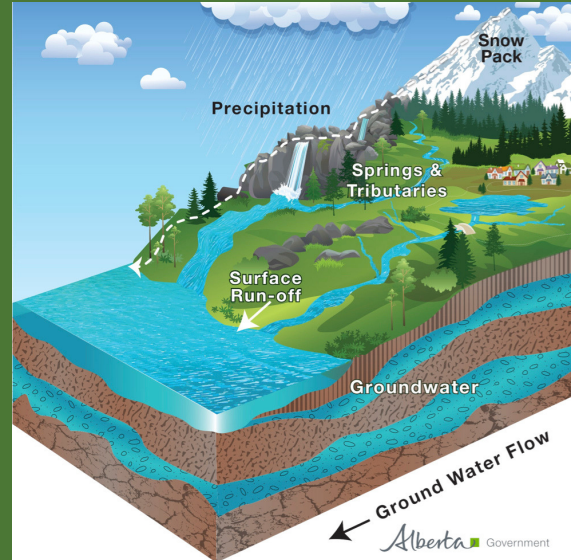


WATERSHEDS 101

OUR WATERSHED. OUR RESPONSIBILITY.



A watershed is an area of land that catches rain and snow and drains or seeps into a marsh, stream, river, lake or groundwater. Homes, farms, cottages, forests, small towns, big cities and more can make up watersheds. Some cross municipal, provincial and even international borders. They come in all shapes and sizes and can vary from millions of acres, like the land that drains into the Arctic Ocean, to a few acres that drain into a pond.



BENEFITS OF HEALTHY WATERSHEDS

HUMAN HEALTH

A healthy watershed provides safe drinking water, provides food, enables us to adapt to the impacts of climate change more easily by cooling the air and absorbing greenhouse gas emissions, and provides natural areas for people to keep active and recharge our batteries.



ECOLOGICAL HEALTH

A healthy watershed conserves water, promotes streamflow, supports sustainable streams, rivers, lakes, and groundwater sources, enables healthy soil for crops and livestock, and also provides habitat for wildlife and plants.

ECONOMIC HEALTH

A healthy watershed produces energy and supplies water for agriculture, industry and households. Forests and wetlands help to prevent or reduce costly climate change and flooding impacts, manages drought, contributes to tourism, fisheries, forestry, agriculture and mining industries.



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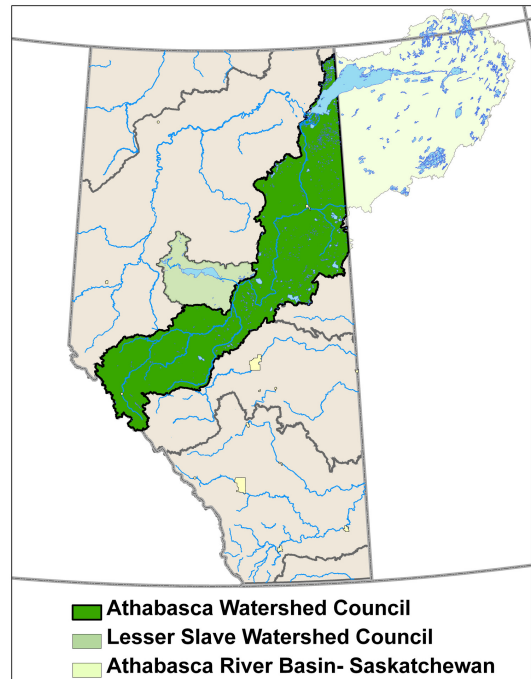


THE ATHABASCA WATERSHED

The Athabasca River is 1,231km long. It flows from the Columbia Icefields in Jasper National Park to Lake Athabasca. The Athabasca River watershed covers about 24% of Alberta (159,000 square km).

The watershed is diverse. It contains several distinct ecosystems, including alpine regions, parkland, and boreal forest. It is the site of many kinds of industrial activities, including agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, mining, and others. There are multiple provincial parks and wilderness areas, and contains part of Wood Buffalo National Park, now designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It contains all or part of 37 municipalities including counties, municipal districts, towns and villages. It spans Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 territories and is home to many Indigenous peoples. There are 9 First Nations represented by 4 Tribal Councils.



WHY WATERSHEDS FOR WATER MANAGEMENT?

Watershed management is the study of the relevant characteristics of a watershed aimed at the sustainable distribution of its resources and the process of creating and implementing plans, programs, and projects to sustain and enhance watershed functions that affect the plant, animal, and human communities within the watershed boundary.



Photos: R. G. Holmberg/Athabasca River Basin Image Bank

Adopting a watershed approach is founded on the basis that Alberta's water resources must be managed within the capacity of individual watersheds and that all Albertans recognize there are limits to the available water supply. What happens on the land and water in a watershed can affect the water supply that rivers, lakes and groundwater provide. While land and water are closely linked, these resources have not historically been managed in a fully integrated manner. Focusing efforts at the watershed level provides a comprehensive understanding of local management needs, and encourages locally led management decisions.