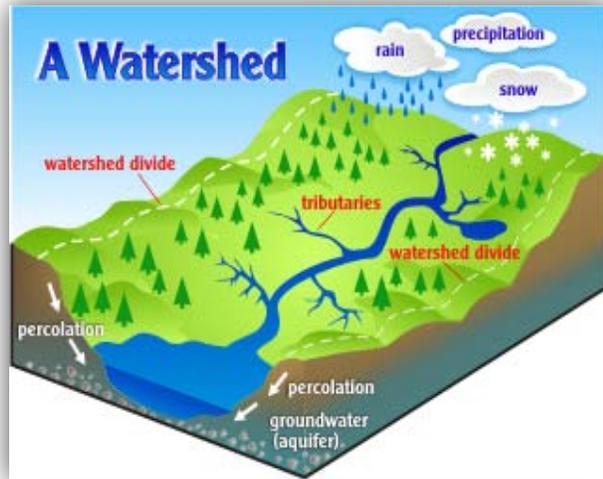


No matter where you live, you live within a watershed

Just as a city, county, or state has boundaries, so does a watershed. You are sitting in a watershed right now! Homes, farms, ranches, forests, small towns, big cities and more can make up watersheds. Some cross county, state, and even international borders. Watersheds come in all shapes and sizes and have many different features. They can have hills or mountains or be nearly flat. Some are millions of square miles while others are just a few acres.



A watershed is the land that drains into a body of water such as a stream, lake or wetland. Because water flows downhill, watershed boundaries are always located on the top of hills or mountains. Rain falling on one side of the hill will flow into one water body, while rain falling on the other side of the hill will flow into another water body.

Any changes to the land in a watershed will affect the river or lake it drains into. For instance, replacing forests and prairies with housing developments decreases the amount of water that can seep into the ground. More water flows over streets and sidewalks into street drains that empty into the river (either directly or via a water treatment facility). Thus, the river tends to flood more often when it rains because so much water is reaching it so quickly.

Rainwater also picks up pollutants such as salt, oil and sand. These pollutants can then reach the river. This type of pollution, which is spread across the landscape and cannot, once it reaches the river, be identified as coming from any one particular person or company, is called non-point source pollution. It is one of the major threats to rivers today.

Because non-point source pollution comes from across the watershed it is more difficult to regulate than point source pollution. Reducing non-point source pollution will take the commitment of everyone in the watershed to change their behaviors. Everything we do in our watershed affects the soil, water, air, plants, and animals.

A watershed is more than just land, it is also a community. A watershed community includes all the people and natural resources located within a watershed as well as animals, birds, and fish. There are many things that can be done to keep a watershed healthy and productive.

On the farm, keep plant residue on the surface of sloping cropland. This reduces runoff and prevents sediment, fertilizers, and pesticides from entering streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds. At

home, landscape your yard with plants that need a minimum of water and fertilizer. Use only the amount of fertilizers and pesticides that plants need. In your community, protect wetlands that serve as natural buffers against pollution, soil erosion, and flooding.

The NRCS offers technical assistance for planning and implementing natural resource solutions through its Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program. CTA provides voluntary conservation technical assistance to land-users, communities, units of state and local government, and other Federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems. This assistance is for planning and implementing conservation practices that address natural resource issues in watersheds. It helps people voluntarily conserve, improve and sustain natural resources.

Let's work together to keep our watersheds healthy. To learn what you can do to take care of your watershed, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit www.co.nrcs.usda.gov.