



Watersheds

Watershed management is an important part of every community. Understanding what they are and how they work is crucial in maintaining their health.

What is a watershed?

Basically, a watershed is the land surface that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river or lake. A comparison can be made between your roof and the landscape. Rainfall and snow run off your roof and down rain gutters to your yard where it is soaked into the soil. The landscape soaks in rainfall and melted snow until it finds its way to a small creek which joins with other creeks until eventually it meets with a river.

Each watershed is unique. They can be flat, hilly or mountainous, or they may be covered with towns, industrial areas or farmland. They vary in size from a few square blocks to millions of acres.

Your watershed community

Everyone is a part of a watershed community. You affect the health and well-being of the watershed by how you treat the natural resources which are in it— the soil, water, air, plants and animals. In turn, what happens in your watershed affects other bodies of water. It is important to understand the effects of such day-to-day activities as lawn care, gardening or automobile maintenance and how they can contribute to an excess of nutrients, sediment and pollutants flowing into the surface waters of our watersheds.

Results of human activity to the watershed

Excessive nutrient run off can cause an increase in aquatic plants and algae growth while sediments cloud the water making it less visually appealing. Pollutants can hurt fish and plant life in lakes and streams and sometimes these pollutants can contaminate our drinking water.

How can you protect your watershed?

- On the farm, it is important to reduce runoff by placing plant residue on the surface of sloping cropland. It is also important to plant buffer strips along waterways. Both of these techniques are used to prevent sediment, fertilizers, and pesticides from entering streams and other bodies of water.
- At home, try to landscape yards with plants that need only a small amount of water or fertilizers. Do not over fertilize or use more pesticides than are necessary. Also, recycle automotive and other waste oils rather than letting them run into the ground.
- In your community, do what you can to protect the wetlands that serve as natural buffers against pollution, soil erosion and flooding.

What is a Watershed District?

Watershed districts are local units of government that work to solve and prevent water-related problems. The boundaries of the districts follow those of a natural watershed, and the districts are usually named after that watershed.

Managing natural resources on a watershed basis allows for an overall, holistic approach to resource conservation since watershed boundaries do not follow political boundaries.

Minnesota has 43 watershed districts which were created to deal with such things as flood control and water quality issues.

Watershed Districts are established when water management problems become greater than one community or city can handle. Effective management is necessary for control as well as prevention of problems.

Watershed Districts are governed by a Board of Managers appointed by the Boards of County Commissioners. All watershed district meetings are open to the public.

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Watershed districts in Minnesota...These are some of the things they can do.

- They are partners in water planning and management with the state, counties, cities and soil and water conservation districts;
- Are partners in wetlands protection and management with the state, counties, cities and soil and water conservation districts;
- Conduct water quality surveys of lakes and streams within the district;
- Monitor groundwater levels;
- Manage draining systems;
- Regulate, conserve and control the use of water within the district;
- Establish, record and maintain hydrological data;
- Approve culvert size and placement in all roads of the district; and
- Other projects related to meeting the purposes of the district.

***What is a Watershed District?* is from the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, Inc.'s web site- www.mnwatershed.org**

The Buffalo-Red Watershed District:



Map is from the Environmental Protection Agency's web site- www.epa.gov

What is a Water Resource District?

In North Dakota water management is accomplished through water resource districts (WRDs) which are somewhat different than watershed districts. Most of them are established along county lines and are named for that county. Within their areas of jurisdiction, WRDs have a broad range of authorities for water management. A board of managers governs the WRD and they are appointed by the board of county commissioners. They may have three to five managers which are appointed to staggered terms. The number of meetings varies depending on the nature and amount of issues facing the district. They are all open to the public as well. Fargo belongs to the Southeast Cass Water Resource District.

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