

10 Things Every Michigan Lakefront Owner Should Know About Riparian Rights

1. Only Riparian Lands Have Riparian Rights

If land touches a natural waterbody, it has “littoral” (or sometimes called “riparian”) rights. Backlot owners do not automatically share these rights.

3. Rights Are Not Unlimited

Courts apply a “reasonableness test” to balance lake-front rights with those of neighbors and the public.

5. Easements Change Things

Backlot or subdivision owners can have or could have secured riparian rights if a deed, an easement, or the law grants them.

7. The Public Trust Still Applies

While riparian rights are strong, the public retains certain rights to use navigable waters for fishing, boating, and more.

9. Disputes Are Common and Solvable

Disputes involve docks, easements, or shared access lots have possible precedent for resolving them.

2. Dock Rights Belong to Riparian Owners

Only riparian property owners may install docks and moor boats, subject to reasonableness and state rules.

4. Boundaries Extend Into the Water

Lake shore ownership generally reaches into the “bottomlands” often divided by wedge-shaped lines toward the center.

6. Local Ordinances Have Limits

Townships can regulate safety and zoning but cannot eliminate or fundamentally re-strict riparian rights.

8. Government Overreach Can Be Challenged

Unlawful restrictions on shoreline use may be unconstitutional or unlawful under Michigan law.

10. Protect the Investment

Riparian rights significantly affect property value. Understanding them is essential when buying, selling, or defending your property.



Michigan Property Rights Attorneys

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