

PLANT LIFE COLUMN

WATERSHED

What is your address? You know where you live and you know how to get there. Probably been doing it for a while. But, do you know your watershed address?

A watershed is an area of land with borders that are defined so that all rain that falls on the watershed drains down-hill toward a common body of water. There are not many hills in Florida, but there is just enough elevation change that water flows down hill. Watersheds include the people, plants and animals that live in the area.

Watersheds provide homes for people and wildlife. They absorb rain so it can replenish our underground water supply. They hold soil and prevent erosion and sediment that clogs our waterways. Trees and plant within the watershed provide oxygen, filter pollutants and capture carbon from the atmosphere to reduce the impacts of the greenhouse effect that is increasing our air temperature on a global scale.

It is often difficult to measure the dollar value of watersheds in providing stormwater management, infiltration and habitat until you develop the land and have to pay to re-create the systems that are provided naturally.

Most of Osceola County is in the Kissimmee River Valley Watershed. This means the rain that falls in your yard most likely reaches the Kissimmee River, south of us. The Eastern portion of our county is in the St. Johns River Watershed.

Our watershed address is important because our down-stream neighbors depend on us. Our water use, our fertilizer practices, our land use, our landscaping practices and our use of chemical pesticides impacts our neighbors down-hill, or down-stream in our watershed. These impact our two legged neighbors as well as the four legged ones and the plants and other creatures that live in the environment.

The large Kissimmee River Valley Watershed drains down-stream to Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades Watershed and eventually connects to coastal areas from Lee County and St. Lucie County to the Florida Keys. WOW.

While our down-hill neighbors depend on our protection and onservation of the water in our watershed, we depend on rainfall to replenish our surface water ponds, creeks, canals and lakes. We must protect our watershed to take care of our own water supply and our recreational waterways as well. Protecting our quality of life is a lot of responsibility. It is important to understand the connections between our natural resources and our economy so we can make better choices to improve both.

"Welcome to Your Watershed" is an educational workshop to help citizens better understand our local watersheds, the many threats that face us and personal actions we can take for protection. The program is offered by the Nature Conservancy in partnership with the South Florida Water Management District. The next workshop is scheduled for Friday, March 8 and Saturday, March 9. The program is open to anyone who is interested in learning. Registration is \$30.00 for the two-day program. Call Petra Royston at 407-935-0002 for a registration form. Space is limited.

The program gives participants a chance to explore some of our beautiful local natural areas and find out about the plants and animals that depend on water for survival. The diversity of participants from business, environment, development and government provides a good perspective of issues and decisions that must be made to protect our air, water and wildlife while continuing healthy economic growth.

With information we can make informed choices. We need educated decision makers as well as educated citizens to support them. I hope you can take the time and have the interest to attend.

Residents make many choices in their home landscape that impact our watershed. Learn how you can enhance your landscape, prevent pollution and protect our watershed through our University of Florida's Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program (FYN). Contact Jessica Sullivan at (321) 697-3000 to schedule presentations for civic groups or homeowners associations and find out about upcoming workshops.

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Date: January 11th, 2002**