



We All Live in a Watershed

What is a watershed?

A watershed, also called a drainage basin, is an area of land from which all water drains to a common waterway, such as a river, a lake or the ocean.

As rainwater and melting snow run downhill, they carry soil, pollutants and other materials from the land into our rivers, lakes and bays.

Watersheds are important because they provide drinking water and water for recreation, irrigation and industrial activities. They also provide food and water for plants and animals.

Watersheds consist of surface water - lakes, streams, reservoirs and wetlands - and all the underlying groundwater.

A watershed can be large or small. Some watersheds drain a few city blocks while others drain a large geographic area. The Mississippi River Basin drains 31 states before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico!

We all live downstream and our everyday activities can affect downstream waters.

Check out EPA's How's My Waterway - watersgeo.epa.gov/mywaterway - to learn more about the condition of your local water body. Use a smart phone, tablet or computer to find out if your local stream or river is polluted and what's being done to help address the problems.