

# Living on the Watershed



**Things Everyone Can  
Do To Preserve the  
Quality of Water in  
Lake DeForest**

## **What is a watershed?**

The watershed is a drainage area, in which all surface water and groundwater flows to a common point - like a river, lake or coastal bay. The boundary of a watershed is the point where the drainage changes direction to a different common point. Topography determines the path surface water takes within a watershed, while groundwater may cross watershed boundaries. Areas that contribute water to streams that empty into a lake are part of the lake's watershed. We all live in a watershed.

## **What is Lake DeForest used for?**

Lake DeForest is a reservoir. It acts as a storage basin for water which can then be treated and used for drinking purposes. This particular reservoir provides approximately one fourth of Rockland County's drinking water.

## **What is being done to protect this resource?**

Use of the lake and surrounding lands is limited to shoreline fishing and hiking. No boating or swimming is allowed. Ownership of forested land adjacent to the reservoir by United Water serves as a buffer and excludes development and other activities which may adversely affect water quality. Fencing around the reservoir properties are meant to prevent trespassing, dumping, encroachment and other activities detrimental to water quality. Periodic inspections are made around the reservoir to minimize these unwanted activities.

## **Why should I care?**

Rockland County is unique in that all of our drinking water comes from within the County. As a result, what you do on your property has a direct effect on water quality, whether you have a private well or are on public water. We want to make you aware of this situation and inform you of some easy things that can be done to help keep Rockland's drinking water safe.

## **How do my actions affect the reservoir and the groundwater?**

Any activity within the watershed can affect water quality. Rain water and irrigation water seeping into the ground can contain pesticides, salt, nutrients and chemicals which can contaminate the groundwater. Some of this groundwater may eventually enter streams and lakes. Surface runoff containing the above contaminants, as well as sediment and oil, ends up in the streams and lakes.

## **Where do those storm drains lead to?**

A common misconception about storm drains, also known as storm sewers, is that they go to a wastewater treatment plant. In this area, storm sewers often transport rain water and other runoff directly to the nearest river, lake, stream or wetland. Whatever runs off the pavement or gets dumped into the storm drain system winds up in a local water body. The contaminants in the water can destroy wildlife habitat, pollute surface and groundwater and aggravate flooding. Never use the storm drain system to get rid of waste oil or garbage.

## **What's in it for me?**

Preventing contaminants from entering water bodies benefits you in many ways. Property values are greater when the surrounding environment is clean and flooding is minimal. Drinking water costs less when we don't have to treat it to remove pollutants. Taxes don't have to be increased to cover costs associated with cleaning up polluted areas, and recreational opportunities are enhanced when the lakes and streams are clean.

## **What are some things I can do to help?**

- Keep a buffer area with vegetation along waterways. Forested buffers have been shown to be most effective in controlling runoff and stream bank erosion.
- Don't throw or pile up grass clippings or leaves near the water's edge.
- Clean up after your pet. Animal waste can transmit disease and contaminate water supplies
- Be especially careful with pesticide use around the outside of the house and on the lawn.

## **What are some things I should avoid doing?**

- Limit the amount of fertilizer you apply to your yard. Dedicate more area of your property to shrubs and trees than lawn.
- Do not put toxic substances such as motor oil, gasoline, antifreeze, paints, thinners, degreasers, or pesticides on the ground surface or down storm drains.

- Do not leave piles of dirt or mulch uncovered or leave areas of your yard unplanted.

### **What can I do if I am on a septic system?**

One of the most important things to do is to have the septic tank pumped regularly. This will both prolong the life of the septic system and protect the water quality in the immediate area. Generally, septic tanks should be cleaned out every 3 to 5 years. When a septic is not pumped out often enough, solids from the septic tank overflow into the absorption area, clogging it beyond repair. Use of a garbage disposal increases the solids in your septic system which means your tank needs to be pumped more often.

### **What special precautions should I take if I'm on a septic?**

- Be especially careful not to put toxic substances such as motor oil, gasoline, antifreeze, paints, thinners, degreasers or pesticides down the drain.
- Use household cleaners, disinfectants, detergents or bleaches in moderate amounts.
- Do not put fats, grease, coffee grounds, kitty litter, paper towels, sanitary napkins, disposable diapers, etc., down the drain as they will clog your septic system.

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