



APPENDIX G
ECOREGION DIVISIONS

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The descriptions in this appendix were adapted from the United States Forest Service “Description of Ecoregions of the United States,” compiled by Roger G. Bailey in 1995 with the exception of the ecoregions unique to Alaska which were adapted from “Description of Ecological Subregions: Sections of the Conterminous United States,” compiled by W. H. McNab, D. T. Cleland, J. A. Freeouf, J. E. Keys, Jr., G. J. Nowacki, and C. A. Carpenter in 2007.

POLAR DOMAIN

Arctic Division

The northern continental fringes of North America, from the Arctic Circle northward to about the 75th parallel, lie within the outer zone of control of arctic air masses. This produces the arctic climate. The average temperature of the warmest month lies between 50F (10C) and 32F (0C).

The arctic climate has a very short, cool summer and a long, severe winter. No more than 188 days per year, and sometimes as few as 55, have a mean temperature higher than 32F (0C). Annual precipitation is light, often less than 8 inches (200 mm), but because potential evaporation is also very low, the climate is humid.

Vegetation on the tundra consists of grasses, sedges, lichens, and willow shrubs. As one moves south, the vegetation changes into birch-lichen woodland, and then into needleleaf forest. In some places, a distinct tree line separates forest from tundra; this line, which coincides approximately with the 50F (10C) isotherm of the warmest month, as a boundary between subarctic and arctic climates.

Wildlife species in arctic habitats fall into three categories: 1) resident species that remain active year-round, 2) resident species hibernating in winter such as

the polar bear, and 3) migratory species present for only a portion of the year. Resident species that remain active year-round include the willow ptarmigan, common raven, snowy owl, Arctic fox, brown lemming, muskoxen, and caribou. Hibernating species include the Arctic ground squirrel, and hoary marmot. The great majority of the approximately 100 bird species using the arctic are migratory.

Except for the wood frog, there are no amphibians or reptiles in the Arctic Ecoregion. Because they are cold-blooded animals, the climate is too cold for these groups. Wood frogs are unique in that they partially freeze in winter; up to one-third of the water in a wood frog's body may turn to ice for a period of several weeks.

The arctic has low species diversity; arctic insect fauna, for example, is only one percent to five percent as rich in species as the insect fauna found at temperate latitudes. Wildlife populations are also constrained by the low plant productivity, and can fluctuate greatly in response to annual changes in plant productivity. Animal population peaks can markedly alter vegetation and other habitat features in some instances, leading to sharp declines in population numbers.

Insect fauna provides an important prey base for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl. To cope with the short summer and limited food supplies, migratory birds tend to nest almost immediately upon arriving on the breeding grounds, and young hatch when insects and vegetation are most abundant.

Brant and common eider are prevalent in this area. Seabirds such as the pomarine jaeger, glaucous gull, and black guillemot are characteristic breeders. The semipalmated sandpiper is a common breeder in this section as is the rare Arctic Loon. The breeding range of the rare curlew sandpiper is limited to the tundra adjacent to the coast. Waterfowl, other small birds, and small mammals are preyed upon by Arctic fox, snowy owl, gyrfalcons, peregrine falcons, and rough-legged hawks.

Suitable habitat for denning or burrowing species may be limited in areas with continuous or near-continuous permafrost. Burrowing species must select areas where the permafrost is not near the surface. The presence of deep snowdrifts is important for denning wolverines, polar bears, and brown bears. Talus slopes and cut banks are important habitat features used by denning Arctic foxes. Raptors tend to nest along river and coastal bluffs because of the generally flat, treeless character of the Arctic tundra. Pink and chum salmon are present in this Section as are king, sockeye, and Coho salmon.

Soil particles in the arctic derive almost entirely from mechanical breakup of rock, with little or no chemical alteration. Inceptisols with weakly differentiated horizons are dominant. Continual freezing and thawing of the soil have disintegrated its particles. Like the northern continental interior, the arctic has a

permanently frozen sublayer of soil known as permafrost. The permafrost layer is more than 1,000 feet (300 m) thick throughout most of the region; seasonal thaw reaches only 4-24 inches (10-60 cm) below the surface.

Geomorphic processes are distinctive in the arctic, resulting in a variety of curious landforms. Under a protective layer of sod, water in the soil melts in summer to produce a thick mud that sometimes flows downslope to create bulges, terraces, and lobes on hillsides. The freeze and thaw of water in the soil sorts out coarse particles, giving rise to such patterns in the ground as rings, polygons, and stripes made of stones. The coastal plains have numerous lakes of thermokarst origin, formed by melting groundwater.

Arctic Tundra Province

Land-surface form.--The north coast of Alaska is a broad, level plain that is generally less than 1,000 feet (300 m) in elevation. Rolling foothills rise near the Colville River and gain altitude southward into the Brooks Range. In summer, thousands of lakes and marshes dot the plain.

Climate.--The severe arctic climate reaches temperatures of -60F (-51C) in winter. Average annual temperature is only 10 to 20F (-12C to -6C). Due to its location in the extreme north, this province gets very different amounts of sunlight at different times of year. In summer, the sun remains above the horizon 24 hours a day for from 2 to 85 consecutive days, depending on the latitude; in winter, it can remain below the horizon 24 hours a day for as long as 67 consecutive days. All sunlight is received at oblique angles that average 41 degrees. The growing season averages only two weeks per year. Precipitation is very low throughout the year; average annual precipitation is only seven inches (180 mm).

Vegetation.--Permafrost limits the rooting depth of plants and forces surface water to drain by preventing it from seeping into the soil. Extensive marshes and lakes result. Cottongrass-tussock, the most widespread vegetation system in the Arctic, is associated with sedges, dwarf shrubs, lichens, mosses, dwarf birch, Labrador-tea, and cinquefoil. These highly productive systems produce 500-1,000 lb (227-454 kg) of vegetation per acre, an important source of food for caribou and waterfowl. Several forbs flower brightly in the short summer.

Soils.--The soils are wet, cold Inceptisols with weakly differentiated horizons. Soils on south slopes and low moraines are well drained and loamy, with permafrost and ice features. They are underlain by coarse outwash and till. The uplands have localized areas of poorly drained clayey soils; lowland soils are deep, wet, and silty. There is no surface water in winter and only moderate flows in summer. Supplies of ground water are very limited. The entire province is under continuous permafrost to depths of 2,000 feet (600 m) in some areas.

Fauna.--Mammals of the Arctic include brown bear, wolf, wolverine, caribou, arctic hare, mink, weasel, and lemming. Polar bear, walrus, and arctic fox are common on the ice pack and coastal areas during winter.

Shore and lake areas provide rich habitat for millions of migrating waterfowl and shore birds during the summer months. Ptarmigans, ravens, hawks, and open country owls are common. Gyrfalcons have also been seen on sea ice.

