

What is a watershed?

A watershed—sometimes called a basin or drainage basin—is an area of land that drains into a particular river, lake or other body of water. We all live in a watershed. Some watersheds, like that of a stream or creek, are small. Others, like the Chesapeake Bay watershed, are large. Charlottesville is in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

What is the Chesapeake Bay watershed?

The Chesapeake Bay watershed spans more than 64,000 square miles, encompassing parts of six states—Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia—and the entire District of Columbia. More than 18 million people live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The land-to-water ratio of the Chesapeake Bay is 14:1—the largest of any coastal water body in the world. This is why our actions on land have such a big impact on the Bay's health.

What rivers flow through the Bay watershed?

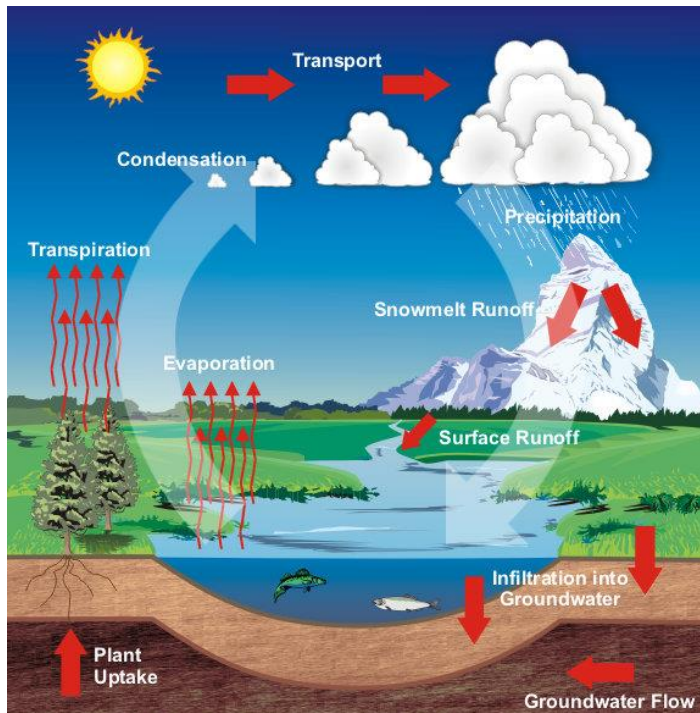
The Susquehanna, Potomac, Rappahannock, York and James rivers are the five largest rivers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. More than 100,000 streams, creeks and rivers—called tributaries—thread through this watershed. Each watershed resident lives within a few miles of one of these local waterways, which act like pipelines that connect our communities to the Bay. Each of the streams, creeks and rivers in the Bay watershed has its own watershed, called sub-watersheds, small watersheds or local watersheds.



Chesapeake watershed facts

- The Chesapeake Bay is North America's largest estuary (where fresh & salt water come together) and the world's third largest.
- "Chesapeake" derives from the Native American "Tschiswapeki," which loosely translates into "great shellfish bay."
- The Bay has 11,600 miles of tidal shoreline – more than the entire US west coast!
- Approximately 17 million people live in the watershed; about 10 million people live along its shores or near them.
- One can reach a Bay tributary in less than 15 minutes from nearly everywhere in the watershed.
- The leading threat to the health of the Chesapeake Bay is excess nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from agriculture, sewage treatment plants, runoff from urban and suburban areas, and air pollution from automobiles, factories, and power plants.
- Everything we do on the land—including the use of automobiles, fertilizers, pesticides, toilets, water and electricity—affects our streams, rivers and the Bay.

Water Cycle facts



Precipitation is a vital component of how water moves through Earth's water cycle, connecting the ocean, land, and atmosphere. Knowing where it rains, how much it rains and the character of the falling rain, snow or hail allows scientists to better understand precipitation's impact on streams, rivers, surface runoff and groundwater. Frequent and detailed measurements help scientists make models of and determine changes in Earth's water cycle. The water cycle describes how water evaporates from the surface of the earth, rises into the atmosphere, cools and condenses into rain or snow in clouds, and falls again to the surface as precipitation. The water falling on land collects in rivers and lakes, soil, and porous layers of rock, and much of it flows back into the oceans, where it will once more evaporate. The cycling of water in and out of the atmosphere is a significant aspect of the weather patterns on Earth.

