

# What is

# a Watershed?

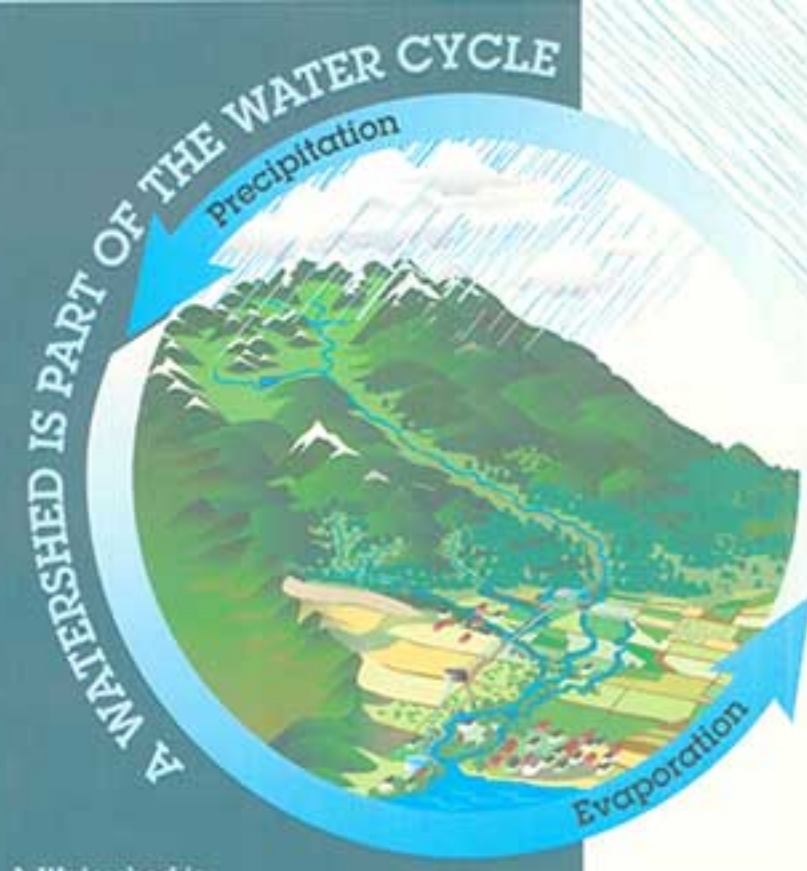
Precipitation falls from the atmosphere as rain or snow...

Water from rains and snowpack runoff seeps into the ground to recharge the aquifer for water use later by homes and farms...

It is the entire drainage area, including:

- mountain peaks and slopes
- soils
- vegetation
- wildlife
- watercourses and wetlands
- people and their activities

Can you find these in the picture?



A Watershed is part of the unending circulation of the earth's water. This is where the precipitation falls back to earth as rain, snow, or some form of moisture and flows down watershed drainages as it returns to the sea.