Brooks Range Tundra

Land-surface form.--The Brooks Range, a northern extension of the Rocky Mountains, reaches 600 miles (970 km) westward from Canada to the Chukchi Sea. Its rugged peaks reach elevations of 9,000 feet (2,700 m) in the east, falling to 3,000 feet (900 m) in the west. Broad U-shaped valleys, morainal topography, and braided stream channels show evidence of glaciation. A series of rolling plateaus and low mountains, the arctic foothills, borders the coastal plain to the north.

Climate.--The climate of the Brooks Range is similar to that of the arctic coastal plain, but precipitation increases at the higher altitudes and at the east end of the range. Summer temperatures reach 90 to 100F (32 to 38C), and winter temperatures drop as low as -75F (-60C). Because the province lies above the Arctic Circle, it gets several days of 24-hr sunlight in June, and several sunless days in December. Precipitation averages 7 to 15 inches (180 to 390 mm), but drainage is rapid due to the area's steep slopes and the low holding capacity of its soils.

Vegetation.--In the higher alpine areas, plant cover is discontinuous over barren rock. It consists chiefly of low mats of such herbaceous and shrubby species as dwarf arctic birch, crowberry, Labrador-tea, arctic willow, resin birch, and dwarf blueberry. Areas at lower elevations may be covered by a mat of sedge and shrub that provides valuable forage for caribou. Cottongrass, bluejoint, mosses, dwarf willow, dwarf birch, Labrador-tea, and bistort are common. Regeneration is extremely slow for most species; some mosses require more than 60 years to recover from disturbance.

Soils.--The mountains are underlain by folded and faulted limestone, the foothills by various sediments. Soils are rocky and poorly developed. Inceptisols cover the lower slopes. Glacial and alluvial deposits occur in the valleys and at the base of the mountain slopes. Permafrost is continuous under the entire area.

Fauna.--The Brooks Range is an important big-game area in Alaska, supporting brown and black bear, wolf, wolverine, caribou, and Dall sheep. Smaller mammals include marmot, red and arctic fox, ground squirrel, lemming, and pika.

The Brooks Range is an important resting area for migrating waterfowl and songbirds during summer. Raptors prominent in many areas include golden eagles, marsh hawks, gyrfalcons, and snowy and other open country owls.

Bering Sea Tundra Province

Land-surface form.--The Bering Sea Tundra is a western extension of the arctic coastal plain, a broad lowland area rising gradually to the east. General topography is less than 1,000 feet (300 m) in elevation, broken in places by small mountain groups that rise 2,500-3,500 feet (800-1,100 m). Standing water is present in thousands of shallow lakes and marshes along the coast. Two large braided rivers, the lower Yukon and the Kuskokwim, flow out of the province to the southwest.

Climate.--The climate is less severe in the Bering Sea Tundra than on the arctic slope, but it also has cold winters and generally cool summers. Temperatures range from a high of 90F (32C) in summer to a low of -70F (-57C) in winter. Annual precipitation averages 17 inches (430 mm).

Vegetation.--Vegetation along the wet coastal areas is chiefly sedge and cottongrass; woody plants grow on higher sites. Birch-willow-alder thickets are extensive in transition zones between beach and forest. The lower Yukon and Kuskokwim Valleys are dominated by white spruce mixed with cottonwood and balsam poplar in tall, relatively dense stands, with a dense undergrowth of thinlinealder, willow, rose, dogwood, and various species of berry bushes.

Soils.--Coastal soils are wet, cool Inceptisols over silt, sand, and marine sediments. The lower Yukon and Kuskokwim Valley bottoms have pockets of Entisols with no soil horizons. Ground water throughout the area is limited, but some is present in the major river valleys. Surface water on the Seward Peninsula ceases to flow in winter, but further south it flows year-round. Permafrost is continuous under most of the area.

Fauna.--River bottom lands provide excellent habitat for furbearers, game birds, and moose. Upland and coastal areas support brown and black bear, wolf, wolverine, coyote, caribou, reindeer, snowshoe hare, red fox, lynx, beaver, moose, squirrels, mice, weasel, mink, and marten. Along the northern Bering Sea coast, polar bear, walrus, and arctic fox are occasionally found.

Coastal areas provide extensive and excellent habitat for migrating waterfowl and shore birds. Other bird species in the area include ospreys, falcons, grouse, ravens, golden eagles, and various hawks and owls.

SUBARCTIC DIVISION

The source region for the continental polar air masses is south of the tundra zone between latitude 50 and 70 N. The climate type here shows very great seasonal range in temperature; winters are severe, and the region's small

amounts of annual precipitation are concentrated in the three warm months. This cold, snowy forest climate, referred to in this volume as the boreal subarctic type, is classified as E in the Koppen-Trewartha system. This climate is moist all year, with cool, short summers. Only one month of the year has an average temperature above 50F (10C).

Winter is the dominant season of the boreal subarctic climate. Because average monthly temperatures are subfreezing for six to seven consecutive months, all moisture in the soil and subsoil freezes solidly to depths of many feet. Summer warmth is insufficient to thaw more than a few surface feet, so permafrost prevails under large areas. Seasonal thaw penetrates from 2 to 14 feet (0.6 to 4 m), depending on latitude, aspect, and kind of ground. Despite low temperatures and long winters, the valleys of interior Alaska were not glaciated during the Pleistocene, probably because of insufficient precipitation.

The subarctic climate zone coincides with a great belt of needleleaf forest, often referred to as boreal forest, and with the open lichen woodland known as taiga. Most trees are small, with less value as lumber than as pulpwood.

Boreal forests are structurally more complex than tundra, and thus support a greater diversity of wildlife species. These forests provide habitat for large mammals, such as grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, moose, and wolverine; small mammals, such as red fox, American beaver, American marten, and weasels; birds, such as spruce and ruffed grouse, owls, and raven; and the amphibian, wood frog. Cliffs along the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers provide habitat for several raptor species: osprey, gyrfalcon, hawks, and the endangered American peregrine falcon. Rich fish resources support bald eagles and osprey on the coastline. Many species have unique adaptations to survive in subarctic forests. Herbivores typically graze on herbaceous and shrubby vegetation during the summer, but shift to a high fiber diet of conifer needles and woody shrub browse during winter. White-winged crossbills are an example of a species that have adapted to the abundant cone seeds in boreal forests. These birds move in large flocks when cone supplies are abundant, but are nomadic when cone supplies are limited. White-winged crossbills also breed opportunistically, when cone supplies are most abundant. The boreal forests also provide a rich source of lichen, a food-source that comprises 60-80 percent of the winter diet for barren-ground caribou.

There are fewer wildlife species are found in bogs of the subarctic ecoregion than in upland forests, given the lack of diversity in flora. The high water table of bogs also discourages burrowing species.

The arctic needleleaf forest grows on Inceptisols with pockets of wet, organic Histosols. These light gray soils are wet, strongly leached, and acid; they form a very distinct layer beneath a topsoil layer of humus and forest litter. Agricultural potential is poor, due to the natural infertility of soils and the prevalence of

swamps and lakes left by departing ice sheets. In some places, ice scoured rock surfaces bare, entirely stripping off the overburden. Elsewhere rock basins were formed and stream courses dammed, creating countless lakes.

