



Healthy Watersheds Begin

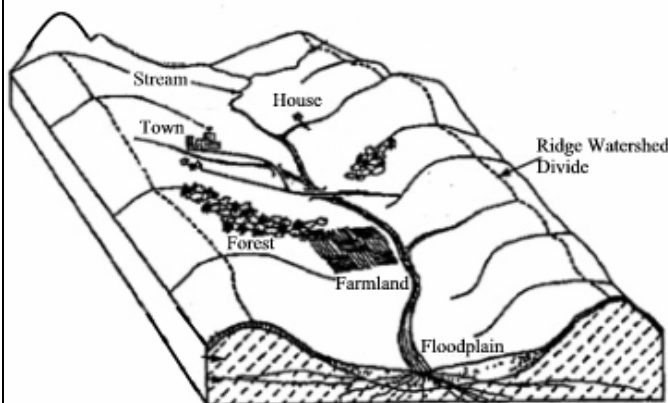
With Understanding

Watershed Series Article 1

Healthy watersheds lead to healthy communities. But what exactly is a watershed and how can it lead to a healthy community?

A watershed consists of all the land that drains water, sediment and other material to a common point, such as a stream or lake. Watersheds come in a variety of shapes and can include farms, big cities, small towns and forests.

Watersheds can range in size from a few acres to several thousand square miles. Land elevation, not town, county or political borders, defines watershed boundaries. Pictured below is an example of a watershed.



Watersheds supply drinking water, plant and animal habitat and areas that are used for relaxation and recreation. With growth and development stressing water resources and watersheds, it is vital that everyone do their part in improving watershed health.

Healthy watersheds can lead to healthy communities through:

- Affordable, high-quality drinking water
- High property values
- Improved quality of life

Affordable, High-Quality Drinking Water Communities without a supply of potable water are forced to treat, or clean up, contaminated water or pump water in from an outside source. Both options are expensive and can lead to higher taxes and water bills for the residents of that community. Healthy watersheds are able to naturally remove most contaminants from water, which decreases the need for expensive water treatment plants and lowers average water costs.

High Property Values Property found within a healthy watershed experiences an increase in property values due to an inexpensive supply of potable water, reduced flood damage and increased aesthetic appeal. Healthy watersheds generally have realistic zoning laws and development regulations, which lead to higher property values.

Improved Quality of Life Communities within a healthy watershed contain more greenspace (trees, prairies and native vegetation), increased wildlife habitat and access to clean streams and ponds for recreational activities; attributes that have been proven through research to reduce stress.

Every action, from township zoning, to crab grass killer application to a morning shower, produces an affect on the watershed. The remainder of the "*Healthy Watersheds Begin*" series provides information that can be used to positively impact any watershed.

For more healthy watershed ideas, contact your local University of Illinois Extension office or visit the Illinois Watershed Management Clearinghouse web site at www.watershed.uiuc.edu