

ENCIRCLING ECOSYSTEMS:

Here, There, and Everywhere!



Ecology

Ecology is the science that explores ecosystems and the relationships between all living (biotic) and nonliving (abiotic) things within them.

Ecosystems can be on land (alpine mountains, sagebrush steppe, and temperate forests) or in water (rivers, lakes, and coastlines).



Mom and baby seal resting on an iceberg at Tongass National Forest in Alaska.



Tropical plants in the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Cactus at the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico.



A bison at Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie in Illinois.

There are many kinds of ecosystems across the United States. Each is made up of unique animals, plants, and soils. You can find arctic tundra in Alaska, arid deserts in the Southwest, rolling prairies in the Great Plains, and tropical rainforests in Hawai'i and Puerto Rico. Even your neighborhood, school, and community are part of a large city ecosystem.

Every part of an ecosystem depends on each other. All ecosystems need a balance of nonliving parts (like sun, water, and soil) and living parts (like plants, animals, and humans) to be healthy. No matter where you go, you are part of an ecosystem!



TRY THIS: Be an Ecologist





Career Exploration

An ecologist is a scientist who studies the relationships between living things and their environment. Ecologists are curious to know how people, plants, animals, and even nonliving things interact.

- Some ecologists do fieldwork to study how animals interact with each other and humans in a specific environment, like a national forest near a city.
- Some ecologists might research specific habitats like coastal areas or deserts.
- Some ecologists might specialize in topics like pollution, ecosystems in cities, or taking care of forests.

With an adult, find a safe place to be outside and try this activity. Maybe explore a backyard, community vegetable garden, or a park nearby.

 What kinds of living things do you see? How many of each do you see?

 What kinds of nonliving things do you notice? What is the weather like? Are there human-made nonliving things like signs, playgrounds, fences, or streets?

Draw the ecosystem that you see:

Rate this job! Based on what you learned and what you did, circle or color the number of stars you give this job.



Why did you give it this rating?