

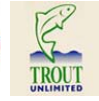


Hike and Learn

What is a Watershed?

TroutAdventureTrail.org

A proud partnership of Trout Unlimited, the US Forest Service, and Boy Scouts of America



WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place. Watersheds come in many shapes and sizes.

Watersheds are formed by the features of the surface of the earth, called **topography**. Water can flow from underground (percolation from underground water sources, including springs, wells, and seeps) or from above (rainfall and snow). Water will flow from higher places to lower places in brooks, streams and, eventually, rivers that ultimately flow to the sea.

WATERSHEDS OF THE TROUT ADVENTURE TRAIL

Noontootla Creek Watershed

The vicinity of **Three Forks** is a great example of a watershed. The Trout Adventure Trail is in an area of higher elevation. In addition, ridges surround the trail system. The water from the ridgelines and sides of mountains and hills runs in unnamed streams, rivulet, and rills into Long Creek, Stover Creek, Chester Creek and Frick Creek, eventually flowing into a larger stream called Noontootla Creek. Thus, this area is correctly named the **Noontootla Creek Watershed** because all the water within the ridges that surround the trail system flow into Noontootla Creek.

Toccoa River Watershed

As all these streams and Noontootla Creek flow downhill, they become larger by collecting more water from runoff, from tributary streams and from springs or seeps. Noontootla Creek eventually flows into the **Toccoa River** and Lake Blue Ridge. This means the area around Three Forks is part of the **Toccoa River Watershed**.

Ocoee-Hiwassee-Tennessee-Ohio-Mississippi Watersheds

Eventually, the Toccoa River flows north across the Tennessee state line where it is renamed the **Ocoee River**. The Ocoee River flows into the Hiwassee River, which in turn flows into the Tennessee River, which then flows into the Ohio River. The Ohio River flows into the mighty Mississippi River before ending in the Gulf of Mexico. Thus, it can be said that the Noontootla Creek Watershed ultimately drains into the Gulf of Mexico via the mighty Mississippi River Watershed.

DEMONSTRATING A WATERSHED AT THREE FORKS

An easy way to demonstrate how a watershed works is to stand where Long Creek flows into Noontootla Creek and describe the “Three Forks” – Stover Creek, Long Creek and Chester Creek – flowing into Noontootla Creek.

These small tributaries form the larger stream – Noontootla Creek – which flows into a larger river – Toccoa River.

Hikers who walk up to Long Creek Falls on the Trout Adventure Trail will see small rills, rivulets and streams flowing downhill into Long Creek. The concept of a watershed – **Long Creek Watershed** -- is easily envisioned right there by observation.



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