

What is a Watershed?

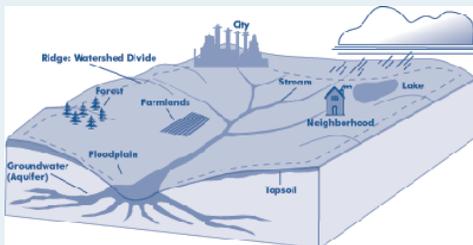
A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common point, such as a nearby creek, stream, river or lake. Every small watershed drains to a larger watershed that eventually flows to the ocean.

Watersheds support a wide variety of plants and wildlife and provide many outdoor recreation opportunities. By protecting the health of our watersheds we can preserve and enhance the quality of life for Sedgwick County residents.

What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow. It flows from rooftops, over paved streets, sidewalks and parking lots, across bare soil, and through lawns and storm drains. As it flows, runoff collects and transports soil, pet waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease, litter and other pollutants. This water drains directly into nearby creeks, streams and rivers, without receiving treatment at sewage plants.

Polluted stormwater contaminates streams, rivers and lakes. It can kill or damage plants, fish and wildlife, while degrading the quality of our water.



A typical watershed system

Stormwater Stormwater

Sedgwick County is 1,009 square miles in size with a population of close to 500,000 people. The County crosses eight watersheds within the Lower Arkansas and Walnut River Basins with the most notable rivers being the Arkansas and Little Arkansas Rivers. Drainage throughout the County is by way of the Arkansas River and its tributaries including Big Slough, Cowskin Creek, and the Ninnescah.

Stormwater Management

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Protect Our Streams

Watershed Tip

Stream corridors should be buffered with trees and native plants – not used as dumping grounds



Clean Water. Healthy Life.



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Facts About Stream Corridors

Streams are among the most important natural resources in the Sedgwick County region.

Streams, and the natural corridors along them, provide a number of important environmental services that contribute to making our region a quality place to live. Whether you have a stream running through your backyard, business, local school, or park, protecting them with stream buffers is a good idea.

A stream buffer is a protected zone within a stream corridor. This zone includes the stream bank, a vegetated area, and much of the floodplain. Within the buffer it is important to maintain native vegetation, avoid activities that disturb habitats, and prevent harmful dumping. Stream corridors provide vital networks for wildlife and help filter out pollutants. Streams surrounded by a healthy mix of vegetation including grasses, shrubs and trees buffer the effects of surrounding land uses, which might otherwise harm water quality.

Whats the Problem?

Many property owners may not realize that what they do on their land impacts neighborhoods, stream habitats and water quality downstream. The condition of land that surrounds streams directly affects property values, the health of the stream and the well-being and safety of citizens.

Streams are dynamic systems that change over time, according to the condition of the land around them.

Every stream has two components: the water flowing through it and the land beneath and around it. Good stream corridor stewardship maintains the health of both components to enhance the strength, shape and quality of a stream over time.

Landscaping and dumping are two areas where land owners can have the biggest impact on streams and stream corridors.

Landscaping with non-native plants and mowing to the edges of streams eliminates natural plants and bushes, damaging root systems that hold soil in place. This damage results in destabilized stream banks, degraded water quality, and loss of natural habitats.

Trash and litter on stream banks is unsightly, unsanitary, and unsafe for humans and wildlife. Even organic material such as yard waste, food debris and leaves is unacceptable to dump along stream banks. When these materials get into the stream cycle, they decompose and eliminate critical, life-giving oxygen from the water. As a result, streams become unsightly and emit foul odors.

What Can You Do?

Residents have an opportunity to help improve the quality of stream corridors whether they live along stream corridors or not. These are some simple steps that you can take to help improve the quality of streams corridors in the Sedgwick County region:

Don't mow up to the edge of a stream.

Avoid mowing within 10 to 25 feet from the edge of a stream. This will create a safe buffer zone that will help minimize erosion and naturally filter stormwater runoff.

Plant native plants, grasses, trees and bushes.

One of the easiest and most inexpensive methods of protecting stream banks is to plant native plants. These are trees, shrubs, grasses, and herbaceous plants that are climatized to our area.

Keep litter out of streams.

Adopt a stream or form a stream team to become a steward for a designated stretch of stream or streams in the region. Stream teams also plant trees and monitor water quality in streams.



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