



Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

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Topic of the Month - August 2017

What is a watershed and why are they important?

A watershed is an area of land that drains all of its water to a specific lake or river. As rainwater and melting snow run downhill, they carry sediment and other materials into our streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater.

The boundary of a watershed is defined by the watershed divide, which is the ridge of highest elevation surrounding a given stream or network of streams. A drop of rainwater falling outside of this boundary will enter a different watershed and will flow to a different body of water.

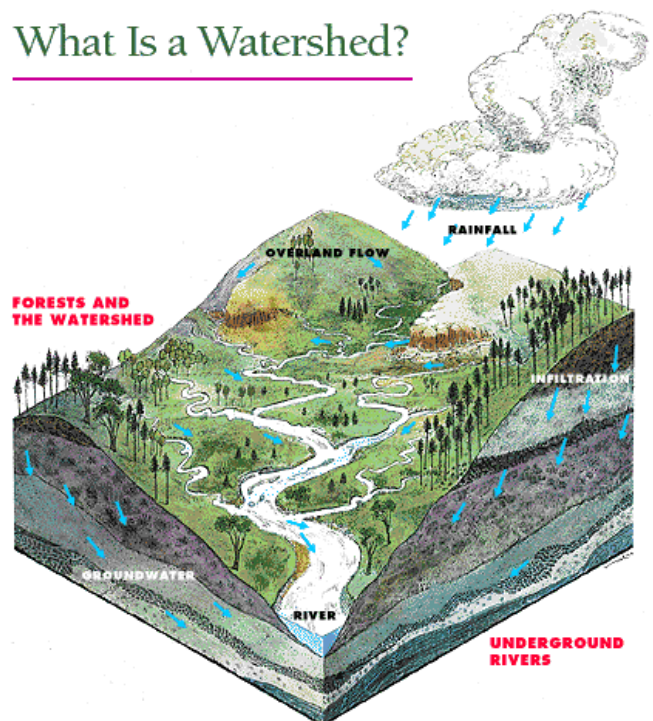
No matter where you live, work or play you are within a watershed! Our streams and rivers may flow through many different types of land use in their paths to the ocean. Each land use presents unique impacts and challenges on water quality.

Why is your watershed important?

We all live in a watershed. Watersheds are the places we call home, where we work and where we play. Everyone relies on water and other natural resources to exist. What you and others do on the land impacts the quality and quantity of water and our other natural resources.

Healthy watersheds are vital for a healthy environment and economy. Our watersheds provide water for drinking, irrigation and industry. Many people also enjoy lakes and streams for their beauty and for boating, fishing and swimming. Wildlife also need healthy watersheds for food and shelter.

What Is a Watershed?



Managing the water and other natural resources is an effective and efficient way to sustain the local economy and environmental health. Scientists and leaders now recognize the best way to protect the vital natural resources is to understand and manage them on a watershed basis. Everything that is done in a watershed affects the watershed's system.

Pollutants and Water Quality

In the past, most water quality problems were traced to the most obvious cause point source pollution. This means the problem can be traced to a specific location such as a pipe or disposal site.

Technical and regulatory methods have been used to detect and control these problems. Much progress has been made in preventing further water quality problems from point sources.

However, water quality problems from nonpoint- source pollution are more difficult to isolate and control. These sources are often hard to identify and difficult to measure. This type of pollution results from a wide variety of activities over a wide area.

Nonpoint-source pollutants are in the water that runs off crop or forest land. Others include failing septic systems, parking lots, construction sites, irrigation systems and drainage systems. It can even result from automobile exhaust getting in the atmosphere and falling back to earth in the rain.

A partnership among all who live, work or play in the watershed can help identify concerns, educate those involved and encourage them to take action. Watershed management plans focus on prevention of pollution. This is easier and cheaper than trying to cleanup a watershed after the fact.



Understanding your watershed is the first step in protecting the water and other natural resources.

Information shared by Michael Macioch