

## Finding Your Ecological Address

### Student Reading

Water runs downhill- we all know that. The instant that a drop of rain hits the earth, it begins its journey to the ocean (If it falls as snow, it has to wait until it melts!). Of course, not all water drops make it to the ocean. Some are taken up by the roots of plants and are transpired into the air through the plant's leaves. Some evaporate in puddles, or other areas that hold water. Some filter down into underground areas, moving slowly downhill. But most water drops end up as runoff, the water that finds its way into creeks, streams and rivers.

This long or short journey to the ocean takes place within a watershed. If you were to stand in a streambed and look upstream at all the land the stream drains, you would be looking at the stream's watershed. Almost all the area of a watershed is land- not water! And almost everything that affects the stream

that drains it happens on that land. In other words, ALL land on Earth is in a watershed.

Watersheds can be big or small. A mud puddle has a watershed of only a few square feet. The Columbia River in the Western United States has a watershed that is 258,000 square miles. The biggest watershed in the country is the Mississippi River, which drains all the land between the Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains!

Watersheds are separated by ridges, called divides. The Continental Divide of the United States, for example, is in the Rocky Mountains. All the rain and snow falling on the west side of the divide flows into the Pacific Ocean. All the rain and snow falling on the east side of the divide, sooner or later, ends up in the Atlantic Ocean.

Now, write your own definition of a watershed:

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