

# Managing urban watersheds

## A WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK MODULE

*This material was generated as part of a collaboration between members of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network and students and faculty of a service learning course in urban ecology. The views and opinions expressed in these materials are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the University of Georgia.*



In this presentation, you will learn about the laws and regulations that govern watersheds to ensure their health and the health of the community.

This material was based on a curriculum developed by members of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, led by Dr. Yomi Noibi of Eco-Action.

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## Regulation happens at many levels

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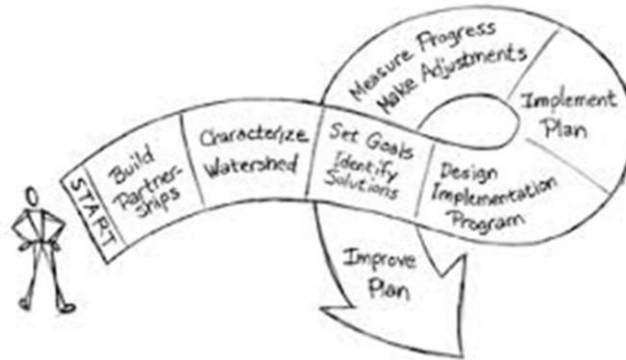


Photo Credit: US EPA



In the US, watersheds are regulated at the federal, state, and local levels.

# Federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Clean Water Act

Title 1: Research and Related Programs

Title 2: Grants for Construction of Treatment Works

Title 3: Standards and Enforcement

Title 4: Permits and Licenses

Title 5: General Provisions

Title 6: State Water Pollution Control Revolving Funds



One organization that regulates watersheds at the federal level is the US Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA. One key federal regulation that the EPA administers is the Clean Water Act.

First proposed in 1948 as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, then amended and renamed to its current status in 1977, the Clean Water Act was one of the US's first environmental laws. The Clean Water Act has 6 "Titles" or components.

Title 1 created grant programs to pay for water quality research so that scientists could help regulating agencies understand the problems they hoped to fix.

Title 2

specifically set aside funds for states to construct water treatment facilities, so communities could clean their sewage water. Originally, the CWA committed the federal government to pay 75% of project costs for state and local government, but this number was reduced by Congress to 55% in 1981.

Title 3 is one of the most extensive parts of the CWA. It outlines standards for sewage and other pollutive discharges, water quality, and guidelines for technological

monitoring of such standards. It also set up the National Water Quality Inventory to keep track of how watersheds compared to these standards. Title 3 also set up avenues of enforcement of its standards, including different types of fines and reprimands for non-compliance.

Title 4 created a system of permits and certificates required for industry to discharge any pollutants into the watershed, so that the EPA can ensure no more than the allowable amount of pollution gets into the watershed.

Title 5 ensures that any citizen has the right to sue another citizen or the EPA itself if they believe the CWA was not properly enforced in a case. It also protects EPA employees from being fired or adversely affected because they reported a failure of the EPA to enforce the CWA, often called a whistle-blower provision.

Title 6 replaced Title 2 in 1987 as the primary source of funds for watershed management projects for state and local government.

## State

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Photo credit: GA EPD Logo



States have their own regulatory agencies that govern and manage watersheds. Part of what these agencies do is hold corporations, individuals, and other agencies accountable to the standards set under federal regulations such as the Clean Water Act.

State governments also have the right to enact their own environmental legislation and standards, which their state agencies then enforce. States often have special needs for watershed management dependent upon their particular topography and environmental conditions, so the states set standards that fit their watershed best.

For example, in the state of Georgia, the primary regulating agency is the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). The Georgia Water Quality Control Act was enacted to govern the quantity and quality of water, such as regulating stormwater, in the state of Georgia, and is monitored and enforced by EPD. The EPD also has a specific branch under its division, the Watershed Protection Branch, that deals specifically with ensuring the health of watersheds in Georgia.

## Local

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Photo credit: City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management



Local governments, often at the county level, also have their own regulatory agencies to address the specific needs and concerns of their communities.

In Atlanta, the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management regulates water and sewer services, ensures regulations are being followed, and carries out programs to improve watershed health in the city. The Department's "Clean Water Atlanta" plan is "a comprehensive, multi-program initiative to improve water quality in Atlanta through capital construction programs and enhanced operation of the City's drinking and wastewater systems" (Clean Water Atlanta).

## Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)



*Keeping Watch Over Our Waters*

Photo credit: Chattahoochee River Keeper



Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also contribute to monitoring watersheds. While they don't have the ability to enact and enforce laws, NGO's do important work within and alongside the community to support conservation and monitoring.

For example, The Chattahoochee River Keeper (CRK) is an NGO that advocates for and takes action to protect the health of the Chattahoochee River, a source of drinking water, recreation, and wildlife habitat in Atlanta, Georgia. Government agencies are often understaffed and overloaded with regulatory work, so NGO's like CRK can help address these needs. CRK has an enforcement program where they inspect hundreds of industrial sewers and streams, report their findings directly to the property owners and help them form an attainable management plan.

CRK also uses legal avenues to protect watersheds in Atlanta. Historically, CRK sued the City of Atlanta for non-compliance with the Clean Water Act, which helped bring the city back into compliance with the federal regulation. CRK also advocates to politicians about the importance of our watersheds and their protection in the legal system, and lobbies in local and state governments for the protection of local watersheds.

## References

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