Yukon Intermontane Taiga Province

Land-surface form.--A series of broad valleys, dissected uplands, and lowland basins covered with alluvial deposits extends across interior Alaska between the Brooks and Alaska Ranges. Four major rivers, the Yukon, Tanana, Koyukuk, and upper Kuskokwim, provide the area's outstanding hydrologic features. All four form wide valleys, with extensively braided channels; in some areas, the valleys contain hundreds of small lakes and marshes. Elevations are generally less than 2,000 feet (600 m).

Climate.--The semiarid climate has extreme temperatures. Summers are short and hot, with temperatures up to 100F (38C); winters are long and severe, with temperatures as low as -75F (-60C). Average annual precipitation is only 17 inches (430 mm). Temperature inversions, frequent in upland areas in winter, result in warmer temperatures on lower slopes than in bottom lands.

Vegetation.--The major river bottoms support dense white spruce-cottonwood-poplar forests on floodplains and southfacing slopes up to about 1,000 feet (300 m). The undergrowth is dense shrubbery formed by green and thinleaf alder, willow, dogwood, and berries. The outer valley edges support evergreen and coniferous forests, often with pure stands of black spruce. The undergrowth consists of willow, dwarf birch, crowberry, fern, blueberry, lichens, and mosses. Upland areas are generally covered by a rather dense white spruce-birch-aspen-poplar forest. Pure stands of white spruce grow near streams. Typical undergrowth includes willow, alder, fern, berries, grasses, and mosses. Root systems are shallow. Water balance is likely the factor limiting growth in most of these areas because of the hot, dry summer climate. Old river terraces, ponds, and sloughs contain scattered but extensive bogs where the vegetation is chiefly sphagnum and other mosses, sedges, bog rosemary, and Labrador-tea. Marginal areas may support willow and alder.

Soils.--River bottom and lower slope soils are generally deep, well-drained Inceptisols over sands, silts, and gravels that are only slightly weathered. Permafrost is discontinuous in major river valleys. Soils on northfacing slopes are shallow and poorly developed, with continuous permafrost. Upland soils that support spruce-hardwood forests are well-drained, shallow Inceptisols over continuous permafrost. Bog soils are Histosols.

Fauna.--The spruce-hardwood forests provide excellent habitat for furbearers and other mammals. Brush zones and immature forests recovering from fires furnish especially good browse for moose. Common game animals in addition to moose include black and brown bear, wolf, wolverine, and caribou. Smaller mammals include lynx, red fox, beaver, mink, muskrat, weasel, river otter,

marten, red and northern flying squirrel, and deer mouse. Woodland game birds find plentiful habitat. Upland birds include northern hawk-owl, spruce grouse, and boreal chickadee.

Upper Yukon Taiga Province

Land-surface form.--This province is mostly a flat plains and rounded low mountains. The plains consist of marshy lake-dotted flats rising from 300 feet (90 m) in altitude in the west to 600-900 feet (180-270 m) in the north and east. The mountains rise to 4,000 feet (600-1,200 m). The province is made up of outwash fans and floodplains of the Chandalar, Christian, Sheenjek, and Upper Yukon Rivers. Rolling silt- and gravel-covered marginal terraces with sharp escarpments 150-600 feet (50-180 m) high rise above the flats, sloping gradually upward to altitudes of about 1,500 feet (460 m) at the base of surrounding uplands and mountains.

Climate.--The climate is the extreme continental boreal type, with its large annual temperature range, severely cold winters, and short, hot summers. The average daily minimum temperature of the coldest month is -29F (-33C). At Fort Yukon, more than 130 days per year have a minimum temperature of 0F (-18C) or below. The record low at Fort Yukon is -78F (-61C), and the record high is 100F (38C). The growing season is less than 3 months. The region is semiarid, with an average annual precipitation of about seven inches (179 mm), with a summer maximum. Snowfall averages 45 inches (1,150 mm) per year.

Vegetation.-- The vegetation pattern in the area is complex. Bottom land spruce-aspens-birch grow on the better drained alluvial sites. Alder and willow form thickets on newly exposed alluvial sites subject to periodic flooding. Forests of white spruce, paper birch, and quaking aspen cover most lower slopes in the south and southfacing slopes in the north. Black spruce forest vegetation grows at higher elevations, on all northfacing slopes in the south, on all but steep southfacing slopes in the north, and on lower slopes with impeded soil drainage throughout the area. Above the black spruce forest, the vegetation is alpine meadow characterized by sedges on poorly drained sites and by low-growing shrubs on drier sites.

Soils.--Principal soils are wet Inceptisols, mostly in flats and low areas. Lower parts of the floodplains are poorly drained and covered with peat, whereas river terraces are better drained.

Fauna.--The fauna of the Yukon Flats Province are similar to those in other taiga regions. But this province provides what may be the most productive arctic habitat for avian wildlife on the continent. Predominant waterfowl species that breed in the region include the lesser scaup, pintail, scoter, and wigeon. The area supports 15-20 percent of remaining canvasbacks. Arctic, red-throated, and common loons, horned and red-necked grebes, and sandhill cranes are also common. Cliffs along the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers support

several raptor species, including osprey, gyrfalcon, Swainson's hawk, and the endangered American peregrine falcon.

Alaska Range Taiga

Land-surface form--The Alaska Range is a continuation of the Pacific Coast Mountains extending in an arc across the northern Pacific. The towering, glaciated peaks of the Wrangell Mountains and of the Alaska Range--which includes Mt. McKinley at 20,320 feet (6,194 m)--typify the ruggedness of the area. The only major waterways are the Susitna and upper Copper Rivers.

Climate--The Alaska Range and the Wrangell Mountains have a transitional climate of severe winters and hot, dry summers. Temperatures range from 90F to -70F (32C to -57C). Precipitation averages only 16 inches (410 mm) annually.

Vegetation--Vertical vegetational zonation characterizes the Alaska Range and Wrangell Mountains, beginning with dense bottom-land stands of white spruce and cottonwood on the floodplains and low terraces of the Copper and Susitna Rivers. Above the terraces, poorly drained areas up to 1,000 feet (300 m) support stands of black spruce. Upland spruce-hardwood forests of white spruce, birch, aspen, and poplar, with an undergrowth of moss, fern, grass, and berry, extend to timberline at about 2,500-3,500 feet (800-1,100 m). Tundra systems of low shrubs and herbaceous plants form discontinuous mats among the rocks and rubble above timberline. White mountain-avens may cover entire ridges in the Alaska Range, associated with moss campion, black oxytrope, arctic sandwort, lichens, grasses, and sedges. These tundra systems stop short of the permanent ice caps on the highest peaks.

