

Sum of the Parts

No matter where you live and how much or how little water is nearby, you live in a watershed. A watershed is an area of land that drains into a specific body of water like a river, stream, or lake. It includes everything within its borders: all the land, air, plants, animals, mountains, deserts, cities, farms, and people. Within a large watershed, for example the Nile River Watershed, there are many small watersheds that contain streams that

drain into the Nile River. In turn, it is also part of a larger watershed.

Protecting watersheds is important because they support everything from the water we drink and use to grow food, to water for industry, transportation, and wildlife. Clean drinking water depends on clean source water like springs.

Protecting source water is an important part of watershed protection and the health of

our communities.

Every watershed is different, but an old saying holds true everywhere on Earth: We ALL Live Downstream. This means we all share responsibility for protecting our watersheds and keeping them clean. To do this, we need to understand first what a watershed is.

Find the following features in this picture: springs, river, ocean, mountains, and the watershed boundary. How can you tell which way the river flows? Trace the drop's journey as it flows to the ocean. Locate the stars and the streams they represent and count the streams that flow into the main stem of the river. How many are there?

Activity

1. Water falls as rain or snow. Place a drop of water on a flat surface on the ground. Does it run off to the sides? Does it drain into the ground? If water falls on a flat surface, it may not run off or drain.
2. In what direction does water flow? Collect the dirt at your feet and mix it with water until it is the consistency of clay. With the clay, create a mound with steep slopes. Drip water from your cup onto the peak of the mound. Did it flow downhill?
3. How are watersheds divided? Create a mound of clay with steep slopes. Drip water from your cup onto the peak of the mound of clay. Down which side does the water drain? The top of your mound of clay represents the boundary between watersheds, and the water flows down on whichever side it falls. Watersheds are divided at their highest points.
4. Are large watersheds made of smaller watersheds? Put your hand on top of the mound of clay and squish it down. Drip water over your new landscape. Does the water flow into pools in spots? What watershed features could these represent? Large watersheds may contain many smaller watersheds, each with several streams and lakes.



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