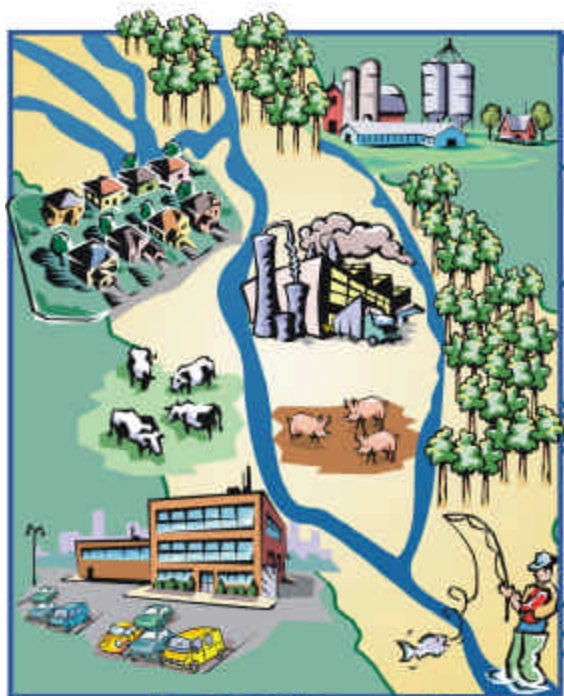


Arkansas Watershed Planning Guide



ADEQ

Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
Environmental Preservation Division

Watersheds

A watershed is a geographic area where all the rain and snowmelt drains to a common waterbody, such as, a river, lake, or wetland. A watershed is a natural boundary, defined by elevation. Rainwater and snowmelt drain to streams, rivers, wetlands, or lakes as surface runoff and, eventually, make it to the ocean, or it may percolate through the soil and become groundwater. As water travels through the landscape, first as runoff, then as the flow in streams and rivers, it picks up contaminants, sediment, and debris. Activities or land use within a watershed, such as, a change in landcover or the placement of an industry that discharges permitted waste-water from a pipe, may affect the quantity and quality of water in the receiving waters. Because watersheds are the land areas that directly affect water quality, they represent the most logical basis for managing water resources.

Watersheds, also referred to as catchments, basins, or drainage area, describe geography at many different scales. Watersheds may be a few acres that drain to a small stream or a million acres that drains to a large river. About 40 percent of the U.S. land area in the lower 48 states drains to the Mississippi River. Larger watersheds such as the Mississippi River basin in the U.S. and the White River basin in Arkansas encompass countless smaller watersheds.



Figure 1.1 A watershed is the area of land that drains to a common point such as a stream, lake, or wetland.