

# What is a Watershed?

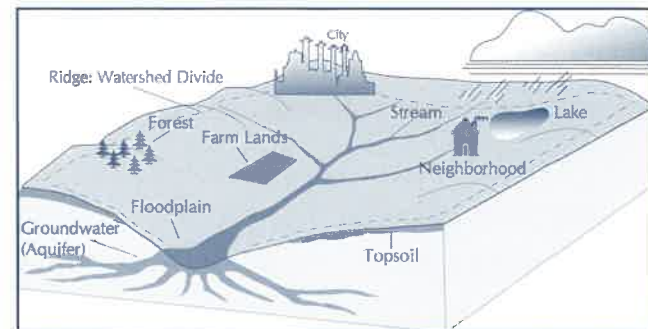
A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common point, such as a nearby creek, stream, river or lake. Every small watershed drains to a larger watershed that eventually flows to the ocean.

Watersheds support a wide variety of plants and wildlife and provide many outdoor recreation opportunities. Protecting the health of our watersheds preserves and enhances the quality of life for Kansas City area residents.

## What is Stormwater Runoff?

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow. It flows from rooftops, over paved streets, sidewalks and parking lots, across bare soil, and through lawns and storm drains. As it flows, runoff collects and transports soil, pet waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease, litter and other pollutants. This water drains directly into nearby creeks, streams and rivers, without receiving treatment at sewage plants.

Polluted stormwater contaminates local waterways. It can harm plants, fish and wildlife, while degrading the quality of water.



A typical watershed system



For more information,  
visit [www.marc.org/water](http://www.marc.org/water)  
or call 816/474-4240.

Summer Watershed Tip



Only rain  
should go down  
storm drains.



Good Neighbors Care  
About Clean Water

## The Facts About Storm Drains

### *What is a Storm Drain?*

Storm drains are the metal grates found on urban and suburban streets, often at corners and on the sides of curbs and gutters. They help prevent flooding by draining rainwater and melted snow off of streets and other paved surfaces.

### *Is a Storm Drain System the same thing as a Sanitary Sewer System?*

Sewer systems and storm drain systems are not the same. The water that goes down a sink or toilet in your home or business flows through a sewer system to a wastewater treatment plant where it is treated and cleaned. Water that flows down a driveway or street and into a gutter goes into a storm drain which goes directly to a natural body of water, *untreated*.



## What's the Problem?

While storm drains were designed to divert water from streets, they become dangerous water polluters when harmful substances from lawns and streets flow through them.

During a rainfall, water runs down streets and through yards, picking up substances along the way. This "runoff" often contains elements that pollute our waterways, can harm wildlife, and degrade water quality.

### **Water that enters storm drains is *not* cleaned at a wastewater treatment plant before it flows directly to streams, rivers and lakes.**

Some common contaminants in stormwater include lawn chemicals, pet waste, household chemicals like paint, and soaps used for washing cars. Products advertised as "non-toxic" or "biodegradable" are not typically safe for our waterways either — even small amounts of dirt entering storm drains can affect the water quality.

These small amounts of pollution can add up to a big problem when it comes from an area the size of the Kansas City region. Each storm drain can have harmful effects on wildlife, recreation and forestry.

**THIS DRAIN FOR RAIN.  
FLOWS TO STREAM.**

## What Can You Do?

To help prevent stormwater pollution follow these simple tips:

- ☞ **Use lawn chemicals safely.** Always follow label instructions and never apply before rain or watering the lawn, unless directed.
- ☞ **Pick up after your pets.** When walking your pet, remember to bring extra bags to pick up and dispose of waste properly.
- ☞ **Recycle used oil.** Never place used motor oil in the trash or pour down storm drains. Visit [www.marc.org](http://www.marc.org) to find the nearest oil recycling center.
- ☞ **Sweep driveways and sidewalks clean.** Remove debris and residue that could end up in a storm drain from concrete and paved areas around your house
- ☞ **Wash your car the right way.** Either wash your car at a car wash that filters the wastewater, or wash your car in a grassy area. Avoid washing your car on a driveway or in the street.
- ☞ **Don't dump.** Never discard trash or yard waste down storm drains or in the street.
- ☞ **Storm drain marking.** Join or start a group that attaches markers or paints stencils with anti-dumping messages on storm drains to remind citizens where the water flows.