Soils--Bottom-land and terrace soils of the Copper and Susitna Rivers are stratified, well-drained Entisols without pedogenic horizons. Upland hardwood forest soils are mostly shallow, well-drained Inceptisols. Permafrost is continuous on northfacing slopes, discontinuous on southfacing ones. Soils that support the moister tundra areas range from wet Inceptisols to Histosols. Alpine Inceptisols are generally shallow and poorly developed, with discontinuous or continuous permafrost.

Fauna--The Alaska Range supports large big-game populations of moose, Dall sheep, black and brown bear, wolf, caribou, and wolverine. Smaller mammals include beaver, red fox, lynx, otter, marten, squirrels, and weasel. Golden eagles, ptarmigan, ravens, and sharp-shinned hawks inhabit the uplands. Near timberline in Lake Clark National Park, Alaska Range.

HUMID TEMPERATE DOMAIN

Warm Continental Division

South of the subarctic climate lies the humid warm-summer continental climate. Located squarely between the source regions of polar continental air masses to

the north and maritime air masses to the south, it is subject to strong seasonal contrasts in temperature as these air masses push back and forth across the land.

It has a cold snowy winter climate with a warm summer. The climate has four to seven months when temperatures exceed 50F (10C), with no dry season. The average temperature during the coldest month is below 32F (0C). The warm summer has an average temperature during its hottest month that does not exceed 72F (22C). Precipitation is ample all year, but is substantially greater during the summer.

Needleleaf and mixed needleleaf-deciduous forest grows throughout the colder northern parts of the humid continental climate zone, extending into the mountain regions north of Cook Inlet.

Alaska Mixed Forest Province

Land-surface form.--This province is a moraine- and outwash-mantled lowland that rises from sea level to an altitude of 2,000 feet (600 m). Drained by the Nushagak and other large rivers that flow into Bristol Bay, the lowland is dotted with morainal and thaw lakes. The Copper River lowland is also part of the province. It is a broad basin of rolling to hilly moraines and nearly level alluvial plains on the site of a Pleistocene glacial lake.

Climate.--This province has a marine phase of the tundra climate, with cold winters and cool, short summers. Although the climate is subarctic, it is less severe than the interior of Alaska, because much of the region is sheltered by the Alaska Range to the north. Proximity to the Gulf of Alaska makes the climate transitional to the marine climates to the south. Average annual temperatures range from 32 to 39F (0 to 4C), with a winter average of about 5F (-15C) and summer maximums of about 64F (18C). Average annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 18 inches (260 to 460 mm). Annual snowfall averages from 4 to 10 inches (100 to 260 mm).

Vegetation.-- Throughout the Cook Inlet lowlands, lowland spruce-hardwood forests are abundant. Bottom land spruce-poplar forest adjoins the larger river drainages, along with thickets of alder and willow. Wet tundra communities exist along the Cook Inlet coastline. The Copper River lowland is characterized by black spruce forest interspersed with large areas of brushy tundra. White spruce forests occur on southfacing gravelly moraines, and cottonwood-tall bush communities are common on large floodplains.

Soil.--Dominant soils are Inceptisols. Most soils are formed in ash deposits of various thickness, underlain by gravelly glacial till, outwash deposits, or silty alluvium. Coastal plain soils are formed in gravelly alluvium, cinders, or weathered rock blanketed by thick sedge peat. Spodosols are the principal upland soils in the Cook Inlet. Permafrost is sporadic or absent.

Fauna.-- The diversity of habitats in this province supports a large variety of species. Muskrats and red foxes abound, moose flourish in lowland areas, and Dall sheep are frequently seen in the uplands. Black bear populations are dense throughout the region. Trumpeter swans nest here, and tundra swans are present during migration. King, sockeye, and Coho salmon are common or abundant. Brown bears are common mammals, partly because of large salmon runs in this area. Bristol Bay provides staging and migration habitat for large numbers of waterfowl. Ospreys occur more frequently in this province than in any other part of Alaska. Blackpoll warblers are common breeders in conifer stands in the north.

Cold Oceanic Division

The Cold Oceanic division includes much of the Alaska Peninsula and all of the Aleutian Islands. The islands that chiefly make up this province are mountainous, rising steeply from the sea. The Islands and the Alaska peninsula experience a maritime climate. Precipitation varies widely, from 20 to 82 inches. Generally, larger islands receive more precipitation than smaller ones, and coastal areas more than inland areas. Temperatures range from average lows of 20 to -4F in winter to average highs of 50 to 55F in summer

Trees are absent from the division and vegetation consists of low shrubs of willow, birch, and alder interspersed with lichen, and grass communities. At lower elevations, there is a luxuriant growth of tall grasses, flowering plants, and ferns, with thickets of low willows in some places. A little higher up, several types of heath cover vast areas. The boreal forest and coastal rainforest are slowly encroaching from the east on the area of this province. This is explained by the assumption that the distribution of the vegetation is not yet adjusted to the climatic conditions produced by retreat of the last continental glaciers. Alpine tundra is found on mountainsides.

The division supports many seabird colonies of extraordinary size and global importance. The Pribilof Islands, for example, provide breeding habitat for approximately three million seabirds including virtually all of the world's 250,000 red-legged kittiwakes. Many of the islands also support endemic species, including the Pribilof Island shrew and the Aleutian shield fern, the only federally-listed endangered plant in Alaska.

The division has most soils form of volcanic ash or cinders over basaltic rock, and dominant soil types are Typic Haplocryands and Typic Vitricryands. Higher elevations often are covered in bare rock and basaltic rubble.

Aleutian Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--The islands that chiefly make up this province are mountainous, rising steeply from the sea. They contain more than 75 volcanoes, about half of which are known to have erupted during the last 200 years. Altitudes of the volcanoes decrease southwestward from 7,500 feet (2,300 m)

at Mount Katmai on the Alaska Peninsula to 6,000 feet (1,800 m) on the Aleutian Islands. Not much of the land on the islands or on the peninsula is level. Steep slopes prevail all the way to water's edge, and shores are rocky and craggy. The Alaska Peninsula has intensely glaciated mountains indented with fjords that are bordered by cliffs. Several large lakes are on the peninsula.

Climate.--The climate is similar to that on the arctic coastal plain, except it is a marine phase (described above for the Bering Tundra Province). Winters are less severe than those on the coastal plain, with temperature ranges of 18 to 27F (10 to 15C), as compared to a 54F (30C) range on the coastal plain. The climate is characterized by fog and rain, with the amount of precipitation varying little from month to month. Annual precipitation varies from 21 inches (530 mm) to more than 78 inches (2,000 mm). In general, smaller islands receive less precipitation than larger islands. Winds are often severe on the islands. Pacific Ocean water moving northward through the straits between the islands produces complex mixing with Bering Sea water, including upwelling. The Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea are about at the southern limit of the arctic ice pack in winter.

Vegetation.--Trees are absent from the Aleutian Province, although there are a few shrubs, chiefly dwarf willows. At lower elevations, there is a luxuriant growth of tall grasses, flowering plants, and ferns, with thickets of low willows in some places. A little higher up, several types of heath cover vast areas. The boreal forest and coastal rainforest are slowly encroaching from the east on the area of this province. This is explained by the assumption that the distribution of the vegetation is not yet adjusted to the climatic conditions produced by retreat of the last continental glaciers.

