

*Extension Bulletin 364
Revised March 1971*

Watersheds

for water management

Michigan State University • Cooperative Extension Service • East Lansing

watersheds

for water management

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Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. George S. McIntyre, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Mich. 2R-2:71-10M-SQ

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the problem

surface water management begins when the raindrop first hits the ground

A WATER WONDERLAND is nature's gift to the people of Michigan. The state has abundant fresh water in underground reservoirs, lakes, and streams. The supply can meet immediate foreseeable needs.

Future generations may not be as lucky. Population will grow; per capita consumption of water will increase; industry will expand. Acute problems will arise in providing water to all who need it.

Running water knows no property line or political boundary. No one segment of the population or any one industry could ever solve its own water problems completely and satisfactorily. Even if that were possible, the solution would create new problems for others.

This bulletin discusses some of the problems of surface water use and management, and suggests how Michigan people can work together to solve them on a "watershed basis."

Ground work is already laid to meet some of Michigan's surface water problems:

- Statutes provide for organizing watershed councils and intermunicipality committees.



- Soil Conservation Districts help with land treatment to reduce surface runoff and assist in applying for federal aid through Public Law 566.
- The Bureau of Water Management in the Department of Natural Resources controls land use in flood plains as well as the subdivision of land wherever it may take place.
- The Fish Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is also active in watersheds to improve the quality of water for fish.
- Ordinances are being adopted by counties and townships to control development practices.
- Drainage Districts are in operation.
- Some farmers pool their efforts informally to meet a local problem.

All these programs have one thing in common. Each is designed to encourage good water use and management practices in our watersheds. In each, management should begin where the raindrop first hits the ground.

a watershed

what and why

Everyone lives in a watershed. It includes all the land and water area having common drainage into a stream, a lake, or an ocean. It may cover only a few acres draining into a brook. It may include thousands of square miles draining into a large river and then into a lake or ocean.

In its largest sense, it is a regional river basin with a wide range of farm land, forests, many tributary streams, lakes, towns, cities, and other subdivisions – all draining into an ocean.

As a geographical unit, it is ideally suited for the achievement of maximum water management in a specific problem area. It is a management unit within which people with varied economic and social interests can work together on a common problem. It provides a workable unit with which public agencies can coordinate their water management activities.

Uses of water in any area are obvious:

- Farmers use it both to irrigate and to protect crops, to water their livestock, as well as for home protection and use.
- Industry uses it in factories, power plants, transportation, air-conditioning, and waste disposal.
- Cities use it for public water service and sewage disposal.
- The public uses it for domestic use and for recreation.

In serving all these needs, water is not always found at the right place at the right time in the right amount at the right quality and at the right price for everybody.

In many places, more water is needed than a lake or stream can provide. Few streams or inland lakes have enough for all uses on a year-around basis. This is especially true in summer when the surface water supply is limited. Then there may not be enough water for one use, let alone the needs of many groups.

In late winter and spring the picture is entirely different. Snow melt and heavy rainfall provide more water than is needed. There is considerable run-off, erosion damage, silting of channels and flooding, and a need for drainage.

water runs downhill

Often water damage in a downstream area may have its beginning many miles upstream. This fact is not often appreciated when property owners in the upper parts of a watershed are asked to help reduce water damage downstream.



Lowland floods often result from large volumes of surface run-off from uplands. Erosion from fields can result in severe siltation of streams, impounded water areas, highways, and other property. Uncontrolled surface water accumulating from many acres often concentrates in a single swift flowing channel and overflows onto adjacent land.

Equally important is the fact that such uncontrolled water is usually lost to the land owner or other users. Such loss may limit expansion of agriculture, industry, recreation, or subdivisions in that watershed.

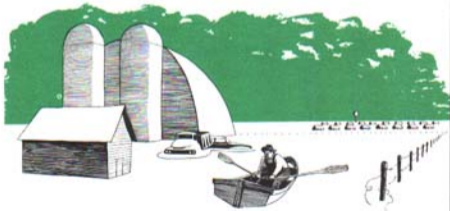
Managing surface water to reduce flooding, siltation, and excessive run-off and to achieve the best utilization of water for many purposes requires that we approach the job on a watershed basis.

too much or too little

Often there is too much or too little water, and both situations may exist in the same area during a single season. Tile drainage has opened thousands of acres to agri-

cultural, industrial and residential uses. Drainage is dependent upon outlet channels that can transport large volumes of water. Some areas have no adequate channels or ditches. In other cases, proper water retention structures must be installed to prevent additional damages downstream.

