



# what's a watershed?

No matter where you are in New Jersey, you are in a watershed. Watersheds are everywhere ... from your front doorstep to the local park to the shopping mall to the creek down the road.

Watersheds are the link between our land, our water and our communities because the quality of our water is linked to how we use the watershed surrounding it.

*So what is a watershed?*

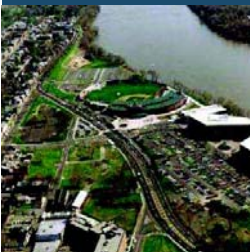
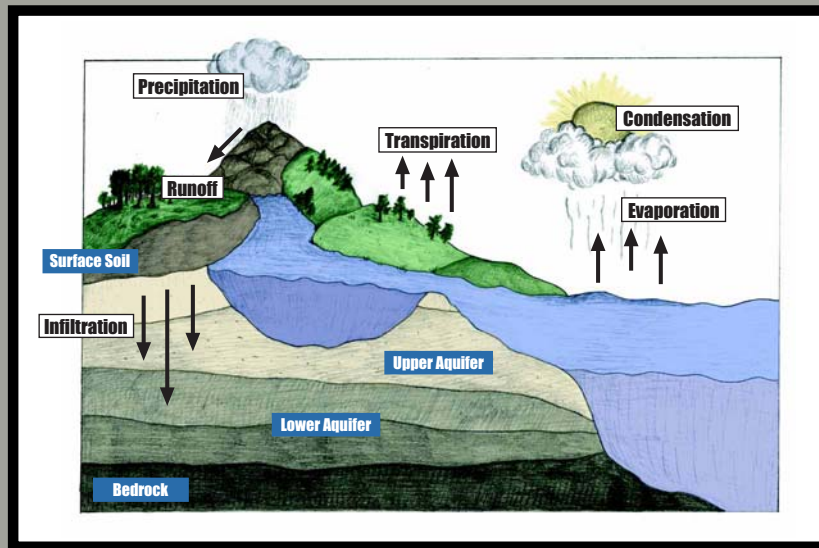


## what's a watershed?

A watershed is the area of land that drains into a body of water such as a river, lake, stream or bay. It is separated from other watersheds by high points in the area such as hills or slopes. It includes not only the waterway itself but also the entire land area that drains to it. For example, the watershed of a lake would include not only the streams entering that lake but also the land area that drains into those streams and eventually the lake. Drainage basins generally refer to large watersheds that encompass the watersheds of many smaller rivers and streams.

## what's the water cycle?

For millions of years, water has been constantly recycled and reused. When it rains, the rainwater flows over land into waterways or is absorbed by the ground or plants. Water evaporates from land and water bodies becoming water vapor in the atmosphere. Water is also released from trees and other plants through "transpiration." The water vapor from evaporation and transpiration forms clouds in the atmosphere which in turn provide precipitation (rain, hail, snow, sleet) to start the cycle over again. This process of water recycling, known as the water cycle, repeats itself continuously.



## what's ground water?

A sizable amount of rainwater runoff seeps into the ground to become ground water. Ground water moves into water-filled layers of porous geological formations called aquifers. If the aquifer is close to the surface, its ground water can flow into nearby waterways or wetlands, providing a base flow. Depending on your location, aquifers containing ground water can range from a few feet below the surface to several hundred feet underground. Contrary to popular belief, aquifers are not flowing underground streams or lakes.

Ground water is the primary drinking water source for half of the state's population. Most of this water is obtained from individual domestic wells or public water supplies which tap into aquifers. The other sources of drinking water are surface water reservoirs and rivers.

# how does urbanization change a watershed?

Urbanization (or development) has a great effect on local water resources. It changes how water flows in the watershed and what flows in the water. Both surface and ground water flow are changed.

As a watershed becomes developed, trees, shrubs and other plants are replaced with impervious surfaces (roads, rooftops, parking lots and other hard surfaces that do not allow stormwater to soak into the ground). Without the plants to store and slow the flow of stormwater, the rate of stormwater runoff is increased. Less stormwater soaks into the ground because the sidewalks, roads, parking lots and rooftops block this infiltration. This means a greater volume of water reaches the waterway faster and less water infiltrates to ground water. This in turn leads to more flooding after storms and reduced flow in streams and rivers during dry periods. The reduced amount of infiltrating water can lower ground water levels, which in turn can stress local waterways that depend on steadier flows of water.

In the stream, more erosion of stream banks and scouring of channels will occur due to volume increase. This in turn degrades habitat for plant and animal life that depend on clean water. Sediment from eroded stream banks clogs the gills of fish and blocks light needed for plants. The sediment settles to fill in stream channels, lakes and reservoirs. This also increases flooding and the need for dredging to clear streams or lakes for boating.

In addition to the high flows caused by urbanization, the increased runoff also contains increased contaminants. These include litter, cigarette butts and other debris from sidewalks and streets, motor oil poured into storm sewers, heavy metals from brake linings, settled air pollutants from car exhaust and pesticides and fertilizers from lawn care. These contaminants reach local waterways quickly after a storm.

