

EVERYONE SHARES A *W*ATERSHED



*H*ow to Protect Water Quality
In Your Community

Watershed Management: A Sound Way to Protect Water Quality

When it comes to pollution, what comes around goes around (and around and around) the watershed.



Watershed? It's a region in which all land drains to a particular body of water or common point. It could be as small as your backyard or as large as any major river basin. Regardless of the size, we now know that water quality

Who Is Affected?

Everyone, from private citizens to elected officials, shares a watershed with its own unique set of water quality issues. Problems vary between large and small communities, between rural and urban areas, and from arid regions to places with plenty of water. The problems can also vary at different locations in a watershed – often with competing solutions. Watershed management helps better solve the problems cost-effectively, fairly, and scientifically.



What Is Watershed Management?

The last time you went to the symphony, you didn't listen to the music from just one instrument – you heard the entire orchestra. It was a holistic or complete experience.

Watershed management is like that. Instead of focusing attention and resources on one particular water quality problem, we take a holistic approach. Society makes decisions based on all the water resources, all the water uses, and all the threats to water quality throughout a common geographical area, including surface water, groundwater, and wetlands. In these watersheds, all the water flows to and collects in a common water body, such as a lake or river.

For example, the small lakes and streams in your area might flow into a larger river. These bodies of water, the groundwater aquifers that feed them, and the surrounding land would be your local watershed. Your river might join others and flow into a larger river and eventually the ocean, forming an even bigger watershed. Because most of the water that enters your

local streams or rivers drains or runs off of the land, human activities on that land can greatly affect the quality of water that enters the stream or river – in your own watershed and beyond.

When Did the Watershed Management Concept Begin?

Protecting our water isn't a new idea, but watershed management is a new approach to improving water quality. In the past, the focus has been on controlling a site-specific pollution source, without consideration of overall

benefit to the environment. The watershed approach considers all pollution sources, ranging from industrial discharge to agricultural



leachate and runoff. It evaluates the combined effect on the total watershed environment and focuses on priorities. Water quality leaders from the government, private, and non-profit sectors agree that watershed management is today's best approach for preserving tomorrow's precious water resources.

Where Is the Best Place to Get Started?

Start with your own backyard, because every piece of land managed properly contributes to the solution. And it's not too early to start thinking about the bigger picture. Almost every human activity, including transportation, industrial operations, lawn care, ranch management, land use, flood prevention, waste management, and even recreation, affects the quantity and quality of water. We must think in broad, watershed-wide terms when planning for future water use and protection.



Of course, protecting and preserving water quality costs money. However, it makes little sense to build an expensive plant to treat a city's wastewater, yet fail to prevent pollution of a river by pesticides or highway runoff in the same watershed.

Through watershed management we can evaluate our needs and address the most serious issues first. Limited resources can be allocated most effectively in a way that's tailored to match individual watershed requirements.



Why Is Watershed Management A Tall Order?

Watershed management faces difficult challenges because society naturally divides into communities. To overcome this:

- The public must become involved in water quality and quantity issues that may exceed their own city or town limits;
- Old political boundaries have to be crossed, new coalitions need to be formed, and all stakeholders must be involved to effectively address the issues;
- Water quality priorities must be established fairly, according to the degree of urgency;
- Limited resources are available; and
- People must learn to cooperate and share a commitment to protect water resources.





and uses can be impacted by activities anywhere in the watershed or its tributaries. As a result, we do not know what to clean up first, the creek or the nearby lake it drains into and pollutes.

Water quality is affected by many sources within a watershed. Watershed management integrates programs to manage lakes, rivers, oceans, and groundwater, and provides a strong framework for future watershed protection. The result is improved water quality for communities throughout the watershed.

How Can I Help?

Watershed management requires the cooperation and contributions of everyone, including politicians, educators, utility managers, industry and business representatives, planners, government officials, land owners and managers, and informed citizens. Everyone has a **stake** in the watershed. You can help by:

- Educating yourself about water resources and uses in your watershed;
- Talking to your elected officials about watershed management;
- Forming or participating in watershed planning groups;
- Making sure your area schools are teaching the concept of watershed management;
- Reaching out to other communities and crossing political boundaries to deal with watershed-wide issues; and
- Thinking about water in terms of future needs.



For more information about watershed management, contact your local water or wastewater treatment plant, sanitation district, environmental official, soil and water conservation district or the Water Environment Federation, 601 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 USA, 1 (703) 684-2400.

Visit our website at <http://www.wef.org>