

Wherever you live and whatever you do, you are in a watershed. Learning how to take care of your watershed is important to conserving and maintaining the quality of water in your area.

A watershed is more than just a stream, river or lake. It consists of the land that drains into the surface and groundwater in the area, as well as the soils, vegetation, and animal and human activities within the watershed.

You impact your watershed by the way you use the water and land.

Groups of citizens, local governments, state and federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations are coming together to develop Watershed Protection Plans for their individual watersheds. Watershed Protection Plans are designed to maintain good quality surface waters or restore impaired surface waters by reducing point or nonpoint sources of pollution or both. Nonpoint Source Pollution is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and manmade pollutants, such as soil, nutrients, pesticides and other toxic chemicals. This differs from Point Source Pollution which typically is discharged from a defined point, such as a wastewater treatment plant or industrial discharge. Point sources are typically regulated and permitted by the appropriate local, state, and federal authorities.

Watershed Protection Plans address complex water quality problems that cross multiple jurisdictions and promote sustainable, proactive approaches to managing water quality at the local level. Included in the plans are coordinated public communication and education programs that help spread the word about how citizens can help improve and maintain water quality.

As a citizen living in a watershed, you can help maintain or improve water quality by knowing what effect your daily actions have on water quality and helping inform others.

In your home, you can purchase household products that are low in phosphorus, and properly dispose of hazardous or toxic chemicals to reduce the amount of nutrients and wastes discharged appropriately. You can manage your landscape by planting native plants and grasses that use less water, fertilizer and pesticides, by composting your yard trimmings, and by keeping storm gutters and drains clean of leaves and yard trimmings.

On a larger scale, the Watershed Management Approach, endorsed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is a coordinated, environmental management framework that focuses public and private efforts on a watershed's highest priority pollution problems.

Watershed management is the first, and often the most cost-effective, step to ensure a safe and reliable public water supply.

