How Do Forests Affect our Drinking Water?

Clean water is one of life's basic necessities. Healthy forests keep streams clean and water quality high by promoting soils that provide natural filtration and vegetative cover which minimize soil erosion and sediment runoff. Most of Idaho's municipal water systems use water that originates from forestlands, including those managed for wood production. The quality of this source water is among the best in the nation.

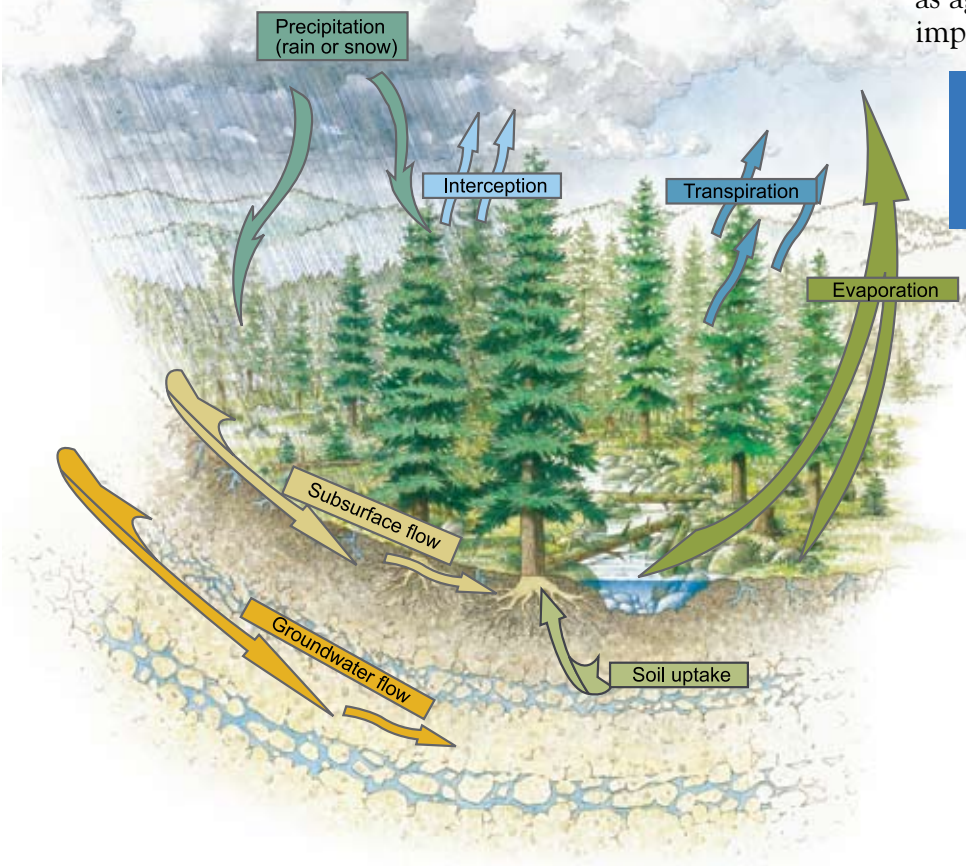
What is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that absorbs rain and snow and drains it through a network of streams into a river or other major water body. All land in Idaho is within one watershed or another. Watershed boundaries can be generally identified by mountains and ridges that divide the drainage areas for different water bodies.

How Does the Water Cycle Work?

As the water reaches healthy forest soils, most is absorbed and, over time, is released to nearby streams or groundwater aquifers, filtering it in the process. Most communities in the United States get their water from watersheds where mixed land uses such as agriculture and development may impact source water quality.

The Forest Water Cycle



Forest soils act as a natural filtration system resulting in high-quality source water that requires minimal treatment.

Inception Vegetation catches and deflects rain, snow & fog.

Evaporation Some water, in the form of vapor, returns to the atmosphere.

Subsurface flow Most water seeps into soil and streams.

Groundwater Some water seeps deeper, reaching underground aquifers.

Soil uptake Roots take in water from the soil.

Transpiration Water moves through the tree and evaporates from the surface of leaves or needles.

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