Soils.--About 30 percent of the area consists of high mountains without soil cover. Dominant soils are Inceptisols formed from volcanic ash or pumice, with large components of pyroclastic materials. Permafrost is generally absent.

Fauna.--The Aleutian Islands support no land mammals larger than foxes. Marine mammals such as seals, sea lions, and sea otters are abundant, using the islands for hauling out and as rookeries.

Bald eagles and hawks are prevalent predators, feeding on the millions of sea birds that use the islands and rocks as rookeries.

Marine Division

Situated on the Pacific coast between latitudes 40 and 60 N. is a zone that receives abundant rainfall from maritime polar air masses and has a rather narrow range of temperatures because it borders on the ocean. The average temperature of the warmest month is below 72F (22C), but at least four months per year have an average temperature of 50F (10C). The average temperature during the coldest month of the year is above 32F (0C).

Precipitation is abundant throughout the year, but is markedly reduced during summer. Although total rainfall is not great by tropical standards, the cooler air temperatures here reduce evaporation and produce a very damp, humid climate with much cloud cover. Mild winters and relatively cool summers are typical. Coastal mountain ranges influence precipitation markedly in these middle latitudes. The mountainous coasts of British Columbia and Alaska annually receive 60 to 80 inches (1,530 to 2,040 mm) of precipitation and more. Heavy precipitation greatly contributed to the development of fiords along the coast: heavy snows during the glacial period fed vigorous valley glaciers that descended to the sea, scouring deep troughs that reach at their lower ends below sea level.

Natural vegetation in the Marine Division is needleleaf forest. In the coastal ranges of the Pacific Northwest, Douglas-fir, redcedar, and spruce grow to magnificent heights, forming some of the densest of all coniferous forests with some of the world's largest trees.

The Marine Division is dominated by evergreen and, to a lesser extent, deciduous forests located along the Pacific Coast. Temperate forests are among the most productive habitats in the world and, due to routine subjection to disturbances that increase variability in the environment, they provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife, including mule deer, bobcat, mountain lion, black bear and grey fox.

In general evergreen trees support less wildlife than deciduous, as they are less palatable. Conifers do possess characteristics that are critical to the survival of many wildlife species, providing critical winter cover for elk, deer and Spruce grouse. Grey squirrels are common among the oak trees of deciduous groves.

Since this ecoregion is characterized by abundant rainfall, there is an abundance of moisture on the forest floor, as well as in ponds and streams, to support a diversity of amphibians. All frogs and toads in this region lay their eggs in water. Most salamanders lay their eggs in or near water, while others lay their eggs on land under logs, in rock outcrops, or both. Many of these amphibians spend a portion or most of their lives out of water, living under moist logs, dead wood, or forest litter, or in burrows or root or rock crevasses.

Few reptiles are found in this ecoregion. The alligator lizard is the only widely distributed species found in forested habitats, and the painted turtle and western pond turtle are the only turtles common in the area. The most common snake is the northwestern garter snake.

Birds have adapted to exploit the different layers of vegetation in the forest. Cavities in snags provide shelter and nesting sites for woodpeckers, owls, and other cavity-using wildlife, while dead and dying bark often harbors large numbers of insect prey for birds. Ruffed grouse, winter wren, American robin, spotted towhee, and dark-eyed junco are often found near the forest floor or in

shrubs. Woodpeckers and brown creepers are seen moving up and down the trunks of trees in search of insects. Nuthatches and chickadees exploit the cone seeds, while warblers and kinglets glean insects from the upper deciduous forest canopy. Shrews, mice and moles are fossorial and also exploit the vegetation types and strata of the forest, while rabbits and hares see shelter in dense vegetation near forest edges

A number of species rely on old-growth forests for most or all of their life requisites. Old-growth forests in the Marine Ecoregion generally consist of conifer trees with a diameter of more than 3 feet at the base of the tree, and that are more than 200 years old. These forests also contain a multilayered canopy and numerous snags and logs. Vaux's swifts depend on large, hollow snags for nesting and roosting habitat. Marbled murrelets use the stout branches of old-growth trees for nest platforms. Northern spotted owl nest in tree cavities and feed on northern flying squirrels. Banana slugs, Pacific giant salamander, Olympic salamander, and Oregon slender salamander are other species that prefer the rotting logs and moist soil conditions found in old-growth habitats.

Soils are strongly leached, acid Inceptisols and Ultisols. Due to the region's cool temperatures, bacterial activity is slower than in the warm tropics, so vegetative matter is not consumed and forms a heavy surface deposit. Organic acids from decomposing vegetation react with soil compounds, removing such bases as calcium, sodium, and potassium.

Pacific Lowland Mixed Forest Province

Land-surface form.--The Pacific Lowland Mixed Forest occupies a north-south depression between the Coast Ranges and the Cascade Mountains. Elevations range from sea level to 1,500 feet (460 m). The Willamette Valley has nearly level to gently sloping floodplains bordered by dissected high terraces and hills. The Puget Sound Valley is a moderately dissected tableland covered by glacial till, glacial outwash, and lacustrine deposits. This province includes isolated hills and low mountains.

Climate.--Because this province is close to the Pacific Ocean, its climate is generally mild throughout the year. Annual temperatures average 48 to 55F (9 to 13C). The moderate rainfall reaches its maximum in winter; summer has a slight moisture deficit. Average annual rainfall ranges from 15 to 60 inches (380 to 1,530 mm); but in much of the area, the range is from 30 to 45 inches (760 to 1,150 mm). Coastal mountains are responsible for the drier and less muted climate. Fog partially compensates for the summer drought.

Vegetation.--Before cultivation, dense coniferous forest dominated the vegetation here. Principal trees are western redcedar, western hemlock, and Douglas-fir. In interior valleys, the coniferous forest is less dense than along the coast and often contains deciduous trees, such as big-leaf maple, Oregon ash,

and black cottonwood. There are prairies that support open stands of oaks or are broken by groves of Douglas-fir and other trees; principal indicator species are Oregon white oak and Pacific madrone. Poorly drained sites with swamp or bog communities are abundant.

Soils.--Alfisols, Inceptisols, and Ultisols are the principal soil orders. Inceptisols dominate in Puget Sound Valley.

Fauna.--The fauna are closely related to those of the surrounding Cascade Province (described below). Mule deer is the most common large mammal. Chief mammalian predators are the mountain lion and bobcat. The western gray squirrel lives in oak trees, and the bushytail wood rat builds nests on shrub-covered stream margins and at forest edges. Isolated thickets are inhabited by brush rabbit and gray fox. Ruffed grouse inhabit the same scattered thickets. The dusky Canada goose winters exclusively in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The periodically abundant acorn crop attracts flocks of band-tailed pigeons, acorn woodpeckers, and mountain quail. The dry terrain is ideal for reptiles, including the northern Pacific rattlesnake, the only poisonous snake in the Pacific Northwest.

