Watersheds are specific areas of drainage. They are where we live, where we work and where we play. Everyone and everything relies on clean water to exist.

What residents do to the land within their watershed has a direct impact on the quality and quantity of water available to all of us.

We use watersheds and their natural water supplies for drinking, irrigation, recreation and industry. People utilize and enjoy lakes, ponds, streams and rivers for their beauty, boating, fishing and swimming.

Healthy watersheds lend themselves to a healthy environment, and help to improve the local economy by attracting people and businesses. Mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, fish and macro-invertebrates use aquatic areas for food sources and habitat. Shopping centers, towns, schools and housing developments spring up in areas that have clean, adequate water sources. Throughout history towns have sprung up in areas of clean, plentiful water.

Oil, litter, pesticides, fertilizers, soil and animal waste are common, potential contaminates to water supplies. These items can be carried via wind or attach themselves to raindrops and travel downstream to settle in the water supply.

Oil has a variety of sources, but many of the oil particulates come from parking lots, driveways and roadways where oil is dripped onto the surface. Oil droplets are picked up by rain drops and carried into fresh water supplies. One drop of oil contaminates many gallons of water.

Litter, whether paper, plastic, glass or metal, ends up in all kinds of places. It not only looks bad, but can strangle wildlife. Most litter biodegrades extremely slowly (100 to 500 years), leaving us to pick it up and dispose of it properly or look at it for extended periods of time.

Pesticides and fertilizers used in the wrong concentrations, and depending on weather conditions, can cause damage to things that were not the intended target. Sprays easily drift during windy applications, and excess liquid products are picked up and carried by water molecules during rainy conditions.

Exposed soil actually is the No. 1 water pollutant in the state of Ohio. Development and land use changes of many kinds leave soil exposed and it too is carried by wind and water to downstream locations. Soil depositing in the bottom of a stream will aid in starving the bottom feeders and suffocating the bottom dwellers. This ultimately upsets the balance in the entire riparian ecosystem.

Animal waste, as a pollutant, is self-explanatory.

Buffers, filter strips, stream stabilization, having vegetative cover all year long and the planting of native plants are just some of the conservation practices we can use to decrease local watershed pollution. By trapping soil particles with attached water molecules and contaminants, and allowing them to filter out or biodegrade in the soil, these various types of buffers help to keep our watersheds clean.