

The Water Column

Our Water: Where Does it Come From, and How Do We Protect It?

Have you ever wondered what the source of Raleigh's tap water is? Maybe a well? Nope – although many residents in Wake County receive their water from groundwater through a private well on their property. Raleigh Water customer's tap water starts in Falls Lake or Lake Benson/Lake Wheeler.

Falls Lake is north of Raleigh, and accounts for about 80% of our water supply. Falls Lake is quite large and at its normal level it holds about 43 billion gallons of water! This water is cleaned at the EM Johnson Water Treatment Plant before being sent to customers.

Lake Benson and Lake Wheeler are in southwestern Wake County. They are part of the Swift Creek Watershed, and account for about 20% of our water supply. This water is cleaned at Dempsey E Benton Water Treatment Plant before being sent to customers.

Another question you may have is: how does water get into these lakes? An obvious answer is that precipitation (rain, snow, sleet, etc.) will fall into the lakes. A less obvious answer is that precipitation will fall on land near the lake, then drain to the lake. Any area where water drains to the lake is considered part of the lake's "watershed".

The Triangle is growing and there is development within these lakes' watersheds. One approach to protecting lake water quality is to protect land next to the water bodies (such as streams and rivers) that drain to these lakes. Many government agencies help with these efforts. Raleigh has a Watershed Protection Program which works with land trusts to protect high priority land through the purchase of conservation easements and conservation projects. This ensures the land is left in its natural state. By leaving land in its natural state, such as forest or wetland, these natural systems filter pollutants that may otherwise drain into the lakes.