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LIVING in the Hudson Hills and Highlands

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By Beth Rhines, Watershed Education Coordinator & Environmental Educator

Ways to Help Keep Our Water Clean

People and wildlife, including bald eagles, require clean water. Here are ten ways you can help preserve the integrity of our local water supply.

1. Use biodegradable soaps for dishwashing, laundry and personal use. Detergents can add phosphates and other chemicals to the watershed. There are many new products available at your local health food store or co-op that are biodegradable and effective.

2. Have a 'green' lawn. Organic lawns are not as hard to have as you may think. There are many simple practices that reduce the need for pesticides. Simply by leaving grass clippings on your lawn you can reduce the need for fertilizers. For more information, check out www.livinglawn.org.

3. Plant native. Native plants and trees typically require less water than ornamental, non-native plants, shrubs and trees because they are accustomed to the region's weather, rainfall and ground conditions. For more information on native plants, go to www.nativeplantcenter.org.

4. Leave the trees. Plants act as natural filters for pollution. When found around wetlands, they decrease the amount of pollutants that actually end up in the water. If you have a wet area on your property, consider planting a buffer of native plants along the edge. Even a wildflower patch or fern garden can reduce water pollution and increase the biodiversity in your backyard. Check local town ordinances before doing any work in wetlands.

5. Check your septic system. Leaky or malfunctioning sewage systems often result in sewage flowing directly into adjacent waterways. Knowing where your sewage goes and how the system works is the key to keeping surrounding waters healthy.

6. Watch your storm drains. Used motor oil, antifreeze and detergents that enter storm drains on your street are pollutants that end up being added directly to your local waterways. Pay careful attention to what goes into these drains. For example, recycle your used motor oil at a local gas station instead of dumping it down the drain.

7. Cut down on impervious surfaces. Impervious surfaces do not soak up water. These surfaces, including concrete and pavement, increase runoff into our waterways. Consider having gravel walkways or driveways instead of pavement. Gravel reduces runoff of pollutants directly into the sewers, and reduces the need for salt in the winter. Use pervious pavers instead of asphalt for driveways.

8. Conserve water. Water is a precious resource, not just when there is a drought. Small everyday steps, such as turning the faucet off when you brush your teeth, can make a big difference in water conservation.

9. Use less road salt. Use less salt on your driveway and encourage your community to use less salt near streams and natural areas.

10. Learn about your watershed and get involved. The more we know about surface water, ground water and watershed areas, the better we can protect them. Join an organization dedicated to ecological health, including water protection. Get to know the waterway in your own neighborhood.

What is your watershed address?

You can look up a topographical map of your watershed on www.usgs.gov

NATURE-FRIENDLY LIVING: living with nature so that we maintain viable ecosystems, which are necessary for healthy, sustainable communities.