

# Penn State Extension

## 4-H Stream Teams: How To...

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### ...Identify Your Local Watershed in Pennsylvania

*There are lots of tools available on the internet for identifying the name of your local watershed; however they can be overwhelming and confusing at first. Please use this guide to help you start on the right path to making connections with your local watershed.*

- **DEFINITIONS:**

First, **what is a watershed?** A **watershed** is the area of land (includes underground too) that drains to a specific body of water. You may also hear the word **basin** used to describe the same thing. **Basin** tends to be associated with large bodies of water, such as rivers and bays (such as the Chesapeake Bay Basin, Ohio River Basin, Lake Erie Basin, etc...) while **watershed** is often used when referring to smaller bodies of water (such as Spring Creek Watershed, Crystal Lake Watershed, etc...). *Don't be surprised if you see the words used interchangeably.*



THE CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED  
image credit: US EPA

- **WATERSHEDS COME IN MANY SIZES:**

It's also important to recognize that **watersheds/basins exist at different scales or sizes** because you will find, as you explore your own watershed, that you live in many different watersheds and this can lead to confusion. Just as you can describe your current location as in your chair, in your living room, in your home, in your neighborhood, in your town, in your state, in your country, etc. you can also name your watershed very locally or on a broad scale. For example, you may live in the Conewago Creek Watershed, but you also live in the larger Susquehanna River Watershed and the much larger Chesapeake Bay Watershed at the same time. For the purposes of the 4-H Stream Teams Program, you will want to identify the watershed associated with a **stream** that water drains to from your location. The watershed from your home is likely to be different from the one at your school or work, so you will have to decide which location you want to focus on. The driving force of this program is to understand how our daily activities impact our local watershed, so consider your group of youth working together and which watershed they all have impacts on.

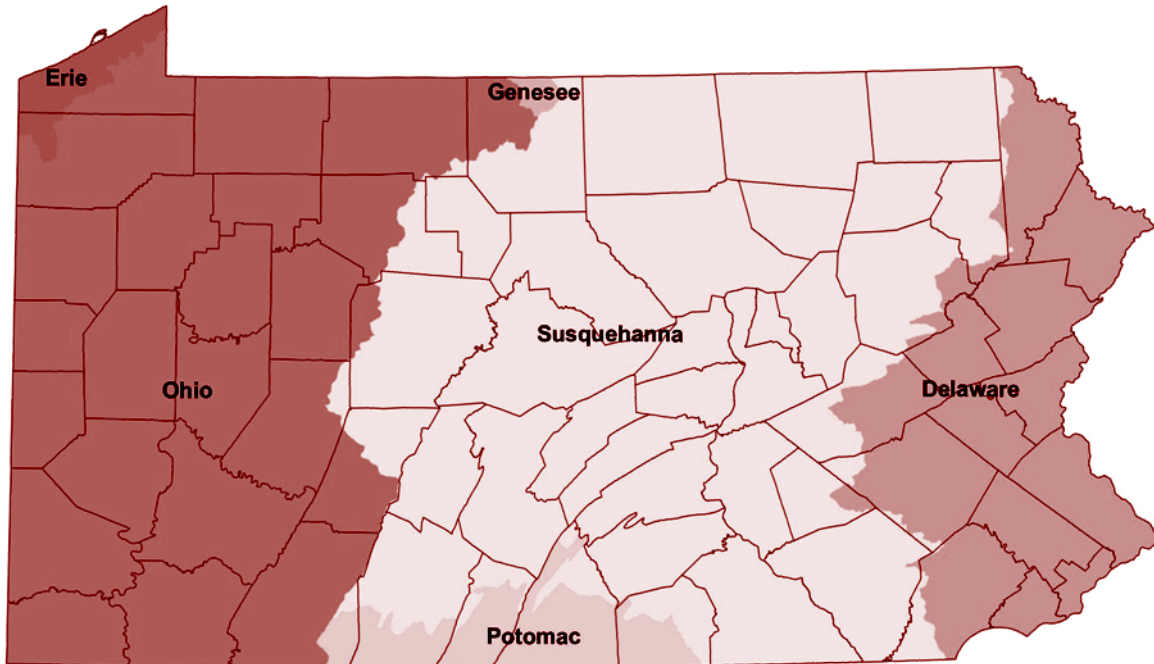
- **SO HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY YOUR WATERSHED:**

There are a few good starting points for identifying your watershed. First, take a look at the maps included on the next two pages of this *4-H Stream Team How To*. You will find a map of Pennsylvania that indicates the six major river basins in PA and a map of smaller basins within the state of Pennsylvania that are used by federal agencies such as the EPA and USGS for planning purposes. These two maps will help you to start to find your local watershed and can also help you see the bigger picture that your local watershed fits into. You can find out which of those slightly smaller basins you live in by visiting the EPA's Surf Your Watershed website (<http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm>) and entering your zip code.

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Appendix 1: The six major river basins in Pennsylvania shaded over the 67 PA counties

Those basins, however, are still rather large. So let's take it a step further and try to identify your stream based watershed address. It is likely that your county planning commission or your county conservation district will have a map of smaller stream-based watersheds available and it may even be on their website. Try doing an internet search for "[Your County] Watershed Map" or "[Your County] Watersheds." Remember that your county's name may not be unique to Pennsylvania, so make sure that if you find a map it is definitely your county. If you can't find the map online, call your county conservation district and ask if they have a map they can share with you.

