


Figure 1: Role of environmental engineering in preventing eutrophication.

The Block Diagram (Figure 1) portrays how environmental engineering (eutrophication) helps reduce environmental problem stemming from excessive inputs of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous into water bodies. It defines the main inputs as agricultural runoff containing fertilizers and untreated or insufficiently treated wastewater on the left of the diagram (Kaushal et al., 2011). Nutrient inputs can stimulate harmful algal blooms as well as depletion of oxygen in the water. Centrally, various engineering solutions are shown as the Best Management Practices (BMPs) of buffer strips and controlled application of fertilizers, as well as nutrient removal wastewater treatment plants, wetlands constructed or restored for pollutant filtration, and others. These inventions greatly mitigate eutrophic conditions in water bodies. Nutrient loading into aquatic ecosystems is reduced on the right side of the diagram along with increased preservation and maintenance of aquatic ecosystems. The

integrated engineering strategies displayed meticulously demonstrate how engineering techniques and water resources engineering prevent eutrophication and sustain the water quality in water bodies.

Objectives of the Research Paper

The research paper primarily aims to investigate the role of environmental engineering practise in aiding prevention of eutrophication and the sustaining of healthy aquatic ecosystems. It plans to deconstruct the elements of nutrient pollution and look into engineering interventions while determining their applicability and efficacy across different contexts. Special emphasis will be placed on integrated watershed management frameworks that incorporate engineered, ecological, and regulatory systems aimed at achieving sustained water quality improvements at varying temporal scales. Environmental engineering integrates theory with practice devise comprehensive solutions that address eutrophication at its

source while alleviating downstream impacts (Radmanović *et al.*, 2018; Sadulla, 2024). Emphasis will be placed on interdisciplinary efforts and optimal sustainable nutrient management practices (Mateo-Sagasta, Raschid-Sally and Thebo, 2017). The research is intended to advance the cause of conserving aquatic life and sustaining resilient freshwater ecosystems amidst mounting environmental and climate stressors.

Causes of Eutrophication

Detrimental Nutrient Discharge from Farming and City Regions

Agriculture and urban regions contribute highly to Eutrophication due to the excess discharge of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, which are key fertilizers used when farming. Each form of agriculture uses fertilizers and manure which is rich in nitrogen and phosphorus. Fertilizers can wash away into Coulees and Streams especially after rainfall which causes excess surface washing. Nowadays most water bodies suffer from excess nitrogen and phosphorus leading to Algal Blooms which destroys the aquatic ecosystems (Carpenter et al., 2001; Hafezieh et al., 2024). The Urban Stormwater (Paul and Meyer, 2001) equally forms a part of nutrient pollution. take for instance roads, rooftops, and pavements are ideal examples of urban living. These structures ensure no rainfall infiltration. It speeds up the rate of runoff and the loaded water contains N:P fertilizers, animal wastes, and even detergents, spearheading eutrophication to happen at an accelerated pace (Battula et al., 2021). Legal structures such as retention ponds and green roofs for stormwater control are hardly available in those areas, thus they become recurring Non-Ptect Point Pollution sources.

Release of Untreated Sewage and Industrial Wastes into Water Bodies

This poorly managed sewage disposal coupled with untreated waste from industries is another leading cause of eutrophication. Poore's 2016 report has outlined how developing countries disregards the basic human sanitation needs such as water treatment plants which leads to the unchecked release of waste into oceans and water bodies. In addition to this, organic wastes along with ammonia and phosphate eutrophication accelerate the process of algae blooms if released the water bodies as added to inflow water (Guli et al., 2021) These steps obstruct the attainment of United Nations sustainable targets by buffering the natural waters excessive nitrogen components. Governments from every region are warned to take action, as failure to do so would violate multiple agreements to maintain clean and unpolluted sources of drinking and irrigation water (Majdanishabestari and Soleimani. 2019). Even as far as economically healthy countries face infrastructural issues with sewage systems which pose the risk of overflowing during storms and pouring highly polluted waste water into clean water sources like lakes and rivers also classified as combined sewer overflows (CSOs). Moreover, outdated technology and lenient regulations tend to deprioritize nutrient removal for a majority of treatment plants. This oversight facilitates the discharge of effluent containing high concentrations of nutrients which accelerates eutrophication in freshwater and marine

ecosystems (Bouwman *et al.*, 2013; Nasirian *et al.*, 2019).

