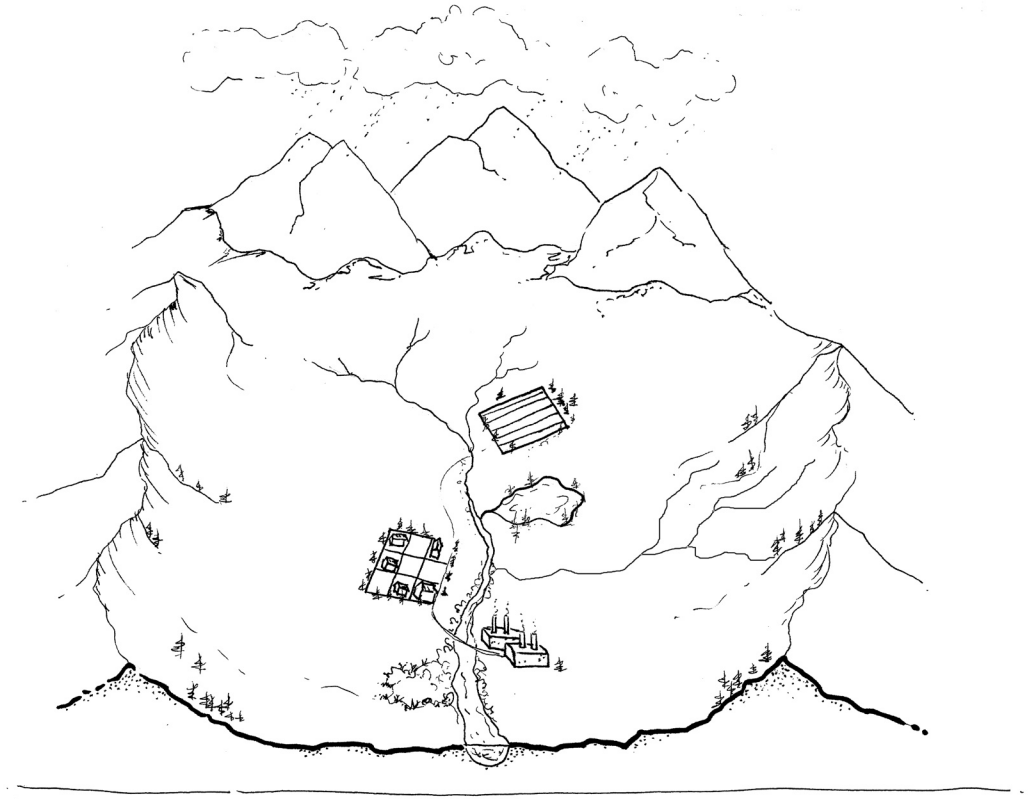
watershed

A watershed is a land area that catches rain or snow and drains to a common point. A system of drainage pathways, either underground or on the surface, move the water. Often these pathways come together into a river system that gets larger as it progresses downstream. In arid regions such as Utah, the water often drains into a lake or wetland. Watersheds can be both large and small, with a number of smaller watersheds often making up a larger one (Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board 3 Dec. 2004).

A healthy watershed performs a number of vital functions. Watersheds capture, store, and release water, filter sediments and pollutants, cycle nutrients through the environment, and support many living organisms, including humans. These functions are dependent upon the climate, topography, soil, and vegetation within the watershed. When a function in any part of a watershed is disturbed, the effects are felt throughout the watershed (California Forest Stewardship Program 16 Dec. 2004).

Careful planning is needed to protect watersheds and their functions from disturbance. Watersheds cross political, social and economic boundaries, making their protection difficult to achieve at the local scale. It is important to include all parties within the watershed when making plans or implementations that may affect its wellbeing. Every community contained within a watershed should become a stakeholder in its management in order to maintain clean water, aesthetics, natural resources, and other amenities.

A basic watershed management plan contains an assessment of the watershed, identifies and prioritizes problems within the system, develops objectives and strategies based on economic and social goals of the stakeholders and finally, implementation strategies and assessment procedures (Know Your Watershed 16 Dec. 2004). Help with watershed management plans is available from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, and a wide range of private organizations.



Industries, agriculture, and residents within a watershed all contribute to its health and water quality.

references and further reading:

Adopt-a-Waterbody, Utah. Utah's Adopt-a-Waterbody Program. 4 Jan. 2005 <http://www.adoptawaterbody.utah.gov/index.htm>.

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Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. An Introduction to Watersheds. 3 Dec. 2004 <http://www.oweb.state.or.us/OWEB/WSHEDS/wsheds_overview.shtml>.