We all live in a watershed.

Everything we do in our watershed affects the soil, water, air, plants, and animals.

Let's work together to keep our watersheds healthy. Here are some things you can do.

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.

Helping People Help the Land

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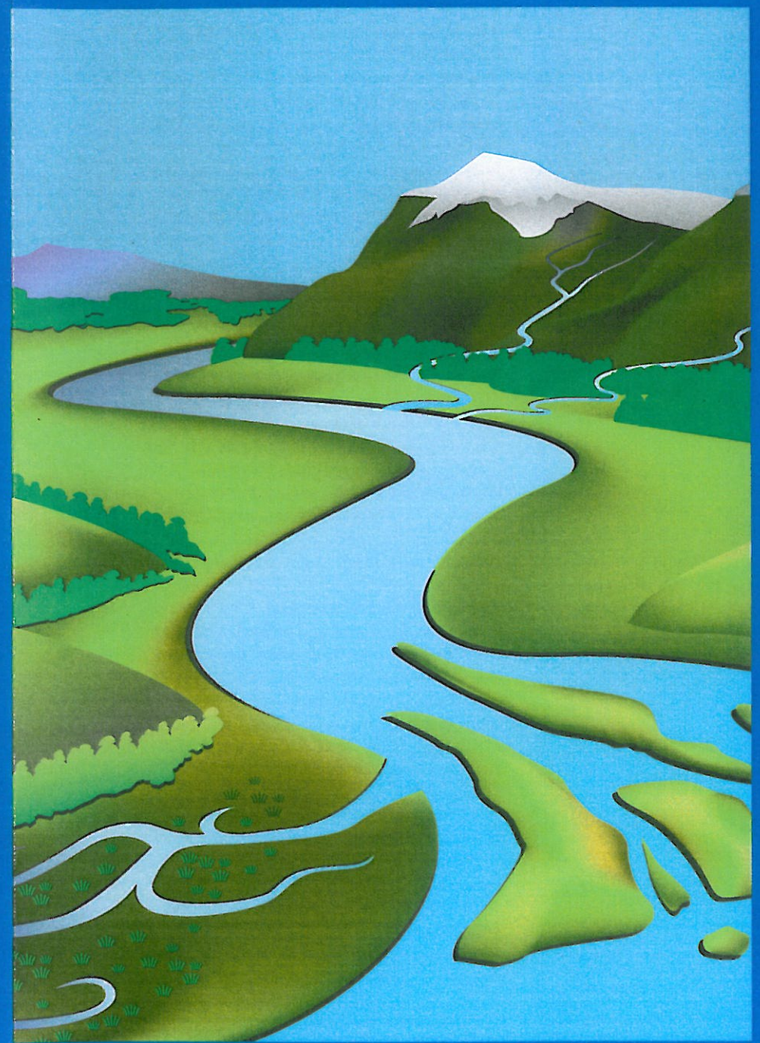
What is a Watershed?



What is a watershed?

It's the land that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river, or lake.

How do watersheds work?

The landscape is made up of many interconnected basins, or watersheds. Within each watershed, all water runs to the lowest point—a stream, river, or lake. On its way, water travels over the surface and across the farm fields, forest land, suburban lawns, and city streets, or its seeps into the soil and travels as ground water. Large watersheds like the ones for the Mississippi River, Columbia River, and Chesapeake Bay are made up of many smaller watersheds across several states.

Are all watersheds the same?

Not at all. Watersheds come in many different shapes and sizes and have many different features. Watersheds can have hills or mountains or be nearly flat. They can have farmland, rangeland, small towns, and big cities. Parts of your watershed may be so rough, rocky, or marshy that they're suited only for certain trees, plants, and wildlife.

Your watershed community.

Everyone lives in a watershed. You and everyone in your watershed are part of the watershed community. The animals, birds, and fish are, too. You influence what happens in your watershed, good or bad, by how you treat the natural resources—the soil, water, air, plants, and animals. What happens in your small watershed also affects the larger watershed downstream.

There are many things you and your community can do to keep your watershed healthy and productive. To learn what you can do to take care of your watershed, call 1-888-LANDCARE or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office. It's listed in the telephone book under U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture. Visit us online at www.nrcs.usda.gov.