



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

GROUND WATER AWARENESS WEEK

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An Important Source of Surface Water

BISMARCK, N.D. – Surface water shapes the contours of our nation. Devils Lake, the Missouri River, that pond or creek you fished in as a child – surface water captures our attention and our imagination. *A River Runs Through It. The Lady in the Lake. Islands in the Stream.*

No one writes songs or stories about ground water, but it is a vital component of surface water, an integral part of the ecosystem.

March 13 through 19 has been designated National Ground Water Awareness Week. In North Dakota, protecting ground water is one of the primary functions of the North Dakota Department of Health's Division of Water Quality. Ground water is found between soil particles and cracks in rocks underground, in formations known as aquifers.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimates that ground water comprises 40 percent to 50 percent of the total flow of small- and medium-sized surface streams. USGS estimates that as much as 40 percent of all surface stream flow in the United States can be attributed to ground water. Ground water is also a major source of water to lakes and wetlands.

The hydrologic cycle begins when the process of evaporation releases water vapor into the atmosphere. The vapor condenses as it forms into clouds. This water returns to the ground through precipitation – rain. Water runoff soaks into the soil, penetrating deep into the ground until it becomes ground water, which is found in aquifers below the surface. Ground water flows through the ground until it discharges into a lake or stream. From there, the cycle begins again.

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Most people would not think of dumping anything into a lake or stream for fear of polluting the water. But it's important to remember that hazardous substances dumped on the ground can ultimately contaminate ground water – and the rest of the hydrologic cycle.

No one writes songs about ground water. But everyone should be mindful of it, and takes steps to safeguard it.

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