## Plants and Animals You Might See or Hear

### Subalpine



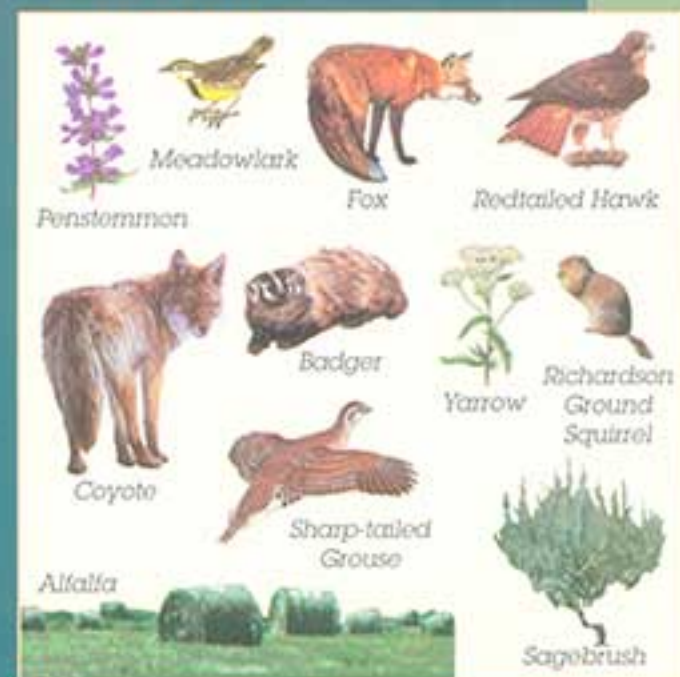
### Trees and Meadows



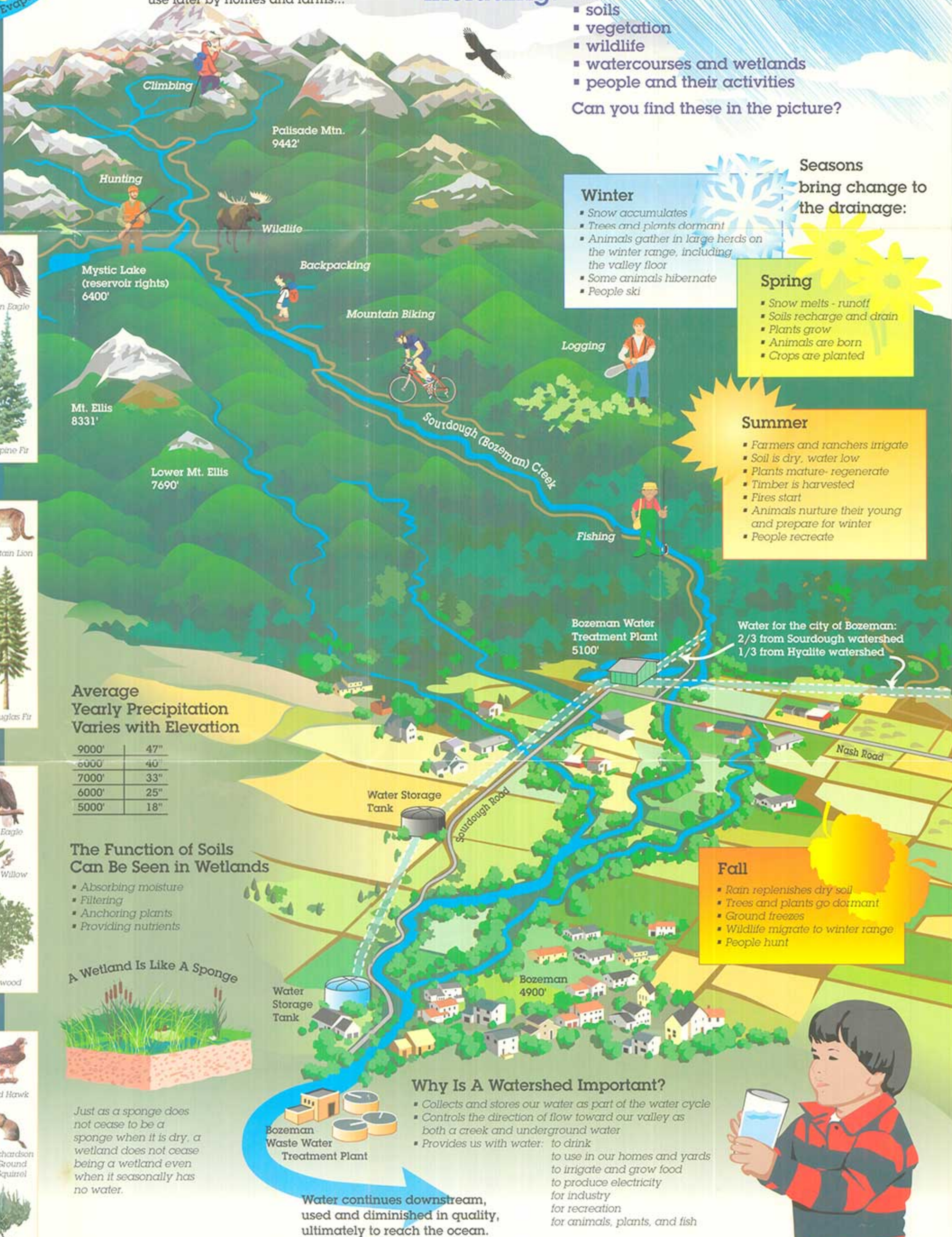
### Riparian



### Grasslands



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Seasons bring change to the drainage:

### Winter

- Snow accumulates
- Trees and plants dormant
- Animals gather in large herds on the winter range, including the valley floor
- Some animals hibernate
- People ski

### Spring

- Snow melts - runoff
- Soils recharge and drain
- Plants grow
- Animals are born
- Crops are planted

### Summer

- Farmers and ranchers irrigate
- Soil is dry, water low
- Plants mature- regenerate
- Timber is harvested
- Fires start
- Animals nurture their young and prepare for winter
- People recreate

### Fall

- Rain replenishes dry soil
- Trees and plants go dormant
- Ground freezes
- Wildlife migrate to winter range
- People hunt

### Average Yearly Precipitation Varies with Elevation

9000'	47"
8000'	40"
7000'	33"
6000'	25"
5000'	18"

### The Function of Soils Can Be Seen in Wetlands

- Absorbing moisture
- Filtering
- Anchoring plants
- Providing nutrients

### A Wetland Is Like A Sponge



Just as a sponge does not cease to be a sponge when it is dry, a wetland does not cease being a wetland even when it seasonally has no water.

### Why Is A Watershed Important?

- Collects and stores our water as part of the water cycle
- Controls the direction of flow toward our valley as both a creek and underground water
- Provides us with water: to drink to use in our homes and yards to irrigate and grow food to produce electricity for industry for recreation for animals, plants, and fish

Water continues downstream, used and diminished in quality, ultimately to reach the ocean.