There are other problems too. Home owners, business establishments and industry may so pollute the streams or lakes with sewage and wastes that the water has little value for other uses. Home builders are often tempted to use sites on flood plains adjacent to rivers and lakes. Unfortunately, many property owners are already located in flood zones. Such development adjacent to water channels may actually cause additional flood damage by retarding normal flow of flood waters. Today, a permit from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is required prior to construction on flood plains.



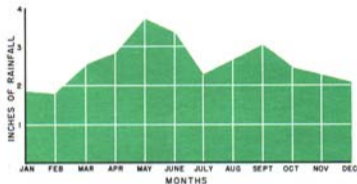
more, More, MORE

An increasing population is aggravating the water use problems. Pavements and roofs encourage rapid run-off. More people, more industry, intensive agriculture, more recreational water needs, increased irrigation water demands, more waste and sewage disposal and larger demand for volumes of high quality water for manufacturing place severe pressures on our water supply. When these demands are made on a limited supply, competition for water results in many social and economic conflicts, as well as a dwindling supply of water for each user.

It becomes necessary and logical to attack the problem on a coordinated watershed basis.

some water facts

The water that becomes surface run-off and ground water recharge comes from rain and snow fall. Precipitation averages 31 inches annually in Michigan. About two-thirds of the rainfall is lost in evaporation or used up by plants. This leaves about one-third of our rainfall to percolate to underground reservoirs or run off.



Rainfall is not evenly distributed throughout the year. The graph shows the monthly average rainfall at the Lansing U.S. Weather Bureau station.

The conclusion is obvious. The most water is available in spring when demands are not great; there is less rainfall in the summer when demands are greatest.

Flood hazard is most serious when snow or frozen ground is melted by rain. However, localized flooding may occur even in summer. Rainfall during summer thunderstorms is usually very intense over a short period in a limited area. Run-off and erosion may be very severe in such localities.

watershed objectives



Basically, watershed improvement objectives are:

- Reduce the loss of surface water run-off from uplands to a minimum.
- Reduce damage caused by erosion, flooding, inadequate drainage, and pollution.
- Manage surface water to provide maximum use from the time it drops on the earth's surface until it reaches the ocean.
- Accommodate water demands of all users.

management techniques

Specific techniques are used to reach these objectives:

- (1) Land treatment practices that will enable land to soak up large volumes of water, reduce rapid run-off and improve drainage.
- (2) Impoundment or storage of excess water upstream in the watershed during periods of heavy run-off.
- (3) Improved stream channels to facilitate run-off waters or improve drainage and to help reduce flooding.
- (4) Control private and public development adjacent to water channels and in flood plains.
- (5) Pollution abatement and control to maintain water quality and to provide for its re-use.

starting a project

who starts it?

Many groups may provide local initiative to start a watershed project. Such projects have been started by Soil Conservation Districts, township boards of supervisors, county boards of commissioners, municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, civic clubs, planning commissions, and local watershed associations.

The local "spark plug" should be a group with ability and facilities to initially bring together community leaders, representatives of water use interests and public agencies having facilities for watershed assistance. Out of this organization should come a general attitude that this is "our" watershed project.

what to do

First, a watershed project begins with recognizing a problem or problems. Then come: *acceptance of the idea, desire for problem solution, a plan of action, inventory of the problems, evaluation of the inventory, alternate solutions, acceptance of a work plan, and finally, action.*

Problem-to-action-and-solution requires time and patience. Local people should conceive, develop, organize, and administer the projects. Public agencies may have re-

search, educational, technical and financial assistance; but it should be made available to local people through local organization. Such a partnership requires that all local groups affected by the water problems should be represented in starting and carrying out the project.

It requires widespread and continuous educational programs for all people in the watersheds. Such programs must begin with the general recognition of the problem and continue through the action program. There is no substitute for an informed public.

As many people as possible should know about the extent and significance of the problems, the possible solutions, local responsibility, public assistance and organization necessary for watershed accomplishment.

how large a project?

The nature of the water problems and the desire of people to correct them will determine the size. Problems involving gully erosion, limited flooding or drainage may affect only a few farms or a few hundred acres and a small surface water channel. However, some erosion damage or flooding may be caused by land use and other factors existing several miles away. To correct such problems,

both the damaged area and the area contributing to the damage must be a part of the watershed project. This may involve several thousands of acres, many farms, and even towns or cities. In other instances, several counties, cities, subdivisions and small streams must be included in the watershed project to handle the water problems effectively. The Grand, Huron, Au Sable, and Muskegon are examples of large watersheds.

