

## Conservation Corner

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This issue of Conservation Corner introduces the concept of the watershed and what everyone can do to help.

### What is a watershed and why is it important?

A watershed (also called a drainage basin or catchment) is the area of land that funnels rain or snowmelt into one location such as a brook, river, lake or wetland. Watersheds are separated by topographical highpoints or divides where water flows in a different direction to a different water body. **Everybody lives in a watershed and healthy watersheds are needed to sustain life.** The US Environmental Protection Agency approximates that nearly half a trillion dollars of the US economy (food, manufactured goods and tourism) depend on clean, healthy watersheds.

The size of a watershed can be defined on many scales based on the geography that is most relevant to its specific area. A watershed can be small, such as a first or second order stream or a modest (195 acre) lake like Gregg Lake with a 3,000 acre watershed, here in Antrim. On the other hand a gigantic watershed like that for the Mississippi River where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico, is approximately 1.25 million square miles. So you can see watersheds can be small or exceptionally large and everything in between. It should however be remembered that not all water flows overland directly into brooks, streams and lakes; some seeps into the earth and becomes groundwater. This is important and may be a topic for future discussion.

### What can you do to care for and protect your watershed?

On undeveloped and undisturbed land, natural cover intercepts precipitation as it falls to the ground and the precipitation is absorbed into the ground. Development and land clearing decreases the ability of the land to absorb precipitation thereby leading to greater overland flow and increased water flow directly into surface water.

Impervious surfaces do not allow precipitation to soak in. Examples include roofs, decks, patios, paved or gravel driveways, parking lots, sidewalks and walkways that are not designed to absorb water. These surfaces act as “fast

lanes” that transport water and the materials it picks up directly into storm ditches (drains) or nearby waterbodies. The excess water volume can quickly overwhelm streams and rivers, causing flooding and erosion. Besides flooding, these uncontrolled waters have the ability to pick up sediment and pollutants that may prove harmful to the waterbody.

Watershed protection is a way of protecting a lake, river, or stream by managing the water that flows into it. Control of stormwater from an impervious surface before it reaches a waterbody falls under the heading of stormwater management.

Some simple things you can do are:

- Use trees and shrubs to filter runoff from your property by planting a native vegetation buffer downslope of your driveway, roof and yard.
- Keep your lawn small—lawns shed more water than forested land and who likes to mow lawns anyway!
- Prevent soil erosion—it can be the single largest threat to the water quality of our lakes and streams. More on how to do this in just a moment.
- Use less lawn fertilizer.
- Properly maintain your septic system.
- Dispose of chemicals properly at a local Household Hazardous Waste Day and not by dumping in the yard or down the sink.
- As always try to reduce, reuse or recycle.

Preventing erosion on your property can take many forms through the use of drywells, rain barrels, dripline trenches, infiltration steps or water bars. These and other amendments may be found in two New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services online publications:

*New Hampshire Homeowner's Guide to Stormwater Management: Do-It-Yourself Stormwater Solutions For Your Home*—<https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/publications/wd/documents/wd-11-11.pdf>

*A Shoreland Homeowner's Guide to Stormwater Management: Protecting Your Home and Environment*—<https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/publications/wd/documents/nhdes-wd-10-8.pdf>

Another helpful publication is *Landscaping at the Water's Edge* published by the UNH Cooperative Extension. A copy of this publication has been provided to the Tuttle Library by the Antrim Conservation Commission and is available to the public for review. ☐

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