Cascade Mixed Forest--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--The Cascade Province covers a series of steep, rugged mountains bordered in places by a narrow coastal plain. Mountains along the coast rise 5,000 feet (1,500 m) above sea level, with a local relief of 1,000-3,000 feet (300-900 m). The interior Cascade Range has mountains 8,000-9,000 feet (2,400-2,700 m) in altitude, dominated every 5-85 miles (8-135 km) by a volcano of much higher elevation. Mt. Rainier, for example, rises more than 14,000 feet (4,300 m) above sea level. Some parts of the province, especially its northern portion and the Cascade Range, have been glaciated.

Climate.--Because this province borders on the Pacific Ocean, its climate is characterized by generally mild temperatures averaging 35 to 50F (2 to 10C) throughout the year. Rainfall is heavy, 30 to 150 inches (770 to 3,800 mm) per year, with a maximum in winter. Humidity is always high, producing an extremely favorable precipitation/evaporation ratio. The southern part of this province is winter-wet with no snow; fog partially compensates for the summer drought. As one moves to the north, the summer dry season shortens, and the proportion of precipitation falling as snow increases. On high mountains, all precipitation may be snow, which reaches depths of 50 to 65 feet (15 to 20 m). East slopes are much drier than west slopes, accumulating less than 20 inches (511 mm) of precipitation per year.

Vegetation.--The Cascade Province is primarily montane, but it ranges from sea level to altitudes above 5,000 feet (1,500 m). At the lowest elevations, there is a dense conifer forest of Douglas-fir, western redcedar, western hemlock, grand fir, silver fir, Sitka spruce, and Alaska-cedar. Numerous species of shrubs

grow exceptionally well in this forest and around its margins. In many places, this vegetation is practically impenetrable.

Although Douglas-fir is the most abundant tree at lower elevations in the region, it is not part of the climax forest. Western hemlock and several other species of fir are more tolerant of shade than Douglas-fir, and in mature forest stands, Douglas-fir cannot regenerate. On the western and southern slopes of the Olympic Mountains in Washington, hemlock is eventually displaced by the more shade-tolerant silver fir.

In the humid conifer forests of southwestern Oregon, Alaska-cedar is replaced by silver fir and redwood. In the fog belt along the coast of northwestern California, redwood is the characteristic tree. Douglas-fir and other conifers associate with it to form perhaps the densest of all coniferous forests, with the world's largest trees. Some redwoods attain heights of more than 325 feet (99 m) and girths of more than 65 feet (19.8 m).

A xerophytic forest of ponderosa pine grows along the dry eastern slopes of the Cascades, descending to 500 feet (150 m) along the eastern foot of the range at the Columbia River. This is typically open forest mixed with grass and shrubs. It occurs throughout the Southwest, the Sierra Nevada, the Rocky Mountains, and the Black Hills.

The high, snowcapped mountains of the Cascades have a well-marked subalpine forest belt that reaches into British Columbia. Important trees are mountain hemlock, subalpine fir, whitebark pine, and Alaska-cedar. To the north, the subalpine forest becomes fragmentary or disappears completely.

All but the highest peaks are covered by forest. In the Cascade Mountains of Oregon, timberline varies from 7,700 to 10,000 feet (2,350 to 3,050 m). Above timberline, there is an alpine zone with rich communities of shrubs and herbs. Perpetual snow is confined to small patches.

Riparian forests in the Pacific Northwest are an exception to the general rule that conifers dominate in the region. Along the region's many rivers and streams, needleleaf trees are replaced by broadleaf species such as black cottonwood and red alder. This kind of forest occurs from southern Alaska south through Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and western Montana, continuing into northern California and the Sierra Nevada.

Soils.--Andisols are extensive where underlain by volcanic ash. Moist Inceptisols are found west of the Cascades; dry soils predominate in the rain shadow east of the mountains.

Fauna.--Common large mammals include elk, deer, mountain lion, bobcat, and black bear. Small mammals include mice, Douglas squirrels, martens, Townsend chipmunks, red tree voles, and bushytail wood rats.

The more common birds are the winter wren, Townsend's warbler, chestnut-backed chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, gray jay, and Steller's jay. The most important game birds are blue and ruffed grouse; there are hawks and owls in the northwestern part of the province. Spotted owl and marbled murrelet depend on remaining old-growth forests.

Among the many species of amphibians that live in this region's moist, cool forests are the Pacific treefrog and the Pacific giant salamander. Reptiles include the northern alligator lizard and rubber boa.

The many swift-flowing rivers of the region are high in dissolved oxygen and generally unpolluted, making them ideal habitats for various salmon and trout species.

Pacific Coastal Icefields

Land-surface form.--The Coast Mountains rise precipitously from the sea to altitudes of about 9,000 feet (2,700 m), cut by an intricate network of deep, narrow fiords. Farther north, in the rugged St. Elias, Chugach, and Kenai Mountains, elevations range from sea level to more than 16,000 feet (4,900 m). Mount Logan (19,850 feet [6,050 m]) and Mount St. Elias (18,008 feet [5,490 m]) are the second and fourth highest peaks on the continent of North America. Icefields and glaciers cover the higher parts of the mountains, forming some of the most extensive valley glacier systems in North America.

Climate.--The marine climate is the same as in Oregon and Washington, except that it has cool summers. Less than four months each year have average temperatures higher than 50F (10C). Despite the many glaciers, the climate is surprisingly mild, with average winter temperatures of about 32F (0C) and minimum temperatures of 0F (18C). Summer temperatures average in the 50's (10-15C), with highs in the 90's (32-37C). The growing season lasts four months or more. Precipitation is heavy, generally averaging more than 80 inches (2,040 mm) annually, with some places getting more than 150 inches (3,830 mm). Inland, the climate grows increasingly severe, partly because of rising distance from the ocean, but chiefly due to higher altitude. Topography and high precipitation form so much ice in the mountains that glaciers extend down to sea level despite mild temperatures. Above 3,000 feet (900 m), there is perennial ice, and above 8,000 feet (2,400 m), even summer storms are usually accompanied by snow.

Vegetation.--The most important trees in the thick forest that covers the lower elevations of this province are Alaska-cedar, western hemlock, mountain hemlock, Sitka spruce, several species of willow, and black cottonwood. Several

kinds of shrubs also grow in the forest, often forming a fringe on its margins. In many places, the dense vegetation is practically impenetrable.

The timberline is at low elevations, and much of the mountainous area above it is covered with nearly bare rocks, snowfields, and glaciers. Wherever soil has accumulated, however, there are grasses, herbs, and low shrubs. The timberline varies greatly in elevation from place to place, depending on slope exposure and other factors. Near Prince William Sound, for example, the timberline is usually between 1,000 and 2,000 feet (300 and 600 m), but sometimes it drops as low as 500 feet (150 m).

Soils.--Icefields and bare rock or rubble make up about 70 percent of the area. The dominant soils are cool, moist Inceptisols.