Climate Change Alongside its Impact on Nutrient Cycling in Aquatic Ecosystems

Eutrophication has long been associated with climate change as a direct consequence, but it is also a consequence of climate change actions. Both nitrogen and phosphorus cycling of nutrients in aquatic systems directly depends on the biology of the system. Elevated global temperatures exacerbate eutrophication through the decomposition of organic matter in aquatic environments (Moss et al., 2011; Yeo and Jiang, 2023). In addition. the growth of harmful cyanobacteria is facilitated by elevated temperatures together with low oxygen (Thirunavukkarasu al.. 2024). et Increased precipitation, flooding, and drought conditions have been shown to impact the runoff rate and the total amount of dissolved and suspended nutrients being transported from land to bodies of water (IPCC, 2021; Sufar and Khudair, 2022). During drought periods, water flow is significantly reduced, which in turn leads to an increase in the concentration ofcertain nutrients supporting the growth and persistence of harmful algal blooms (Michalak et al., 2013; Li, 2024). Moreover, the increased warmth along the surface layers of lakes and water bodies has been observed to not only prevent mixing but also promote the stratification of the waters, effectively secluding vital nutrients within the water where algae can metabolize them, Brookes and Carey, 2011. In summary, such circumstances give rise to the exacerbation of eutrophication, making it a more nuanced phenomenon, a further challenge to control from the changing

frameworks of the environment (Nozim et al., 2023)

Effects of Eutrophication on Water Species

Oxygen Depletion Resulting from Increased Algae Blooms

Perhaps the most apparent and immediate effect of eutrophication is the development of algal blooms. Increased growth leads to widening 'dead zones' within aquatic ecosystems. Algal blooms are a remarkable phenomenon that occur from the inflow of nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus into the water bodies. Nutrient-rich environments enable algae to flourish, forming thick mats over lakes, rivers, and coastal waters. As with any problem, it comes with its own set of challenges. Algal blooms are an indicator of eutrophication, but also disrupt the balance of aquatic ecosystems. Algal blooms stall the penetration of sunlight into deeper layers of water, ultimately impacting the photosynthesis of submerged aquatic vegetation. The die-off period is no better; the decomposition of algae through bacteria releases large proportion of dissolved oxygen in the water. This phenomenon, known as hypoxia, leads to the creation of "dead zones" which make most parts of water harsh to sustain life. Organisms such as fish and invertebrates are left with no option but to evacuate freely, and shift to lower regions of oxygen levels, slowly facing death. In some of the worst scenarios, whole portions of water bodies can become lifeless due to a lack of oxygen. Furthermore, certain types of algal blooms generate toxins that are detrimental to aquatic life forms as well as to birds and mammals that either come

in contact with or drink the contaminated water. These toxic blooms further aggravate the stress faced by aquatic ecosystems and may cause mass mortality events.

Reduction in Biodiversity and Increased Habitat Loss for Aquatic Life

Eutrophication has the potential to greatly increase the loss of biodiversity in freshwater and marine ecosystems. As algae bloom, they grow and take over much of the water body having physical and chemical features of the water. Excessive shading from algal mats on the water surface results in the death of submerged aquatic plants which are critical ecosystem for many fish and invertebrates. Widely accepted as an adverse phenomenon, the 'loss of these plants' translates into a deficit in food, shelter, and breeding grounds for the

aquatic animals. Those species which are more sensitive to low levels of oxygen, high temperatures, and low water clarity are the first ones to experience decline or extinction. This includes populations of native fish, amphibians, and invertebrates who are out competed for these resources by more tolerant species that were able to thrive under socioeconomically degraded conditions. Ecosystem imbalance is further enhanced by replacement from these opportunistic and invasive species. In addition, losing species diversity can impair some functions. ecosystem like nutrient cycling, predation, and reproduction. After ecosystems suffer a loss in biodiversity, recovering their balance may take several decades, even when the nutrient inputs to the ecosystem are diminished.