When you do figure out the name of the stream-based watershed that you live in (or work/attend school in), you might even be able to find a map of just your watershed online. Go ahead and search for it. You may find that your local watershed has a group of concerned citizens working hard to protect it through a watershed association, or you may find links to news stories about your watershed. These are all great things to share with your 4-H Stream Team.

- **WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, CREATE YOUR OWN WATERSHED MAP:**

If you have had no luck finding maps of your county or your watershed, here is another place you could go to get that map. The USGS has an interactive website known as Stream Stats, and we are fortunate to have Pennsylvania as one of the first states to be operational on this site:

<http://water.usgs.gov/osw/streamstats/pennsylvania.html>

Here you can visit their "Interactive Map" and create your own local watershed map. Zoom in on your county and keep zooming in until you can identify your community. Then use the hand tool to pan to where you live. Find the nearest stream and follow it until it empties into a larger

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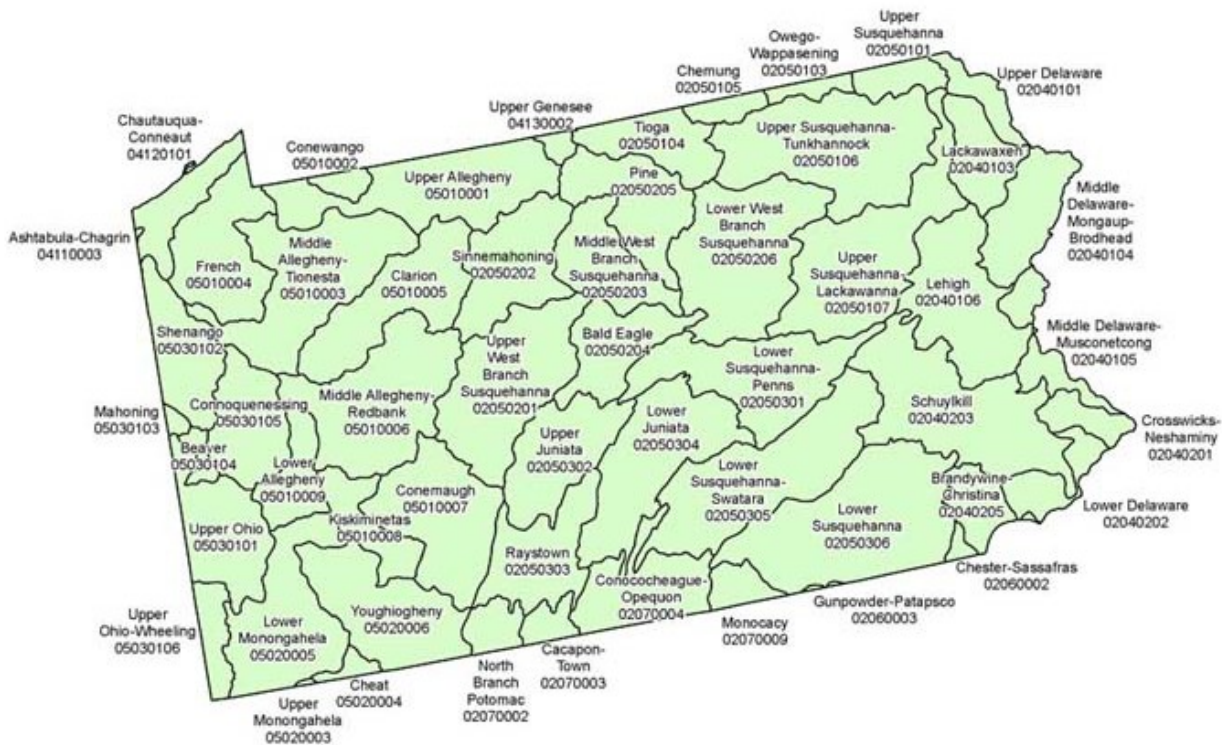
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body of water (likely a nearby river, lake, or a much larger stream). You may find other small streams joining it along the way or that your stream comes into another stream of about the same size. Just keep following until you feel you have reached a point that becomes significantly different (remember that watersheds come in many different sizes). Use the watershed delineation tool (looks like a circle and a + symbol together) and click on the point where your stream and this larger body of water come together. The map will now automatically generate a purple watershed shape that you can explore and print for your reference. Make sure that your home/school/etc... is actually included in that purple area. If not, you picked a stream that may be close by, but is not the place where water drains to from your home. You will have to go back and try again. Look closely at the map once you are certain you picked the right stream. You should be able to find a name for your stream which is also your watershed's name.

• **WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR WATERSHED ADDRESS:**

So now that you know your watershed name, you can start seeking out information about it. Find out if your stream has a local watershed association. Search to see if your stream appears in the local newspapers. Look to see where the boundaries of your watershed are and who else is contributing to your local water quality. Congratulations, you have discovered your watershed address!



Appendix 2: Pennsylvania's watersheds as identified by the EPA and USGS including HUC numbers used for identification purposes. (image credit: US EPA)