Fauna.--Due to the glacial character of the region, Sitka deer do not range into the area, nor do many of the large animals of the interior. The only important large mammals are brown and black bears and mountain goats. The principal small mammals are red squirrels, voles, and shrews. Birds include some arctic types of water birds, such as murrelets and puffins. Land birds include sooty grouse, white-tailed ptarmigan, and Steller's jay. There are no reptiles or amphibians.

Pacific Gulf Coastal Forest Province

Land-surface form.--The Alexander Archipelago, with its hundreds of islands formed by the partly submerged western foothills of the Coast Range, makes up most of this province. The larger islands have mountains 3,000-5,000 feet (900-1,500 m) high, with slopes covered by dense forest where they are not too steep. Long, narrow bays carved into the mountains by glaciers create extremely irregular coastlines. Northward, at Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island, the foothills are mixed with coastal lowlands consisting of alluvial fans, uplifted estuaries, morainal deposits, dunes, and river deltas and terraces.

Climate.--Though similar to that of the Pacific Coastal Mountains Province, the climate here is milder due to the region's generally lower elevation. At Sitka, Alaska, average monthly temperatures for January and August are approximately 28F and 50F (2C and 10C), respectively, for an annual temperature range of only 22F (8C). Precipitation, which averages 96 inches (2,450 mm) per year, reaches a maximum in autumn.

Vegetation.--A coastal rainforest of Sitka spruce and western hemlock provides the dominant vegetation. In poorly drained areas, a wetland vegetation of sphagnum moss, sedges, and willows fosters peatland development. Alder, cottonwood, and birch are found in low-lying areas and along major river channels.

Soils.--The dominant soils are Spodosols.

Fauna.--A characteristic large mammal is the Sitka black-tailed deer. Other mammals include the brown bear, black bear, wolf, red squirrel, and moose. The mountain goat is common on mainland mountain heights, but not on the islands. Sea otters and Steller's sea lions are common throughout Prince William Sound.

A conspicuous and characteristic bird is the Alaska bald eagle. A small sea bird, the marbled murrelet, nests in the tall trees of old-growth forests. Water birds are well represented, including loons and ducks, and there are many gulls and other shore birds. Common land birds include the red-breasted sapsucker, Pacific-slope flycatcher, and golden-crowned kinglet, and both the red and white-winged crossbills. The entire population of dusky Canada geese nests within this province. Fish are abundant in the waters, including several species of salmon.

Mediterranean Division

Situated on the Pacific coast between latitudes 30 and 45 N. is a zone subject to alternate wet and dry seasons, the transition zone between the dry west coast desert and the wet west coast.

The division has a temperate rainy climate with the dry, hot summers. The combination of wet winters with dry summers is unique among climate types and produces a distinctive natural vegetation of hardleaved evergreen trees and shrubs called sclerophyll forest. Various forms of sclerophyll woodland and scrub are also typical. Trees and shrubs must withstand the severe summer drought--two to four rainless months--and severe evaporation.

The vegetation of the Mediterranean Ecoregion is dominated by grassland, shrubland, and forestland habitats. Many shrub (chaparral) and forest/woodland plant species have thick, hard, evergreen leaves. The number of wildlife species using shrub habitats is limited by the lack of trees in shrublands. However, wildlife species diversity can also be limited in evergreen woodlands due to the paucity of shrubs in these communities, as shrubs are often unable to compete with trees for the limited moisture.

Because of their tough, leathery texture, the leaves of vegetation in chaparral communities are resistant to wilting, and thus provide cover for wildlife even during the frequent droughts typical of the region. Wildlife found in chaparral tend to be species that nest on the ground or in shrubs, such as ground- and shrub-nesting birds and rodents, or that prey upon ground- and shrub-dwelling species, including coyote, striped skunk, and bobcat.

Although this ecoregion supports a diverse vertebrate fauna, including numerous species of reptiles and rodents, only a limited number of species are closely tied to the chaparral. These include the mountain quail, California thrasher, wrentit, brush rabbit, California mouse, and dusky-footed woodrat.

Mountain quail favor slopes covered with chaparral. They feed on acorn mast, fruits, and seeds in the fall, leafy foods during winter, and bulbs in the spring and summer. Thrashers and wrentits find good food and cover in the chaparral, and are more often seen than heard in the dense vegetation. The brush rabbit does not use burrows regularly like most other species of rabbits, perhaps because of the dense chaparral cover. Woodrats construct stick dens that are also used by the California mouse. Since homes are constructed of sticks, woodrats are vulnerable to fires in chaparral communities.

Chaparral communities are adapted to fire, and wildlife respond by retreating to burrows, hiding in rock crevices, or escaping from the area. After a fire, seed-eating birds, such as mourning doves, move into the area to feed on seeds exposed by fire. Mule deer seek out the temporary community of herbaceous plants that develop during the first year or two after the fire. Many of these plants produce bright flowers that attract nectar-feeding insects and birds.

Deciduous and evergreen woodlands provide vegetation structure and complexity that benefits a variety of wildlife species. The habitat often occurs in a mosaic-like pattern of conifer stands intermixed with deciduous tree stands. The shrub and herbaceous strata are often poorly developed in these woodlands. Mature woodlands are important to cavity nesting birds, and oak mast crops are an important food source for birds and mammals, such as scrub and Steller's jays, acorn woodpecker, wild turkey, mountain quail, California ground squirrel, western gray squirrel, black bear, and mule deer. Amphibians that reside in the forest detritus layers include Mount Lyell salamander, ensatina, and relictual slender salamander.

Oak woodlands serve as important wildlife habitat, supporting over 300 vertebrate species, many of which are special status species such as the California spotted owl and willow flycatcher. Oak trees provide nesting sites for both canopy- and cavity-nesting birds, and the acorns they produce are an autumn food source relied upon by many bird and mammal species.

Annual and perennial grasslands are found in central and coastal California. Annual grassland habitats consist largely of non-native annuals that have displaced native perennials. Habitat structure and wildlife abundance are dependent on a mix of plant species at a site. Sites with western brackenfern exhibit a taller, more diverse structure than sites with shorter grasses. Many wildlife species use grassland habitats, but some require special habitat features, such as cliffs, caves, ponds, or shrubby areas for breeding, resting, and escape cover.

Soils of this Mediterranean climate are not susceptible to simple classification. Alfisols and Mollisols typical of semiarid climates are generally found.

California Coastal Chaparral Forest Shrub Province

Land-surface form.--This province includes the discontinuous coastal plains, low mountains, and interior valleys adjacent to the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco to San Diego. Elevations range from sea level to 2,400 feet (730 m).

Climate.--The climate is characterized by hot, dry summers and rainy, mild winters. Annual temperatures average 50 to 65F (10 to 18C). Annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 50 inches (260 to 1,280 mm), with a pronounced summer drought. This coastal province has a more moderate climate than the interior and receives some moisture from fog in summer. Fire is common, usually set by lightning during the summer dry season.