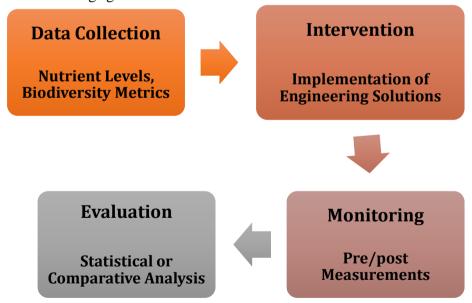


Figure 2: Framework for preventing eutrophication through environmental engineering.

The figure (Figure 2) depicts the guided research framework that has been designed to assess the eutrophication mitigation effectiveness of specific environmental engineering interventions. The process starts with the collection of data, which includes the determination of

primary indicators such as the nutrient (nitrogen phosphorus) and and biodiversity levels in the water bodies impacted. This is followed by the intervention phase which utilizes engineering techniques such as BMPs (Best Management Practices) for Agriculture, upgraded wastewater treatment, or wetland restoration. In the monitoring phase, post-measurements together with pre-measurements are taken to evaluate the water and living organism quality for comparison in the aquatic bio system. Initial assessment or the first steps of evaluation implement different forms statistical of comparative analysis to assess how significantly the interventions of nutrient reduction and load water species protection achieve its objectives. This systematic approach enables the understanding of the problem as well as the solutions enabling the importance of data-based decisions in environmental engineering.

Disruption of Food Chains and Decrease of Species with Commercial Value

Eutrophication also has a broad range of impacts within an aquatic food web. Eutrophication irreversibly alters the function of natural vegetation as a primary food producer, replacing it with algae that holds primary importance within a herbivore dominated ecosystem. This change cascades further up the food chain, impacting higher level predators, population dynamics as well as triggering mass upheavals of equilibrium systems. Take for instance some fish species. Lots of them need clear water to chase prey or spawn. The murky, low-oxygen water is lethal for them. The larger fish that feed on small fish and invertebrates also die when their prey declines. Economically, the system is more unstable, but far less commercially exploited is the ecosystem. This shifts not only weakens ecosystem stability, but also directly lowers collapse-rich commercial fisheries. Numerous species of fish as well as

shellfish of great economic importance are extremely vulnerable to shifts in water quality and oxygen levels. Local economies, food security, and livelihoods are placed at risk due to the increased possibility of local fisheries collapsing from eutrophication. Some fish and shellfish are made inedible for humans due to dangerous levels of toxic algae, impacting fishing industries and public health. Eutrophication has both ecological and economic consequences because it affects entire ecosystems including the tiniest plankton and the largest apex predators.

Application of Environmental Engineering in Preventing Eutrophication

Adoption of Best Management Practices in Agriculture to Alleviate Nutrient Runoff

Agricultural land nutrient runoff, especially nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers, is one of the leading culprits of eutrophication. BMPs (Best Management Practices) have to be developed to mitigate this problem. Environmental engineering is instrumental in developing BMPs to mitigate the runoff for the environmental good. These practices involve control in the timing, placement, and the quantity of fertilizer applications in such a manner that the nutrient losses to the environment are minimized and rather captured by plants. Also, precision farming (whereby fertilizers are injected based on GPS and soil parameters) helps in alleviating the problem of excess nutrient discharge. Cover cropping (growing legumes or grasses during the off-season) captures released nutrients, preventing their erosion or leaching. Reduced soil tillage improves soil

retention of nutrients by lowering soil erosion and runoff. Buffer strips of vegetation alongside fields capture and reduce nutrient-laden runoff into water bodies. Environmental engineers are actively involved in designing, implementing, and monitoring these systems through data collection and modeling to ensure effectiveness. The downstream eutrophication threat can be managed with agricultural rooted BMPs, coupled with quantitative analysis, equipping farmers with smart farming techniques.

