

Watershed 101: Understanding your Watershed Community

What is a watershed?

Every one of us lives in a watershed. A watershed is the area of land from which water drains into a receiving body of water such as a creek, stream, river, lake or ocean. Simply, it is a way to geographically understand how water is shed (or drains) from the land.

USEPA notes that a watershed comes in all shapes and sizes. The boundaries of a watershed are determined by the land. Think of a watershed like a basin; the topography, how the ground rises and falls, of the land determines the boundaries of a watershed. The ridges or highpoints on the land serve to divide watersheds. It is important to note that watersheds do not follow political boundaries.

Watersheds are classified across the United States by Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC) as developed by the Water Resources Council. They also have common names as determined by the receiving waterbody (for example, the Fox River Watershed or Illinois River Watershed).

What we do on the land impacts the watershed; natural processes as well as human impacts will directly affect the quality of the receiving waterbody (or point to which a watershed drains).

To find and view your watershed, visit USEPA's "How to find a Watershed Address" webpage at: <http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/address.cfm> . From there click, "Locate Your Watershed" to "Surf Your Watershed."



Additional References:

USEPA: What is a Watershed? <http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/whatis.cfm>

USGS: What is a Watershed? <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/watershed.html>

