



Did you know you live in a watershed?

A watershed is all the land that drains into a common waterbody, such as a lake, pond, or river. This waterbody is where all the water from precipitation and groundwater not used in other ecological processes eventually collects. A watershed can be only a few square miles or several hundred square miles in size. We all live in a watershed!

For example, Lake Winnepesaukee and its watershed is nested within the Merrimack River watershed, which totals 5,014 square miles, beginning in the White Mountains and flowing into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Massachusetts. Everyone who lives or recreates in the watershed is connected and affected by a common thread—the flow of water.

When it rains, soil and various pollutants such as fertilizers, oils, pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals, and animal manure can be transported from the land surface within a watershed into waterbodies that are miles away. Improper management of lawns, eroding drainage gullies and swales, malfunctioning septic systems, and polluted water flowing from urban and agricultural land allows higher concentrations of pollutants, including nutrients and sediments, to find their way into rivers and lakes than would naturally occur. Increased nutrient loading, particularly of phosphorus, can cause algae blooms (some of which are toxic) and excessive aquatic plant growth, thus greatly accelerating the natural filling-in process of lakes, as well as polluting them with harmful chemicals. Research studies have shown that the amount of phosphorus entering waterbodies from agricultural land is at least five times greater than from forested lands, and from urban areas is more than ten times greater than from forested lands! Without careful management of land and water, especially in agricultural and developed settings, polluted water from the landscape can cause drastic problems in lakes and ponds.



Lake Winnepesaukee nested within the Merrimack River watershed. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Merrimackrivermap.png>.)

New Hampshire is home to nearly 1,000 lakes and ponds. Overall, these waterbodies are of high quality and are particularly important to the citizens of New Hampshire and its visitors since they provide for recreational opportunities. In addition, these waterbodies provide critical fish and wildlife habitat, and many serve as public drinking water supplies. Furthermore, numerous jobs in the state are dependent upon high quality lakes and ponds. A recent economic study showed that just three uses of New Hampshire's surface waters (boating, swimming, and fishing) provides approximately one billion dollars to the economy annually.

Simply put, lakes and ponds are important to the state's economy, its natural environment, and the overall quality of life for New Hampshire residents and visitors. In many ways, it is up to us to ensure the continued health and integrity of our many-faceted watersheds.

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299.

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