

Your Watershed by the Russian River Watershed Association

What is a Watershed?

As you drive around Sonoma and Mendocino County you may see new, large, brown signs with names of watersheds. These signs are located near the dividing line or high point between watersheds, and are part of local initiatives to enhance the watershed through public awareness. But what is a watershed? It is defined as an area of land that drains to a common body of water such as a stream, river, lake or ocean. The boundary of a watershed is identified by the highest elevations surrounding the body of water. The Russian River watershed, which drains to the Pacific Ocean via the Russian River lies within both Sonoma and Mendocino counties.

Land use practices and our daily activities have the potential to negatively affect the characteristics of a watershed or specific waterways within a watershed. A detrimental land use practice to watersheds is the development of surfaces that do not allow rain water to soak into the soil, also known as impervious surfaces. Because impervious surfaces such as concrete, asphalt, and rooftops prevent infiltration - fewer impervious surfaces on your property will result in more infiltration and less runoff which can be damaging to the watershed. If you're replacing or building a driveway, consider using gravel or pervious pavers instead of concrete or asphalt. If you're putting in a new deck, think about having a raised wood or recycled plastic timber deck instead of a poured concrete deck. Also consider collecting the water from your roof drains in large barrels. You can use this water for your lawn or garden in the drier months.

The quality of your watershed depends on the actions of you and of others in your community. Understanding the environmental, educational, recreational, economic and social benefits of a healthy watershed is the first step in helping to protect and preserve the quality of watersheds. The list below outlines ten actions you can take to make a positive contribution to the overall health of your watershed.

1. Water and fertilize your lawn/garden only when needed.
2. Plant native vegetation. Native vegetation requires less water, fertilizer and pesticides.
3. Capture rooftop runoff using rain barrels. The captured water can then be used to irrigate your lawn/garden during drier months. Screen to keep mosquitoes out.
4. Dispose of pet waste properly. Pet waste is typically high in nutrients and bacteria and should be deposited into the toilet or trash.
5. Wash your car at a car wash. Detergents are harmful to aquatic life. Carwash facilities are connected to treated sewer systems or recycle the wash water.
6. Keep your car properly maintained and leak free.
7. Dispose of paints, oils, grease, fluorescent bulbs, batteries and chemicals properly.
8. Keep your septic system properly maintained.
9. Replace your driveway with pervious pavers or pervious concrete.
10. Join a watershed organization.

To locate your watershed or find a local watershed organization in your area, check out the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Surf Your Watershed" web site: www.epa.gov/surf

The Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA) is an association of eleven cities, counties and special districts with operations in the Russian River watershed that have come together to

coordinate regional programs for watershed enhancement. RRWA's member agencies include: the City of Cloverdale, City of Cotati, City of Healdsburg, City of Rohnert Park, City of Santa Rosa, City of Ukiah, County of Sonoma, Mendocino County Water Agency, Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission, Sonoma County Water Agency, and Town of Windsor. The public is encouraged to attend our monthly meeting of the RRWA Board of Directors held at the Windsor Town Hall. For more information regarding RRWA, as well as the dates and locations of future meetings please visit the website at www.rwatershed.org, contact us at (707) 833-2553, or email info@rrwatershed.org.