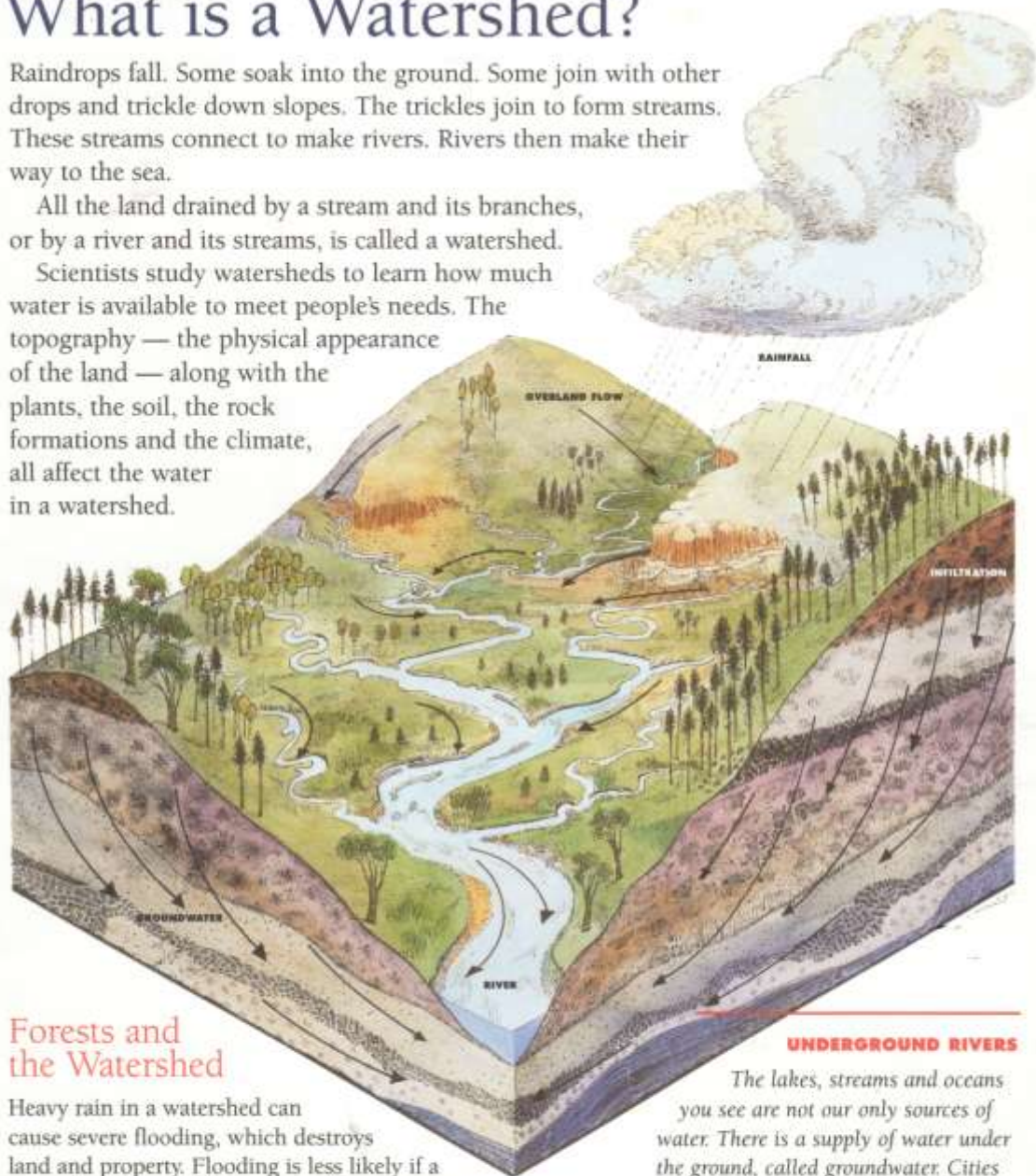


What is a Watershed?

Raindrops fall. Some soak into the ground. Some join with other drops and trickle down slopes. The trickles join to form streams. These streams connect to make rivers. Rivers then make their way to the sea.

All the land drained by a stream and its branches, or by a river and its streams, is called a watershed.

Scientists study watersheds to learn how much water is available to meet people's needs. The topography — the physical appearance of the land — along with the plants, the soil, the rock formations and the climate, all affect the water in a watershed.



Forests and the Watershed

Heavy rain in a watershed can cause severe flooding, which destroys land and property. Flooding is less likely if a watershed has carefully managed forest areas or wetlands. (Wetlands are places that are flooded or boggy all or part of the year. Forests can be wetlands, too.)

Forest soils soak up water. The roots of trees also anchor soil and keep it from washing away — even after the trees are harvested. Wetlands — usually swamps and marshy areas — act as natural sponges, soaking up rainwater that might cause flooding.

UNDERGROUND RIVERS

The lakes, streams and oceans you see are not our only sources of water. There is a supply of water under the ground, called groundwater. Cities and towns use underground lakes and rivers, called aquifers, for drinking, watering crops, manufacturing and other purposes.

Groundwater may lie hundreds of feet down or be very close to the surface. The surface level of groundwater is called the water table.