Figure 3 displays the impact of different Best Management Practices (BMPs) on reducing nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from agricultural fields. The data indicates that the nutrient runoff from farming practices is the most extreme, where nitrogen reaches 35 kg/ha/year and phosphorus 7 kg/ha/year. Nevertheless, adopting BMPs such as cover cropping, buffer strips, and no-till farming dramatically improves these figures. Significantly, the most effective outcome occurs when all three practices are combined, resulting in nitrogen runoff of 10

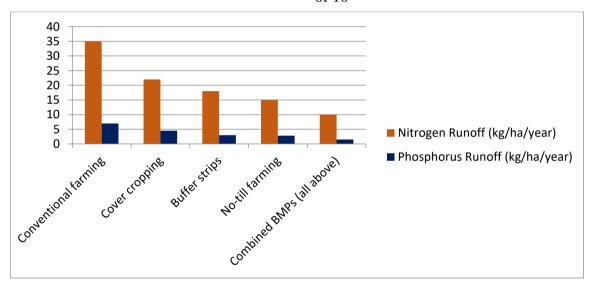


Figure 3: Effect of best management practices (bmps) on nutrient runoff.

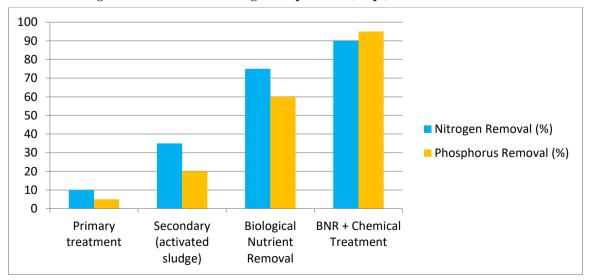


Figure 4: Nutrient removal efficiency – traditional vs. upgraded wastewater treatment.

kg/ha/year and phosphorus lowered to 1.5 kg/ha/year. This image shows the extent to which integrated agriculture practices can resolve the issue of nutrient pollution and subsequently reduce the risk of eutrophication in adjacent water bodies. The graph (Figure 4) shows the different wastewater treatment methods and their respective efficiencies in removal of nutrients. Removal of solids is the primary focus in the processes associated with primary treatment. In this stage, nitrogen removal is 10% phosphorous removal is 5%. These figures improve in secondary treatment

using activated sludge to 35% and 20% respectively. Even so, when facilities implement Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) systems, the numbers increase sharply to 75% for nitrogen and 60% for phosphorus. The highest removal rates are accomplished when BNR is used alongside chemical treatment, where they reach 90% nitrogen and 95% phosphorus removal. This data analysis reiterates the need to shift to advanced wastewater treatment technologies for effective management of nutrient enrichment and prevention of eutrophication.

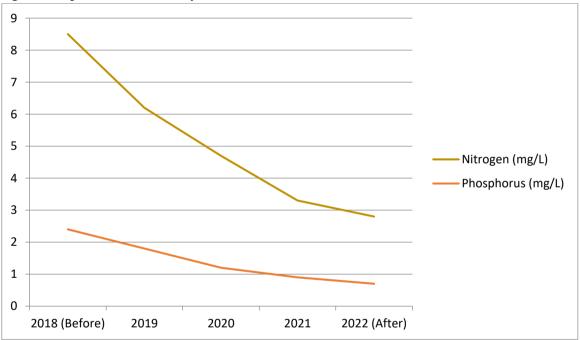


Figure 5: Wetland restoration impact on nutrient filtration (before vs. after).

