

Water Glossary / Key Terms

Benthic: Refers to animals that live in or on the bottom of a lake, sea, or river.

Elevation: Height above sea level.

Freshwater: Not salt or ocean water.

Groundwater: Water held below the surface of the land, underground.

Land use: Refers to how land within a community is utilized. Some examples of land uses include urban, suburban, commercial (businesses/shopping districts), agricultural (farming), or natural areas.

Model: Simplified representation of natural phenomena. Models can be manipulated and used as tools to make predictions or test hypotheses.

Nursery: Breeding or nesting grounds for plants or animals.

pH: Measurement of the amount of hydrogen ions present in a substance such as water. Knowing the amount of hydrogen in a substance allows us to judge whether it is acidic, neutral, or basic.

River system: A network of small rivers leading into larger rivers.

Runoff: Excess rainfall or snowmelt that flows over land into lakes and rivers because it was not absorbed by soil or plants.

Saltwater: Ocean or sea water.

Secchi disk: Instrument used by scientists to measure water clarity. The depth at which the disk's black and white marks cannot be seen is called the "secchi depth."

Sediment: Soil and other particles carried by water or settled on the bottom of a water body.

Slope: Change in elevation, such as downhill or uphill.

Surface water: Water that is above ground (e.g., in lakes and rivers).

Turbidity: Measurement of sediment and/or other particles stirred up or suspended in water.

Water clarity: Measurement of the clearness of water (e.g., low turbidity).

Water quality: Measurement of many factors that contribute to the overall health of water in an ecosystem.

Watershed: The area of land that drains into a river system.

Wetland: An area, such as a bog, swamp, or marsh that has seasonally wet soils and a distinct plant community. Wetlands provide valuable nursery areas and habitat for many plants and animals.