

Winter Watershed Education

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land where all the precipitation (like rain or snow) drains into a common body of water, such as a stream, creek, river, or lake. Everyone lives in a watershed! Do you know which watershed(s) you live in? Visit centrallakeerie.org to find out!

A healthy watershed positively affects water quality and the health of soil, plants, and animals (including humans) that live within it. This allows us access to clean, fresh drinking water and spaces for recreation such as fishing, swimming, sailing, and more. One great way to protect your watershed is by minimizing the pollutants that can be carried into our waterways by stormwater. Stormwater, which includes rain and snowmelt, flows over land and pavement, gathering contaminants before entering the nearest storm drain, stream, or lake – untreated.

Being conscious of the actions you take during all seasons, especially winter, can help reduce pollution in our water and help keep our watershed healthy. Road salt is a substantial contributor to water pollution, especially in the Chagrin River and Lake Erie watersheds. Residue from de-icing materials, oil, gas, and other road pollutants run off our roads and driveways directly into our water.

Snow & Salt Stewardship

Shoveling snow early and often prevents ice from forming and minimizes the need for products, meaning you'll use less of that damaging road salt. When shoveling snow, keep in mind where you place your snow piles, as snowmelt is often full of contaminants.



Choose locations where the snow will have the greatest opportunity to infiltrate the soil and plant roots as it melts, like on or near vegetated areas. This helps filter out harmful pollutants. Avoid piling snow too close to storm drains, local waterways, and impervious surfaces, like driveways and roads.



Consider planting native, salt-tolerant plants where you pile snow to add an extra filtering buffer to your landscape. Winterberry shrubs or little bluestem grasses are both great options to try!

While salting is common practice during Ohio winters, too much salt is detrimental to watershed health, vehicles, roads, and other infrastructure. When using salt or other de-icing products, use only the instructed amount, as excess salt will not melt snow any faster. Sweep up excess salt to prevent it from entering storm drains. Additionally, keep temperature in mind as traditional road salt is only effective above 15° F.

When it comes to de-icing products, many options exist with varying environmental impacts. Consider alternatives with fewer environmental impacts, such as CMA (calcium magnesium acetate) or KA (potassium acetate), which can be found at most hardware stores, or cracked corn, which will not melt ice but will increase traction and biodegrade. In addition, while sand or kitty litter can be used for traction, they can clog sewers and degrade stream habitat.



Watch Your Waste!

Picking up your pet's waste is just as important during colder months as it is in the warmer months. This can be a significant contributor of harmful bacteria and doesn't break down quickly in cold weather. It accumulates on the surface and is then carried directly into drainage systems and streams, depositing a large amount of potentially dangerous bacteria and excessive nutrients.