In a few instances the total watershed of a large river basin involving the complex problems of several states is necessary. The Ohio or the Mississippi River Basins are examples. An inventory of the water use problems and the cost of the project in relation to probable benefits to be received and interest shown by local people in solving their water problems will often provide an early answer concerning the size of a watershed project.

kinds of watershed organizations and projects

- *pooling agreements*
- *drainage districts*
- *improvement projects*
- *small watershed projects*
(public law 566)
- *intermunicipality study*
committees
- *watershed councils*
- *river management districts*
- *watershed associations*

Pooling Agreements

Occasionally a few farmers with a common water problem may decide to work together to solve it. This requires no formal organization and they may not need outside help. In other instances farmers may pool their Rural Environment Cost-sharing Payments under a pooling agreement to help defray the costs. The County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee, County Extension Director, or Soil Conservation Service Conservationist can provide more details about such projects.

Drainage Districts

Agriculture drainage may be a principal problem. New or improved outlets may be necessary before field tiling or surface drainage of flood water can be installed. Residents should also look to land treatment and structural measures to reduce erosion, encourage water infiltration, and retain moisture for summer use.

Drainage districts established under Michigan drain laws may provide a legal organization for doing the channel work and other flood prevention and control measures, and for levying assessments for their cost and mainte-

nance. Information on drainage districts is available from the County Drain Commissioner, County Extension Director or the local Soil Conservation District.

Watershed Improvement Projects

The Fish Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is working on several watersheds in which fishing streams are important. Rapid water run-off into streams causes siltation, changes water temperature, and accelerates stream bank cutting. These conditions harm fish populations.

Correction involves soil conservation practices, protection of stream banks, and stream channel improvement. Major costs for water retention structures, planting materials, and stream bank protective fencing are borne by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources from fishing license funds. Other aid can come from the local Soil Conservation District and cost sharing for certain practices from the County A.S.C.S. Committee.

Small Watershed Projects

Under Congressional Act 566, 1954, as amended

The federal government through Congressional Act 566 may provide extensive aid to communities carrying on watershed projects. The principal problem must be one or more of the following: inadequate drainage, urban flooding, agricultural flooding, or lack of irrigation water. Additional features of a project may be fish and wildlife habitat improvement, certain recreation facilities, municipal and industrial water supply and low flow augmentation. The costs for basic project planning, engineering, and a substantial part of construction are provided by the state and federal governments. Size of any one project is limited to 250,000 acres.



Assistance is provided to local people who must have a legal organization as a sponsor with authority and ability to issue contracts, obtain easements and rights-of-way, levy assessments for local share of costs and operate and maintain the project after completion. Since soil conservation measures on land is an important part of these watershed projects the local soil conservation district should also be a sponsor of the watershed.

who has authority?

At the present time it has been determined that township boards, river management districts, counties, certain cities, county drainage districts, inter-county drainage districts and water management districts have authority and ability to construct, operate and maintain works of improvement. Any one of these units would make satisfactory sponsors, or co-sponsors with Soil Conservation Districts for "566" watershed assistance.

how to apply

Applications for watershed assistance must be submitted to the State Soil Conservation Committee, Michigan Department of Agriculture. The Committee was designated by the governor to act for him in accordance with the watershed act in approving or disapproving the application before it is submitted to the U.S. Soil Conservation Service for implementation.

Small Watershed Projects

continued

state policies

The State Soil Conservation Committee has adopted the following policy concerning applications for Federal watershed assistance under Congressional Act No. 566.

- 1** Sponsors should discuss watershed problems and possible solutions with community or special interest leaders and with interested agency representatives before proceeding with watershed development planning.
- 2** A sponsor and at least one co-sponsor with legal authority and ability to construct, operate and maintain works of improvements make application to the United States Secretary of Agriculture for watershed assistance (use authorized application form as provided by the State Soil Conservation Committee). The completed application must be submitted to the State Soil Conservation Committee, 324 Natural Resources Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48823.
At this time a "notice of intent" must also be submitted to the office of Planning Coordination, Bureau of Policies and Programs, Lewis Cass Building, Lansing 48913.
- 3** A technical review will be performed in the watershed by the Watershed Review Committee.
This committee, to be assembled by the State Soil Conservation Committee, will consider:
 - The eligibility and feasibility of the proposed project under Act 566.
 - Possible alternate solutions to the water management problems of the area.
- 4** Sponsors should organize a steering committee of local leaders to advise, counsel and assist them with the ensuing steps leading to a watershed project.
- 5** A series of watershed-wide information meetings and related education activities should be locally conducted on Public Law 566 and the proposed watershed project.
- 6** State Soil Conservation Committee will conduct a public meeting (informal hearing) to determine extent of local interest in proceeding to preliminary investigation.
- 7** State Soil Conservation Committee acting for the Governor approves or disapproves the application.
- 8** State Soil Conservation Committee forwards approved application to State office of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

- 9 State Soil Conservation Committee continues to set priorities for planning.