The line graph (Figure 5) depicts the trend over a five-year period in nutrient levels, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, in surface runoff before and after wetland restoration. Before the restoration in 2018, the nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations were 8.5 mg/L and 2.4 mg/L respectively. After the restoration efforts, there was a steady decline each subsequent year, attaining 2.8 mg/L and 0.7 mg/L in 2022 for

nitrogen and phosphorus, respectively. This decline exemplifies the wetland's naturally ability to purify water containing excess nutrients and demonstrates the effectiveness of ecological restoration as a low cost, yet enduring approach to enhance overall water quality and preserve life in the water. The allocation of funds for strategies different fighting eutrophication is illustrated in this pie

chart (Figure 6). The largest share, 40%, is provided for upgrading the wastewater treatment plant because of its high cost as well as the importance of nutrient removal on municipal scale. Agricultural BMPs (Best Management Practices) receive 35% of the funding because they help mitigate diffuse pollution. Restoration of wetland and riparian zones accounts for 20%

improving Nature based Solutions (NbS). 5% is allocated to monitoring and research programs for data collection and innovative support. This demonstrates expenditure that is conservatively unbalanced in favor of technological improvements and ecological methods simultaneously. Eutrophication funding is strategically distributed.

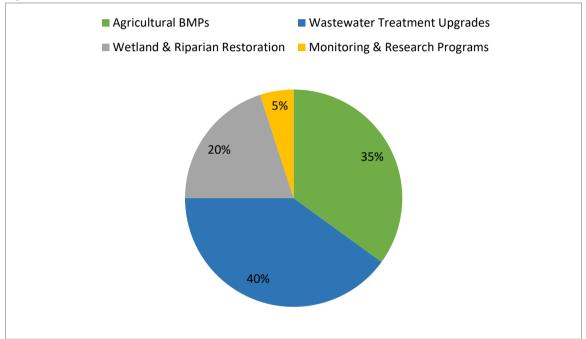


Figure 6: Investment distribution in engineering interventions.

Upgrading Wastewater Treatment Plants to Remove Nutrients Before Discharge

Another significant contributor to nutrient pollution is municipal and industrial wastewater. Most treatment plants concentrate on organic matter and removal. Conventional pathogen wastewater treatment processes ignore nutrients. Environmental engineers have developed advanced nutrient removal processes specifically aimed for effluents prior to their discharge into rivers, lakes and at coastal regions. Installations may include biological nutrient removal BNR which employ certain microorganisms capable of transforming nitrogen and phosphorus into benign gases or biomass. For example, nitrification and denitrification processes convert ammonia into nitrogen gas which is emitted into the atmosphere. Phosphorus can be precipitated from the wastewater by chemical additions of alum or ferric chloride. Membrane filtration and created wetlands simultaneously enhance nutrient removal at treatment stages. Not only do these designed remedies curtail the nutrient input to aquatic ecosystems, they also enhance the quality of water for human and environmental Engineers have to systematically design, test, and oversee the operation of these systems to confirm compliance with minimum operating standards.

Restoration of Riparian Zones and Wetlands to Filter Nutrients Before They Reach Water Bodies

Riparian zones, or vegetated regions bordering water bodies, wetlands and other water bodies are known to naturally filter out pollutants such as nutrients. Increasing their extent is one critical approach in the multidisciplinary field of environmental engineering aimed at controlling diffuse non-point source pollution and reduction of eutrophication. Wetlands are particularly efficient in sediment and nutrient retention due to their complex root structures and active microbial populations. Vegetated riparian buffers greatly reduce surface water flows, and thus transport of sediments and nutrients, while allowing for settling to take place. Their plant life also mitigates the organic load by removing surplus nitrogen and phosphorus through eutrophication, making the process selfsustained. Engineers attempt to design, restore, or even construct artificial wetlands for water purification systems to intercept contaminated water from urban agricultural areas downslope. and Restoration may involve such actions as land contour re-routing or floodplain reconnection which active re-vegetation autochthonous species. systems are known to be efficient in reducing nutrient enrichment and provide other ecological advantages such as expansion of habitats, flood mitigation, and carbon storage. Environmental engineers strategically plan the use of designed natural systems for watershed management to combat eutrophication sustainably and economically.

