

Ecosystem Location Clues

Use geographic details to identify major ecosystems across the United States.

SS.8.G.3.1 "Locate and describe in geographic terms the major ecosystems of the United States."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each ecosystem name and circle the words that tell where it is in the United States. Draw a line from each circled location clue to its ecosystem name to show how place helps identify an ecosystem.

Ecosystems Across the United States

- ① Across the far north of Alaska, tundra stretches along the Arctic Ocean. This ecosystem has low shrubs, mosses, lichens, and grasses, but few trees because the ground stays frozen below a thin summer surface layer. South of the tundra, much of interior Alaska is boreal forest, also called taiga. Spruce, birch, and aspen grow there. Long, cold winters and short growing seasons shape both northern ecosystems. Caribou, migratory birds, and other animals use these connected regions each year.
- ② East of the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains contain temperate grasslands. Rainfall is usually too limited for dense forests, so grasses and wildflowers cover broad, open land. The prairie once extended from Texas north into the Dakotas, although farming has changed much of it. Farther east, deciduous forests dominate from the Midwest through parts of New England and the Southeast. Oak, maple, and hickory trees lose their leaves in autumn. This ecosystem receives more rain than the grasslands to its west.
- ③ Western deserts include hot areas in Arizona and southeastern California and the cold Great Basin of Nevada and Utah. Rainfall is sparse; plants include cacti and creosote in hot deserts and sagebrush in the Great Basin. California chaparral tolerates summer drought and can recover after infrequent fires, but repeated fires at short intervals can harm its shrubs. In the Pacific Northwest, from northern California through Oregon and Washington, moist coniferous forests include tall evergreens. Coastal wetlands, including marshes and mangroves, occur along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, where land meets salt or brackish water. Hawaii has tropical forests, where warm temperatures and high rainfall support lush vegetation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Which two ecosystems are found in Alaska? Describe where each one is located.

2 Locate the temperate grasslands and describe the rainfall and plant conditions there.

3 How do western deserts and the Pacific Northwest coniferous forest differ in location and conditions?

4 Where are tropical forests found in the United States, and what climate supports them?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Complete the table with three different ecosystems from the passage. For each one, give a precise United States location and one condition or plant clue that describes it.

ECOSYSTEM	UNITED STATES LOCATION	CONDITION OR PLANT CLUE

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each ecosystem name and circle the words that tell where it is in the United States. Draw a line from each circled location clue to its ecosystem name to show how place helps identify an ecosystem. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which two ecosystems are found in Alaska? Describe where each one is located.	Tundra is in far northern Alaska along the Arctic Ocean. Boreal forest is south of the tundra in much of interior Alaska.
2	Locate the temperate grasslands and describe the rainfall and plant conditions there.	Temperate grasslands are in the Great Plains east of the Rocky Mountains, from Texas north into the Dakotas. Limited rainfall supports broad areas of grasses and wildflowers rather than dense forests.
3	How do western deserts and the Pacific Northwest coniferous forest differ in location and conditions?	Western deserts include hot areas in Arizona and southeastern California and the cold Great Basin of Nevada and Utah. All have sparse rainfall. Moist coniferous forests extend from northern California through Oregon and Washington and include tall evergreens.
4	Where are tropical forests found in the United States, and what climate supports them?	Tropical forests are found in Hawaii. Warm temperatures and high rainfall support lush vegetation there.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

ECOSYSTEM	UNITED STATES LOCATION	CONDITION OR PLANT CLUE
Tundra	Far northern Alaska along the Arctic Ocean	Low shrubs grow above ground that stays frozen below the summer surface layer.
Temperate grassland	Great Plains east of the Rocky Mountains	Limited rainfall supports grasses and wildflowers.
Coastal wetlands	Gulf and Atlantic coasts	Marshes and mangroves grow where land meets salt or brackish water.

Accept accurate ecosystem locations and descriptions stated in the passage. For the table, students may select any three different ecosystems and may use equivalent geographic wording, such as "interior Alaska" or "the Pacific Northwest."