Glossary

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Ecosystem: an environmental community, based upon the interaction between climate, soil, topography, plants and animals. When functioning, this system is self-sustaining.

Edge habitat: the area where two or more habitat types, such as forestland, grassland, or wetland, meet is called edge. Edge habitat is a place where plants and animals from each of the adjoining habitats mix.

Effluent: wastewater from a septic system or wastewater treatment plant that enters a water body.

First flush: the first half inch to 1 inch of precipitation that accumulates and becomes stormwater runoff. First flush runoff gathers pollution as it washes the earth's surface, and as such it carries the highest concentration of pollutants.

Food chain: a sequence of organisms in which each is the food of the next organism in the sequence. For example, in an aquatic system, a young mosquito is food for a trout, which is food for an osprey.

Food web: all the interconnected and circular food chains in an ecosystem. This system is more inclusive and reflective of an ecosystem than the simpler food chain. For example, if the young mosquito mentioned above escapes the trout, it may later be food for a frog, which is food for a fox. Or the mosquito may escape all of the above and prey upon humans, which then allows it to complete its life cycle and lay eggs in the nearest water body.

Forbs: non woody vegetation including grasses, flowers and ferns.

Habitat: an organism's home, including areas that provide cover, food, shelter, water and breeding sites.

Infiltration: percolation of water and chemicals through the soil.

Ion: an atom or molecule that carries a net charge (negative or positive).

Microorganisms: organisms so small that they are invisible to the human eye.

Nonpoint Source Pollution: diffuse pollution being delivered to a waterbody with no discernible pathway. Whereas "point" sources of pollution, such as pipes or ditches, can be easily pointed to, Nonpoint Source Pollution often travels in runoff and is invisible, so that it is not so easily pointed to.

Retention time: the time it takes for water to travel from its original source to a receiving waterbody or other specific point. The water can travel in surface runoff, streams, rivers, or subsurface flows.

Sheet flow: runoff that flows over the ground as a thin, even layer rather then concentrated in a channel.

Soluble nutrients: nutrients dissolved in water or other solution. Soluble nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen are in forms that can readily be used by plants. The presence of soluble nutrients can have an immediate effect on algae and plant growth in water bodies.

Stormwater runoff: overland flow of water due to rainstorms or snowmelt

Subsurface flow: the underground flow of water through soil or bedrock. This flow moves down gradient, often heading toward surface water bodies. It is often an important source of recharge water in times of low rainfall or drought.

Transpiration: the uptake of water by plants, which they then use in life processes and give off as moisture through their pores.

Vegetated buffer: an area of natural vegetation along the shoreline of a water body or wetland, buffering that resource from human activity

Velocity: speed of movement.

Vernal pool: Vernal pools (also known as ephemeral pools and temporary woodland ponds) typically fill with water in winter due to rising groundwater and rainfall and remain filled through the spring and into summer. Vernal pools usually dry completely by the middle or end of summer each year, or at least every few years. Occasional drying prevents fish from establishing permanent populations. Many amphibian and invertebrate species rely on breeding habitat that is free of fish predators.

Water bodies: a generic term used throughout this manual, referring to rivers, streams, lakes and ponds

Watershed: The area of land from which all surface water and groundwater flows from higher elevations to a common body of water