

What Happens in a Watershed?

Georges Creek is part of a watershed. A watershed is an area that drains into a common body of water. This body of water may be a river, lake, or even an ocean. Hills and mountains form the boundaries of a watershed. For example, the watershed for the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland is hundreds of square kilometers of land.

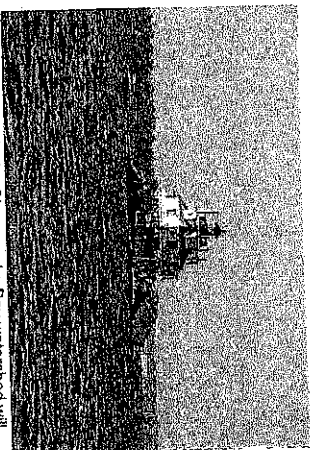
When water falls onto a watershed as rain or snow, the water eventually flows from the land into small creeks, such as Georges Creek, and then into the Chesapeake Bay.

Imagine the effect that polluted water may have on a watershed. When polluted water flows into a watershed, it can move to rivers and oceans.

Near Georges Creek, there is an abandoned coal mine. A coal mine is a series of underground tunnels where workers collect coal. Water can flow into these now empty tunnels and pour out of the mine. This water can eventually flow into a river or another body of water. This is how Georges Creek became polluted.

To understand how this water moves, let's follow the path of water as it flowed out of the abandoned mine and polluted Georges Creek. As the water flowed through the mine, it became red with wastes. It became toxic. The red water flowed into nearby Georges Creek. The polluted water was unhealthy for plants and fish in the creek. All the fish in the creek died. This water then flowed into other parts of the watershed.

When a part of a watershed becomes polluted, such as Georges Creek was, this pollution affects many areas. By taking care of a watershed, people can also protect large bodies of water, such as the Chesapeake Bay.



Water that falls in the Chesapeake Bay watershed will eventually flow into the bay.

We All Live Downstream

Wherever you live, chances are there is water nearby. That water could be a small stream, a pond, or a large river. It could even be the ocean! Can you name the body of water that is closest to you?

The area where water flows on land is called a **watershed**. All of the water in a watershed flows to the same point. That point can be a river. It can also be a lake or an ocean. The term watershed helps us understand an area of land by looking at how the water in that land moves.

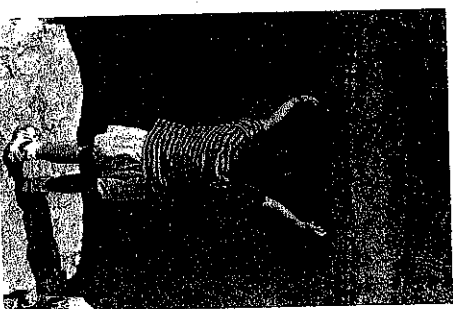
There are many different watersheds in Virginia. There are large ones like the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which includes all of the land that has water flowing into the Chesapeake Bay. There are also small ones, like the Big Sandy watershed in Western Virginia. This land has all of the water that flows into the Big Sandy River.

Every place in Virginia is part of a watershed. If a stream flows past your house, it keeps moving until it reaches the point where it empties. This means that we all need to be careful about how we treat the water around us. If we put garbage in a river, the garbage doesn't go away. It keeps moving downstream.

People who study water say, "We all live downstream." This means that the things we do to our water can affect people, plants, and animals that live downstream. If someone upstream from us pollutes a river, the pollution affects us. What does the saying "We all live downstream" mean to you?



The James River flows through Richmond. It is part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.



It is important to take care of our water.