

Why Are Watershed Boundaries Important?

The first step for addressing any issue is to define the boundaries for your project or discussion. What is inside and what is outside?

Boundaries help you systematically consider each different spatial scale. They help you examine and then decide what to include and what to leave out of your evaluation. Too small and you ignore processes that actively influence or impact the system. Too large and you consider more than is necessary or relevant, and may further complicate an issue.

Before selecting a boundary (size of area or length of time), you should think about what ‘process’ you hope to influence.

ECOLOGICAL PROCESS EXAMPLES

- **Sediment delivery:** Where is sediment coming from? How big is the land area contributing surface water flow?
- **Land Cover:** What are the local and regional land cover types? How much is vegetated, paved or cultivated? Are there important or sensitive natural resource communities?
- **Water flow and volume:** Where is water coming from? How much of the connected river system is of concern?
- **Contaminant sources:** Where are the contaminants coming from? Are there sources/types that are of particular interest?
- **Information delivery:** What key audiences might need to alter their management of land and water resources? Where are the opportunities to work with communities and policy makers?

With these questions in mind, review the [nested watershed scales](#) in the WHAF map and decide which of these scales should be used to begin your investigation of watershed health.

You may also need to consider other types of boundaries. There may be legal jurisdictions such as cities, counties, tribal lands and zoning authorities. There may also be time constraints such as funding cycles that are a mismatch with the rate of measurable watershed change.

It is important to periodically revisit your selected boundaries to ensure you are not missing important inputs occurring at other scales.