Protection of Water Species

Water Quality Monitoring u Assessment as an Early Detection System for Eutrophication

The protection of water organisms starts with the early identification of changes in water quality. Certain changes like increased nutrient levels, algal blooms, and reduced oxygen concentrations are early symptoms of eutrophication and need to be addressed promptly. Continuous monitoring makes it possible to take action before damage occurs to the aquatic life. Water quality is measured by environmental engineers and scientists using multiple different techniques. Temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, and nutrient turbidity are measured by pH sensors. Large-scale algal blooms in lakes and coastal areas can be tracked through remote sensing and satellite imagery. Furthermore, indicators of shifts in the populations of plankton or benthic invertebrates may indicate ecosystem changes. Water sampling and analysis is done routinely so that trends and other possible risks can be identified by responsible authorities. Known threats and emerging issues can be addressed in a timely manner due to early detection when responding mitigation measures like upstream fertilizer modification or enhanced treatment processes initiated. Informed decisions aid in the appropriate management of sensitive species that resource managers work to protect from nutrient pollution and oxygen depletion.

Creation of Protected Areas and Marine Reserves for Endangered Species

Establishing protected areas and reserves in freshwater and marine environments

can help conserve biodiversity protect species of concern. These zones act as refuges where human activities such as extraction and development are prohibited or highly regulated. For threatened species of water life, this refuge may make the difference between survival or extinction. Critical habitats such as spawning areas, nurseries, and feeding grounds are also encompassed within protected areas. Some of these protected waters also contain important habitats for anchoring species which help maintain equilibrium incredibly important in over polluted or eutrophic systems also referred to as "hotspots'. In the eyes of the scientific community these boundaries must ensure the most caring and ecologically important places to be monitored and protected illegally s. Environmental engineers could address this issue by monitoring illegal construction works on boundaries of claimed protected areas and restoring habitats together with infrastructure to make zoning work for these ecosystems. Well-managed nests usually affect the adjacent regions positively by enhancing the water life within them and allowing it to migrate freely into unprotected areas. Hence, balanced marine ecosystems reinforce the balanced economic and environmental systems.

Working Together with Stakeholders and Policymakers towards the Development of Sustainable Water Management

The sustainable protection of water species cannot be done through science and engineering alone. It also includes the active participation of stakeholders such as farmers, industries, government agencies, local communities, and even

non-governmental organizations. Allocation of funds and enforcement of rules necessitates the involvement of policymakers as well. The maintenance of sustainable water practices involves coherence and purposeful collaboration based on proven facts. Taking action without proper considerations such as excess fertilizer application, carelessly dumping waste, and land development severely impact the delicate ecosystems. Change relies on people, therefore environmental education, community participation, and information sharing needs to be prioritized to alter the status quo. Policies concerning the limits of nutrient loading to water bodies, which include nutrient discharge ceilings, buffer zones, and best management practice incentives, are drafted by engineers and environmental managers in conjunction with lawmakers. In addition, they endorse public education programs conservation programs on a local level. Social technologist perspectives makes certain that policies are acceptable and applicable at the same time, while unifying continuity provides balance amidst conflicting interests toward water Healthy species. resilience environmental disturbances and sustained ecological wellbeing is the end result.

Conclusion

Environmental engineering has proven vital in addressing eutrophication and protecting waterways. To mitigate excessive loading of nutrients which can result in harmful algal blooms, anoxic conditions, and loss of biodiversity, environmental engineers devise various methods such as controlling nutrient runoff, treating sewage effluent, and

restoring natural buffers like wetlands and riparian zones. These measures enhance water quality and help maintain critical habitats needed by many aquatic species. Regardless of these measures, eutrophication continues to be increasing problem globally, worsened by climate change and human activity. There is thus greater need for funding in research, development, and policy to create effective and affordable solutions. Encouraging cross-disciplinary cooperation and augmenting infrastructure for monitoring vital for environmental changes are detection proactive and response. Advancements environmental in engineering should include the application of smart technologies, naturebased approaches, and increased community engagement for watershed stewardship. Proactive measures focused on sustainability and resilience greatly mitigate the impacts eutrophication while protecting aquatic ecosystems and water resources for future generations.Further research and refinement in this area is critical for constructing a healthier, safer, and more sustainable water body.

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