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# Wetlands in a Watershed Context

A watershed is an area of land that drains into a common body of water, such as a river or lake, though they include more than just water. The principle of “everything is connected” is clearly evident in a watershed, as it involves water and any other natural feature or function that affects or is affected by water. This includes streams, lakes, wetlands, forests, soil, plants and animals.

Watershed management is aimed at minimizing the impact of human activity upon these natural features and functions. Because watersheds are large complex ecosystems, cooperation among governments, municipalities, industries, interest groups and individual landowners is essential to maintaining healthy, functioning watersheds.

Diagram below courtesy of Conservation Ontario

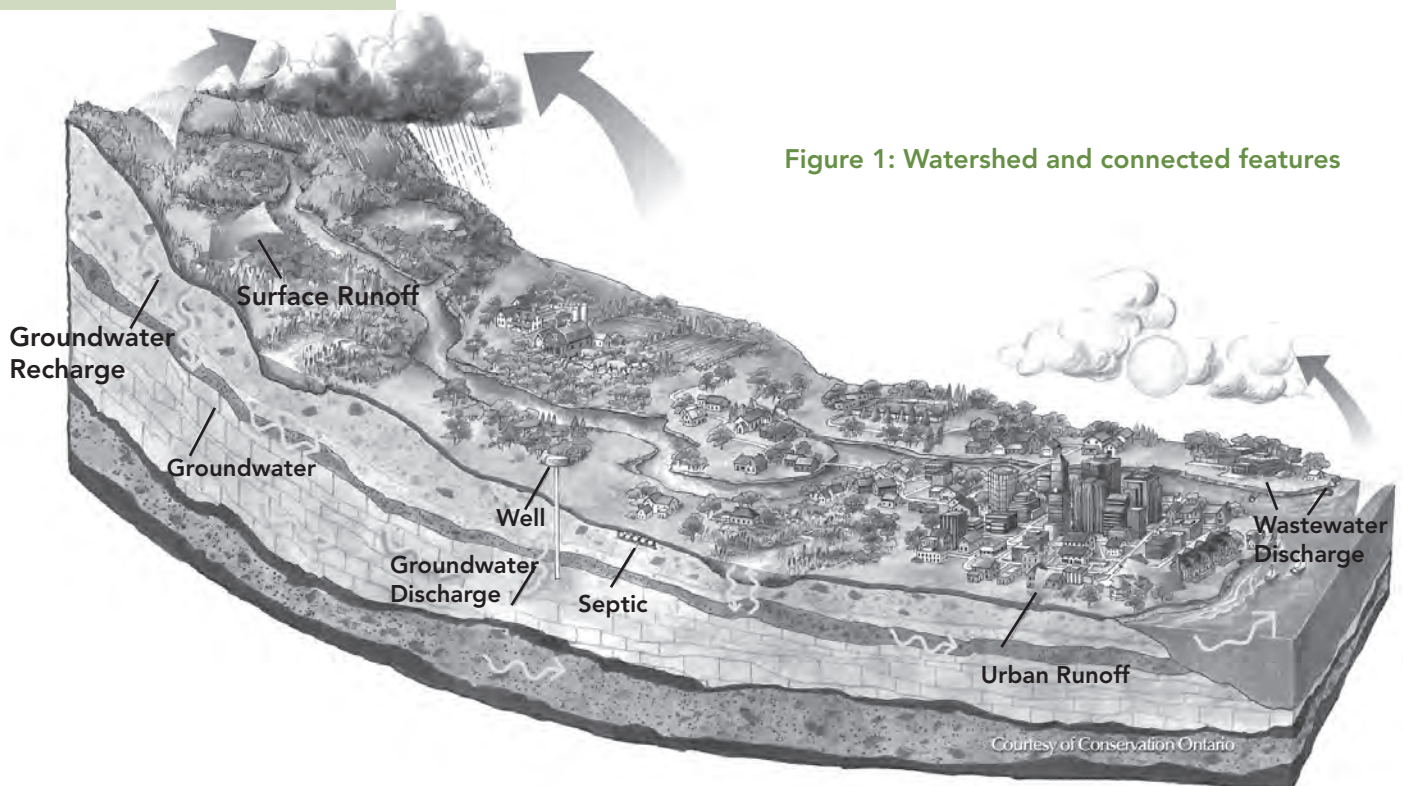


Figure 1: Watershed and connected features

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It is important to remember the principles of connectivity in a landscape when managing/planning for wetlands. Conserving a wetland and its many functions also means protecting some portion of the landscape surrounding the wetland. For example, the forested upland surrounding a wetland may provide essential foraging habitat for raptors that nest in the wetland. Conversely, many turtles, dependent on the wetland for food and shelter, actually nest in nearby upland areas. Some studies indicate that disrupting adjacent upland areas threatens to reduce wetland biodiversity to the same extent as losing one half of the wetland itself.

Adjacent areas can also act as “buffers,” protecting the wetland by filtering out excess sediments, nutrients or contaminants that would otherwise enter the wetland. These inputs can have a drastic impact on the physiological and biological composition of the wetland.

With regard to significant wetlands (as defined by the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement), the Province recommends **“that adjacent lands are those within 120 metres of individual significant wetlands or, in the case of wetland complexes, within 120 metres of individual wetlands comprising the complex.”** Site-specific evaluations based on the ecological functions of the wetland and surrounding area may demonstrate the need for greater or lesser distances for adjacent land widths. Please refer to the Natural Heritage Reference Manual for more information.



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