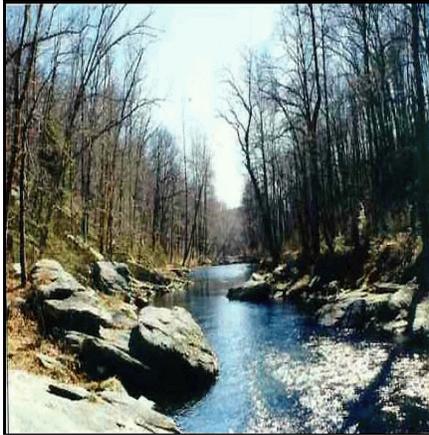


We All Live In a Watershed



New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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What is a Watershed?

A watershed is the land that water flows across or under on its way to a river, lake, stream or bay. Water travels over farm fields, forests, suburban lawns and city streets, or it seeps into the soil and travels as groundwater. Watersheds are separated from each other by high points, such as hills or slopes.

To picture a watershed, think of a small brook that flows into a river. The river then flows into a lake. All the land that surrounds the brook, river and lake are in one watershed, because all the water in the area flows into the lake. In addition, the lake and its watershed may be a part of a larger river's watershed. Water in the larger rivers eventually makes its way

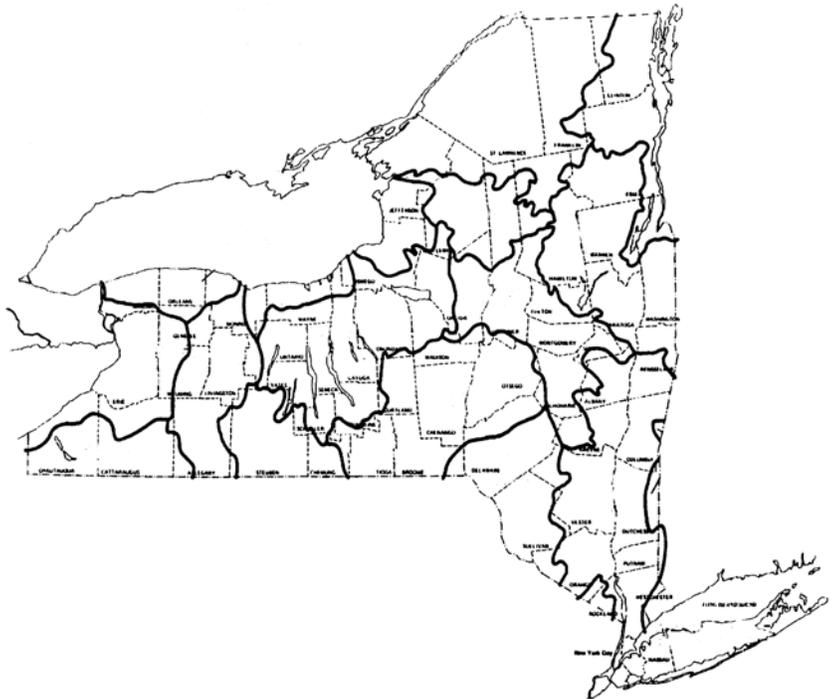
to the ocean.

What is your Watershed Address?

Everyone lives in a watershed. The water in your backyard drains over or under the ground to a small creek or pond and is a part of its watershed. Where does the rain in your backyard end up? The answer to this question is your watershed address, the drainage basin where you live.

What is a Drainage Basin?

A drainage basin is a larger watershed containing the watersheds of several other smaller rivers and streams. New York State has 17 major basins. Can you identify the basin you live in on this New York State map?



Watershed Problems

People affect the environment's health when they pollute a watershed. Pollutants are materials that can harm plants, animals or humans. These materials may be discharged directly into a waterbody or washed off the land and into waterbodies. Some can also seep into the soil and groundwater.

Examples of pollutants include soil from construction sites, waste from septic systems, fertilizers, pesticides and chemicals such as mercury, lead and arsenic. Road salt, soil and animal waste can also pollute if washed into a waterbody. Sources of pollution include atmospheric deposition (acid rain), runoff from paved roads and driveways, lawns, eroding streambanks, oil spills, landfills, industries, and farm fields. Depending on the type and level of pollution, the waterbody may become unsuitable for fishing, swimming, or even for aquatic animals to survive in.

A watershed may also be harmed when people change how and where water flows, for example, by paving large parking lots or changing the direction of a stream. Problems such as flooding or lower groundwater levels can result.

Protect New York's Watersheds

Everyone lives in a watershed. It could be large or small. What you do at your house affects everyone downstream and around you.

- Get involved. Little things can all add up. Get together with friends and adopt a section of waterway. Plan a picnic with friends and clean up the banks of a nearby waterway, bike route or highway.
- Sweep sidewalks and driveways rather than hosing them off. Hosing hard surfaces wastes water and moves the debris into the storm drains. There it can collect and clog the drain. Instead, collect and compost yard waste.
- Don't waste water. Wash your car on the lawn, or better yet, use a commercial car wash. Most commercial car washes recycle or pre-treat their waste water, thereby reducing its affect on the environment.
- Don't flush unused drugs and cosmetics down the drain. These pollutants find their way out into the environment and can damage our watershed and everything living in it. Instead, dispose of these items, along with fats, grease, diapers and personal hygiene products in the garbage can.

To Learn More about Watersheds

DEC has information on New York's 17 major watersheds (or "basins"). Visit us on the web at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/60135.html>