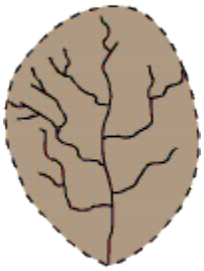
What's a Watershed?

A watershed is a basin-like landform defined by highpoints and ridgelines that descend into lower elevations and stream valleys. A watershed carries water "shed" from the land after rain falls and snow melts. Drop by drop, water is channeled into soils, groundwater, and streams, making its way to larger rivers and eventually the sea. Water is a universal solvent, affected by all that it comes in contact with: the land it traverses, and the soils through which it travels. The important thing about watersheds is: what we do on the land affects water quality for all communities living downstream.

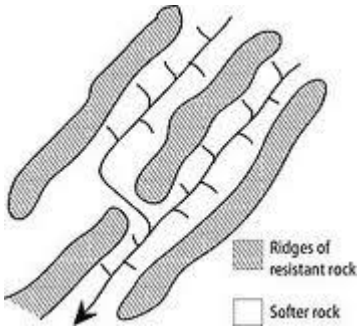
A watershed can be envisioned as an aquatic "tree", a system of upwardly branching, successively smaller streams.



West Virginia's rivers west of the continental divide follow the slope of a terrain where the underlying rocks are flat-bedded (like pancakes) and have a more uniform hardness. The streams and their tributaries resemble the branches of a tree. This drainage system is called dendritic, from the Greek word *dendrites*, pertaining to a tree.

Drainage Systems

Rivers flow in channels that form drainage patterns determined by local factors, such as the topography and the type of underlying rocks.



The Potomac drainage basin is characterized by parallel main streams. The tributaries often join the main rivers at right angles, causing a trellis-like appearance to the river system. A trellis drainage pattern develops where hard and soft rocks are folded into parallel ridges and the main streams follow the weaker beds of rock.

Learn more at: http://www.dep.wv.gov/WWE/getinvolved/sos/Pages/Watersheds.aspx