

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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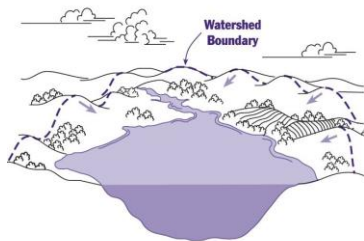
WMB-19

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Why Watersheds Are Important to Protect

What is a Watershed?

A watershed can be defined as an area of land that drains downslope until it reaches a common point. "Watershed" is synonymous with other terms you may have heard such as "drainage basin" and "catchment area." All precipitation that falls within a watershed, but is not used by existing vegetation, will ultimately flow to the lowest point. The low point is a body of water such as a river, lake, or ocean. Every waterbody, no matter how small or large, has a watershed area. Further, a large watershed, like for an ocean, contains rivers and lakes and their associated smaller watersheds. This means that every stream, brook, tributary, and river that we see will eventually reach a larger body of water, and



everything that happens within a smaller watershed can have an effect on the larger watershed. Even groundwater that we cannot see moves towards a common low point. One way to picture a watershed is as a giant funnel that catches and directs all of the water that falls into it towards the bottom. On a topographical map, a watershed can be determined by connecting all of the points of highest elevation around a lake or other body of water.

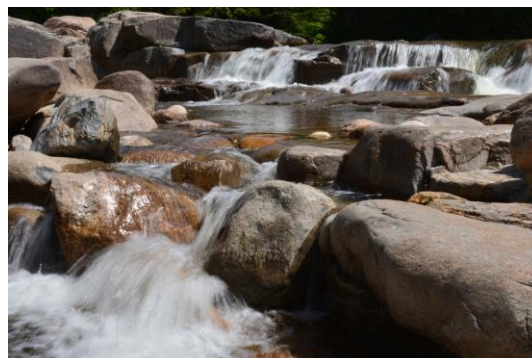


Who lives in watersheds?

Everyone lives in a watershed! No matter where we live, we will always be part of a watershed. Major watersheds span across county, state and national boundaries. The Mississippi River watershed covers almost half of the continental U.S. and a small part of Canada. For that reason, a resident of New Hampshire can affect a lake in Massachusetts, Maine or Vermont and vice versa. It doesn't matter if the waterbody is in your front yard or miles away.

How significant are watersheds?

Watersheds are *extremely* important. Healthy forested watersheds provide many services such as cleaning our drinking water supplies and stabilizing soils. The waterbodies they drain to provide us with recreational opportunities and aesthetic benefits. When vegetation within a watershed is replaced by impervious surfaces



like roads, parking lots and rooftops, it can have a negative impact on waterbodies. It increases the speed and amount of stormwater runoff (water from rain and melting snow) flowing into waterbodies and may cause erosion, turbidity, and degraded wildlife habitats. Runoff also carries pollutants such as oil, bacteria, nutrients, sediment, metals and salt to waterbodies. On the other hand, forested areas within watersheds provide plant cover and leaf litter to absorb rain and help maintain soil structure. Root masses keep soil permeable and stable so water can move into it feeding groundwater supplies. This is more desirable as it allows water to be filtered and released slowly toward the waterbody rather than rapidly running overland.

What's happening in your watershed?

Locate your home watershed and learn more about it by checking out these websites:

- USEPA's [Surf Your Watershed website](#)
- USGS' [Science in Your Watershed and Watershed Information Network website](#)
- NHDES' [Watershed Report Cards website](#)