Watershed

Have you ever followed or traced your local river on a map from its source to the ocean? Where does it start? Where does it end? How might the surrounding landscape influence the river's flow along its course?

Before we begin our study of the environment and water quality for the Guadalupe River, let's explore the big picture! Guadalupe River is part of two, large natural systems: the **water cycle** and **watersheds**.

The water cycle is the movement of water from the ocean to the sky, onto land, and back to sky, again. Can you name five stages of the **water cycle**?

A **watershed** is an area that collects, stores, and releases water. It is usually defined as an area of land that drains water to a common point, be it a river, the bay, or the ocean. Where does Guadalupe River drain to?

Precipitation falls onto Earth's surface where it runs down slopes, and is collected by valleys, soil, plants, and by man-made surfaces, like streets, becoming part of a watershed. In a watershed, water is stored in wetlands, lakes, and reservoirs. It is also stored in soil as it slowly moves down into groundwater supply. Water is also in glaciers, and inside you! Water leaves the watershed by flowing out through rivers, evaporation, or can be drained to another watershed through man-made pipes.

Since watersheds include land and the water flowing from it, all living things live in and are a part of a watershed. A healthy watershed is necessary for the plants and animals living there.