At the shoreline there’s a mucky strip called the Transitional Zone. This not–quite–water swath of soggy soil is prone to flooding. Its upper edge is where the water has left its mark on the landscape.

The extensive root systems of shoreline plants stabilize the banks against pounding waves. This prevents soil from washing away, improving water clarity.

Many Plants = Many Animals

A great many plants grow here, everything from sedges to wildflowers to shrubs. Look for species that prefer saturated soil: wild iris, Joe–pye weed and willow to name a few.

The diversity of plants means abundant animal life. You’ll find insects galore, especially beneficial ones like dragonflies, which gobble up mosquitoes. For amphibians, this is paradise—moist atmosphere, plenty of food and easy access to the water. Hollow trees and snags are common, making popular roosts for birds and mammals. And if you see a bank burrow—a mud pile mixed with cattail clippings—that’s a muskrat’s home.