

What is a Watershed?



A watershed is an area of land that drains towards a common water body such as a larger river, lake, bay or ocean.

Watersheds exist at many different scales. For example, the Mississippi River Watershed is the fourth largest in the world and spans 31 states and 2 Canadian provinces. The water quality in the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico near Louisiana is heavily influenced by the activities of the many farms, cities, industries and natural areas contained within this watershed.

Much of East Baton Rouge Parish is bounded by the Comite River Watershed which drains into the Lake Pontchartrain Basin and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. A closer look at East Baton Rouge reveals many smaller watersheds created by streams and small rivers.

Many of these watersheds have been heavily changed by the activities of people, reducing wildlife habitat, making waters unsafe for swimming and fishing and causing extreme flood events. Most water issues are the direct or indirect result of urban development and the loss of natural vegetation on the landscape. Essentially as we clear the land of trees, shrubs and grasses to develop and build houses, shopping malls, restaurants, parking lots, etc. we remove the land's ability to hold water and ultimately clean the water. This results in more drastic flood events, poorer water quality and more soil loss to erosion. We often see these effects in BREC parks but you can help to make a difference.

Louisiana's waterways are a beautiful and important resource. It is our duty to protect these places so that they remain areas that you want to go kayaking, fishing, swimming, rockhounding, bird watching, etc. Watersheds play an important role in our everyday life. The wetlands that they contain work hard to prevent flooding and clean water as it filters through plants and soils. It is up to all of us to keep them working properly so Louisiana's waterways remain clean and healthy for generations to come.