Further information on this type of watershed help is available from your local Soil Conservation District, local U.S. Soil Conservation Service office, County Extension Director, or from the State Soil Conservation Committee, Michigan Department of Agriculture, 324 Natural Resources Building, East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

Watershed Councils

Act 253 of 1965 is known as the Local River Management Act. The Act provides for the formation of a watershed council composed of representatives from local governments in the watershed. It enables these local units of government to cooperate in planning and carrying out a coordinated water management program in the watershed which they share. The watershed council may conduct or cause to be conducted studies of the water resources in the watershed, prepare periodic reports, request Water Resources Commission to determine minimum necessary stream flow, advise federal, state and local governmental agencies, cooperate with federal, state and local agencies in water resource data gathering and may recommend the creation of a river management district.

Intermunicipality Studies

Act 200 of 1957 provides for the formation of an intermunicipality study committee. Such a committee, composed of two or more municipalities ("municipalities" in this Act are defined as cities, villages, chartered townships and other incorporated political subdivisions), may study area water resource (and other) problems, receive gifts and grants and may formulate recommendations for review and action by member bodies.

For further information contact the State Water Resources Commission.

River Management Districts

A river management district may be created upon recommendation of a watershed council. The governing bodies of any two or more local governments may petition the Water Resources Commission to establish a river management district in order to provide an agency for the acquisition, construction, operation and financing of water storage and other river control facilities necessary for river management.

For additional information about watershed councils and river management districts, contact the Water Resources Commission in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Watershed Associations

A watershed association is usually an organization of landowners in a watershed with a common objective and concern. Common objectives of watershed associations are one or more of the following:

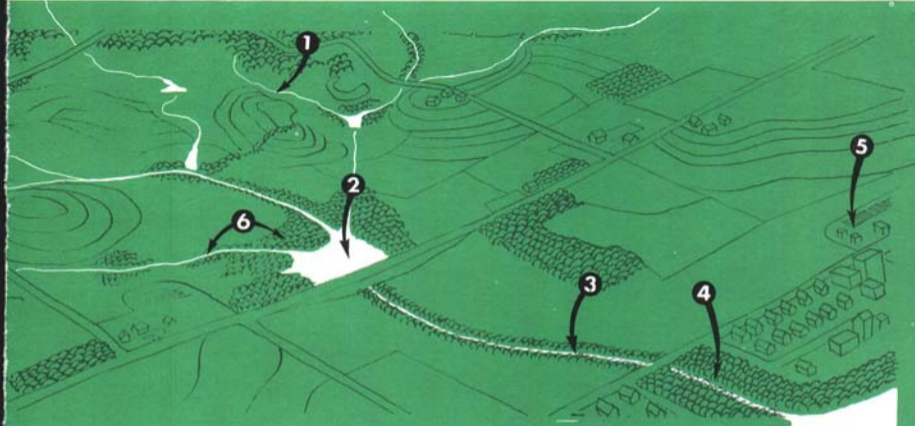
1. Preserve or improve water quality.
2. Control uses made of the water.
3. Control land uses adjacent to the water.
4. Preserve the recreational integrity of the area.
5. Provide an organized avenue for communication between watershed landowners and governmental officials and agencies.
6. Assume responsibility for operation and maintenance of water control structures associated with the lake or stream.

Membership varies widely, but in many instances includes landowners and local officials. The watershed association accomplishes its objectives through educational campaigns, petitions and resolutions to governmental units, working closely with local governments and promoting a cooperative spirit with landowners.

There are over 350 watershed associations in Michigan. Additional information may be obtained from the Bureau of Water Management, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, or the Association of Michigan Lakes and Streams Associations, 9610 East Shore Drive, Kalamazoo 49002.

“Our” Watersheds

Watershed management becomes a task of cooperative action by all water use interests in a geographical area to solve a common natural resource problem. Local people who want to accomplish this objective should utilize their own leadership, initiative, facilities, and organizations. They may bring into the problem area the combined resources of public agencies — federal, state and local — to aid them with the job. This is indeed democracy in action.



1 Land Treatment Practices

2 Water Storage — Recreation

3 Channel Improvement

4 Flood Plain Protection — Zoning

5 Pollution Control — Water Purification

6 Fish and Wildlife Habitat

