



# Defining the Planning Area

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## What is it?

The area needing resource planning often seems obvious. Bank erosion and sedimentation in a local stream, for example, requires addressing conditions throughout the stream's "watershed," or all the land that drains to the stream.

On closer examination, however, watershed terminology is not always so simple. It is possible to define almost an infinite number of watershed boundaries, depending on the reference point. One small stream drains to successively larger streams. Should the planning consider the smallest drainage area, called the *catchment*? Or should the plan address the *subwatershed*, *watershed*, or *subbasin* level?

No matter the terms used, it's critical to clearly define the boundaries of the planning area. The planning area will focus the identification of problems and opportunities, the inventory work, and the development of management strategies. The stakeholders who should be represented on the Planning Committee will also be defined by the planning area.

## When do we do it?

The planning area needs to be identified during the initial pre-planning meetings with stakeholders.

## How do we do it?

Usually resource planning is conducted on a watershed basis. In general, watershed-based planning is advantageous because it gives a systems perspective for problem-solving, works across political boundaries, and is the most effective way of addressing nonpoint source pollution. Experts say the optimal watershed size for effective resource planning is about 5 to 20 square miles, but the NRCS resource planning process also works in smaller or larger watersheds.

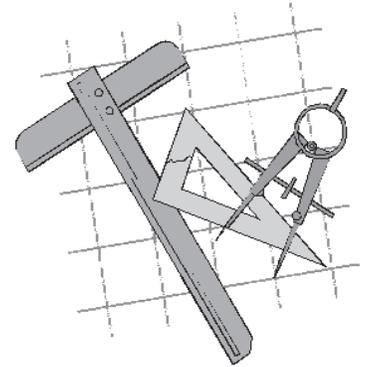
The NRCS District Conservationist and other resource professionals will help stakeholders identify the drainage area relevant to their concerns. Start by reviewing a watershed map such as the NRCS Hydrologic Unit map. The Illinois EPA has also delineated over 800 watersheds for planning purposes. All upstream watershed acreage should be included in the planning area, while downstream acreage is usually limited to a juncture with the next major waterbody.

Along with stakeholder input, consider the conservation activities of Conservation Partners. Try to limit the size of the watershed because the larger the watershed, the more complicated the planning process— especially when watersheds cross state lines. Also, larger watersheds necessitate more general plans, which tend to be less effective.

Typically this analysis results in a planning area encompassing all the land draining a large community stream (usually named), and one or more (often unnamed) small creeks or drainage ditches.

**The following are some indications that the planning area is appropriately defined:**

- There are similar stakeholder concerns throughout the watershed.
- There is consistent resource conditions, land uses, and planning issues throughout the watershed.



Occasionally resource planning is not conducted on a watershed scale. Instead, the planning may be done for a karst area, an oil brine damage area, a mine-reclamation area, for a single community, or a county. The same considerations for watershed-based planning apply for non-watershed resource planning. Boundaries are suggested by the types of resource issues, community interests and geographical considerations. All public and private lands necessary to effect change should be included. Local stakeholders should help finalize planning area boundaries.

### **The Next Step**

After the Planning Committee has defined on the planning area, they will begin Step 1 of the resource planning process. Refer to the factsheet “Identifying Resource Concerns.”