Whether your drinking water comes from an underground well, a river, or a reservoir, what you do to the land in your watershed determines the quality and quantity of your water. Good watershed practices safeguard not only our drinking water, but also fishing, floating, and other water-based recreational activities. Here are some ways to protect your watershed and your water resources.
Use GOOD Watershed Practices

1. On farms, use best management practices — such as contour planting — to protect soil from erosion. Always leave an undisturbed streamside buffer zone between the stream and crop fields, logging operations, or livestock-grazing areas.

2. Fence livestock out of the stream and streamside area to reduce the animal waste that enters the stream and to protect trees and other plants that grow there. Healthy, well-vegetated streamside areas stabilize streambanks, shade the stream, and filter out pollution from runoff that enters the stream.

3. Be sure bridges and stream crossings allow free passage of fish and other aquatic life both upstream and downstream.

4. Impervious surfaces such as parking lots, streets, and buildings prevent stormwater from soaking into the ground and cause more runoff to rush into streams. Use stormwater retention methods to help slow water and capture pollutants before they reach the stream.

5. Protect soil at construction sites with properly installed and maintained silt fences and other best management practices for erosion control. Sediment that enters a stream can smother fish and other aquatic life and destroy habitat.

Avoid BAD Watershed Practices

1. Do not remove gravel from the stream channel. Improper gravel removal can cause streambank erosion upstream and sediment buildup downstream.

2. Channelizing or straightening a stream increases the speed at which water can flow. This, in turn, increases the power of the water to erode the land and choked the stream with sediment.

3. Too much fertilizer and chemical runoff from lawns, agricultural fields, or golf courses can pollute streams, kill fish and other aquatic life, and cause public health problems.

4. Avoid removing trees and other plants from along the stream. Grazing livestock, planting crops or lawns to the streambank, or building in these areas increases erosion.

5. Improperly constructed or poorly designed bridges and stream crossings can cause major problems for streams — bank erosion, channel instability, sediment deposition, and aquatic habitat destruction, which can also lead to increased infrastructure costs.
Missouri has 45 major watersheds.

What is your watershed address?

1. Big Piney River
2. Big River
3. Black River
4. Blackwater River
5. Bourbeuse River
6. Chariton River
7. Cuivre River
8. Current River
9. Eleven Point River
10. Elk River
11. Fabius River
12. Fox River
13. Gasconade River
14. Grand River
15. Headwater Diversion
16. Jacks Fork River
17. James River
18. Lamine River
19. Locust Creek
20. Meramec River
21. Mississippi River, Lower
22. Mississippi River, Upper
23. Missouri River
24. Spring River
25. Moreau River
26. North Fork White River
27. Niangua River
28. Nodaway River
29. North River
30. Osage River, East
31. Osage River, West
32. Platte River
33. Pomme de Terre River
34. Sac River
35. Salt River
36. South Grand River
37. Spring River
38. St. Francis River
39. White River
40. Wyaconda River
41. Cache River
42. Lower Kansas River
43. Nishnabotna River
44. Lower Des Moines River
45. Tarkio River

The Missouri River watershed is a sub-watershed of the Mississippi River watershed. The state of Missouri lies entirely within the Mississippi River watershed.
What You Do to the Land, You Do to the Water

Everything that happens on the land affects the water into which it drains. A stream, pond, or wetland can be only as healthy as its watershed. As water runs downhill, it picks up whatever is on the ground. In a healthy watershed, water is naturally cleaned, filtered, and stored. When water flows through cities or across fields and pastures, it picks up sediment, pollutants, and heat. These contaminants — which flow into streams, wetlands, and lakes, or into underground passageways — affect the water you use for drinking, swimming, or fishing. When you flush your toilet, wash your laundry, fertilize your lawn, or dump used oil on the ground, you affect water quality in your watershed.

It’s not easy to see a watershed unless you’re standing on top of a ridge or looking down from an airplane. Then you can see all the hills and valleys that drain water into streams, wetlands, and lakes. A watershed might be as small as your yard or millions of square miles. If you stand atop the ridge that divides two watersheds, you can pour a glass of water from one hand into one watershed and a glass of water from the other hand into a different watershed. Sooner or later, the water from the two glasses will end up in two different streams.

Missouri is part of the Mississippi River watershed — the largest in the United States. However, many small (sub) watersheds and tributaries comprise its 1.2 million-square-mile area. For example, the Missouri River watershed is a sub-watershed of the Mississippi River watershed, just as the Missouri River is a tributary of the Mississippi River. Your watershed address is the watershed, sub-watershed, or sub-sub-watershed in which you live. It tells which lake, stream, or wetland collects the water that eventually you will use.