

A watershed is like a funnel that collects runoff

A watershed is like a funnel that collects runoff from surrounding areas and drains to a receiving water resource (lake, stream or river).

Nearly everything that runs off yards in the watershed, leaves, grass clippings, fertilizers, cigarette butts, and soil, travels through the streets and storm sewers and into a receiving water resource (a lake like Bone, Comfort or Forest).

For example, the Forest Lake watershed extends for miles from the lake's shore. In fact runoff from as far away as 230th St. N. and Manning Trail N. ends up in the lake.

The actual size of the Forest Lake watershed is roughly 8,160 acres. This results in a 3.6 to 1 ratio of watershed area to lake surface area for the 2,220 acre lake.

The larger the ratio, the larger the stress from pollutants the lake receives.

For comparison, Comfort Lake, has roughly a 88 to 1 watershed to lake surface area ratio.

In other words, you don't have to live on a lake to have an effect on a water resource. Everyone lives in a watershed.

YARD IMPACT

While normal lawn watering or rainfall is beneficial, intense rain or excessive irrigation creates runoff which carries fertilizers, pesticides, soil, leaves grass clippings and other debris to the streets and storm drains and into the receiving water resource.

That's why a healthy yard is the first step toward a healthy lake. Maintaining a healthy landscape will help prevent runoff.

Seed bare spots on your yard to prevent soil erosion. Point drain spouts away from foundations and paved surfaces and onto your yard.

Before you apply fertilizers and pesticides to our lawn, always read the labeled instructions. Never pour leftover fertilizer or pesticides down storm drains, and clean up spills immediately.

Also, keep leaves and grass clippings off paved surfaces. Nutrients from these organic materials damage our lakes.

Bag your leaves for collection, or better yet compost them. Grass clippings can be safely left on your lawn. In fact, nutrients that harm a lake are beneficial to a lawn.

When grass clippings or leaves are left in the street, they are easily washed into

storm drains and into the lake.

These organic materials begin to decay immediately. So, even if the lawn clippings do not make it to the lake, the nutrients they release as they decay will make it. These nutrients harm our lakes by promoting the growth of excessive algae and aquatic vegetation growth. The algae form a scum on the water's surface that creates an unpleasant odor. But more importantly, the scum suffocates the lake. Aquatic plants don't get the sunlight they need, and fish don't get the oxygen they need.

Remember that even if you don't live next to a lake, you live in a watershed.

THE COLUMN IS A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM THE COMFORT LAKE-FOREST LAKE WATERSHED DISTRICT.