

Watershed Information

Fact Sheet

A watershed is the area of land that is drained by a creek, stream, or river. All of the land on Earth is part of some watershed.

When water falls to the Earth it lands in a watershed. A watershed is the land that captures water in any form, such as rain, snow, dew, sleet, or hail. All the land whose water drains into a particular stream system or lake is the watershed for that body of water. All land is part of some creek, stream, river, lake, pond, or puddle's watershed. Some watersheds are huge. The Mississippi River's watershed extends from Minnesota to Louisiana. It has many smaller watersheds that feed water into the main river. In the California counties of Calaveras and Amador, the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed includes fourteen creeks emptying into the North Fork of the Mokelumne River. Two creeks feed the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River, and four creeks nourish the South Fork of the Mokelumne River. This is also true of the Tuolumne River and the Stanislaus River in Tuolumne County. These smaller watersheds are all part of the larger watershed, just like one's fingers are all part of one's hand.

Think of the word "shed." It can mean something that stores things, like a garden "shed," or it can mean to let something run off, like an umbrella "sheds" water. A watershed does both! Some rain that falls on the watershed runs off, carving the land into hills and valleys in a slow process called "erosion." As water flows it causes erosion and small particles of mud, sand, and rock are transported downstream changing the shape of the streambed and stream banks.

Some of the water seeps into the ground where it is stored for a while before being released slowly into streams by way of springs. This "groundwater" may be tapped by wells and pumped out of the ground to be used by people. California's golden future depends on the watershed doing its job of capturing, storing, and slowly releasing its water.

Everyone lives, works, and plays in watersheds, and what humans do affects everything and everyone else in the watershed. Water from homes soaks into the ground or drains into creeks and lakes within the watershed; what is done around homes can change the quality of water downstream.

Source

The State Water Resources Control Board, www.swrcb.ca.gov.