Vegetation.--Plant communities are well marked in this province. Several tree species are endemic to the region, including the Monterey cypress, Torrey pine, Monterey pine, and Bishop pine. The coastal plains and larger valleys have sagebrush and grassland communities. A riparian forest containing many broadleaf species grows along streams. On the hills and lower mountains, there is sclerophyll forest consisting of low trees with small, leathery leaves that can withstand the lack of summer precipitation. Live oak or white oak woodland is found here. On steep hill and mountain slopes too dry to support oak woodland or oak forest, much of the vegetation is scrub or "dwarf forest" known as chaparral, which varies in composition with elevation and exposure. It consists of chamise and various manzanitas that are adapted to periodic occurrence of fire. Exposed coastal areas support desertlike shrub communities called coastal scrub, dominated by coyote bush, California sagebrush, and bush lupine. Toward southern California, sages become abundant within coastal scrub communities.

Most of the coastal plains and interior valleys have been converted to urban use or irrigated agriculture. Citrus, grapes, avocados, nuts (such as almonds and walnuts), and deciduous fruits are grown extensively. Irrigated alluvial soils are also highly productive of vegetable crops. Bluegum eucalyptus and other species imported from Australia are abundant along roadsides and much of the coastline as well as farther inland.

Soils.--The soils of this region are mostly Alfisols and Mollisols. They are high in bases and quite fertile when soil water is adequate.

Fauna.--The brushy rabbit is common, as is the opossum, North America's only marsupial. Several species of seals and sea lions live along the California coast, and sea otters often float among kelp, feeding on sea urchins. The blue whale, the world's largest animal species, is found in California's coastal waters.

Coastal California is a major migration route for both water and land birds. From midsummer through winter and spring, thousands of shore birds, ducks, and geese inhabit coastal estuaries, lagoons, and mudflats. Other birds include the lesser goldfinch and golden-crowned sparrow.

California Dry Steppe Province

Land-surface form.--This province lies within the Central Valley of California--a flat alluvial plain between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges. Elevations range from sea level to 500 feet (150 m). This area has broad, nearly level valleys bordered by sloping alluvial fans, slightly dissected terraces and the lower foothills of the surrounding uplands. Large undrained basins lie in the south.

Climate.--Annual temperatures in this climate average 60 to 67F (16 to 19C), but can fall as low as 55F (13C) in the south. Precipitation is largely limited to winter rainfall, which peaks in December, January, and February. Except near the coast, summers are hot and the winters mild--often foggy, with little or no snow. Annual rainfall ranges from approximately six inches (150 mm) in the upper San Joaquin Valley to nearly 30 inches (760 mm) along the coast. Potential evaporation during the warmest months is often much greater than the precipitation. Low rainfall and small streamflow result in water scarcity in many areas.

Vegetation.--Evidence indicates that the Central Valley of California was once dominated by natural grasses that the plow, fire, and grazing have eliminated except in a few remaining stands. These stands suggest that the dominants were bunch grasses on lands similar in appearance to mixed prairie. Apparently, needlegrass was the principal species except near the coast. Today, introduced annual grasses, including various species of avens, brome, fescue, and barley, occupy most of the remaining grassland areas.

The rivers flow through alkaline flats where greasewood, picklewood, salt grass, and shadscale provide the chief cover. Tule marshes border the lower reaches of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers.

Soils.--The soils of this region are mostly Entisols and Alfisols. The Entisols are usually at the lower elevations and the Alfisols at slightly higher elevations, away from the valley floor. A small area of Aridisols occurs in the more arid southern portions of the San Joaquin Valley.

Fauna.--Intensive agricultural development has changed the fauna of the annual grasslands. Larger species, such as the California grizzly bear, wolf, and pronghorn antelope, have been eliminated or pushed up into the hills. Common mammals include the Beechy ground squirrel, cottontail, blacktail jackrabbit, California mouse, and kangaroo rats. Several subspecies of mule deer live in brushy areas. Other species, such as the coyote and bobcat, live in adjacent woodlands, occasionally entering from them. The San Joaquin kit fox is classified as an endangered species.

Common birds include the mourning dove, horned lark, western meadowlark, western kingbird, mockingbird, loggerhead shrike, house finch, lesser goldfinch, red-shafted flicker, and scrub jay. The roadrunner feeds on reptiles and insects.

The California quail is numerous in areas where brush or rock outcrops provide cover. Avian predators include the golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, and Cooper's hawk.

Several species of snakes and lizards are present; rattlesnakes are important predators on rodents.

California Coastal Steppe, Mixed Forest, and Redwood Forest Province

Land-surface form.--Much of this province is composed of low mountains, but in places there is a narrow coastal plain and gently sloping marine terraces. A few broad valleys extend inland through the mountains. Confined to the coast, this region extends no farther inland than 35 miles (56 km), remaining at elevations below 3,000 feet (900 m).

Climate.--Characterized by a cool-summer subtype of the Mediterranean dry-summer subtropical climate, this province is confined to coasts washed by cool currents. The annual temperature cycle is very weak, reflecting the powerful influence of the cold California sea current with its cool marine air layer. Cool summers are typical, and winter temperatures are much milder than those of inland locations at similar latitudes. Annual temperatures average 50 to 55F (10 to 13C). All months are above freezing. Rainfall drops to nearly zero for two consecutive summer months, but rises to substantial amounts in the rainy winter season. Annual rainfall ranges from 40 to 100 inches (1,020 to 2,550 mm). Heavy fogs are common along the coast in summer. This region has a greater mean number of days with dense fogs than any other place in the United States.

Vegetation.--The redwood is characteristic of the fog belt on seaward slopes of coastal northwestern California. Associated with it are Douglas-fir and other conifers such as hemlock and cedar. The redwood forest is a hygrophyllic type of warm-temperate forest. Redwoods, which attain a height of 330 feet (100 m), are taller than the giant sequoia (big tree), which grows only in the Sierra Nevada of California. But redwood trunks remain relatively slender. Although redwoods live 500 years on average, they can reach up to 1,800 years of age. By comparison, 4,000 annual rings have been counted in the trunks of giant sequoia.

Redwood forests typically have a well-developed understory, usually dominated by large and colorful Pacific rhododendrons and western azaleas. Other shrubs, especially salal and California huckleberry, are usually present. Many ferns and flowers grow in the cool shade, such as western sword fern and redwood sorrel.

Headlands tend to be dry, and their outer ends are covered with fescue-oatgrass grasslands. Along the coast in a narrow, patchy belt lies pine-cypress forest. Inland, the southfacing mountain slopes are covered by mixed forest,

including tanoak, coast live oak, madrone, and Douglas-fir. Oaks in the area of coastal forest tend to form distinct patches of oak woodland.

Soils.--The dominant soils are Ultisols under forest and Mollisols under grasslands.

Fauna.--Mule deer are common, and the Roosevelt subspecies of elk can be seen in Redwood National Park. Mammals include both Douglas and western gray squirrels, as well as two chipmunk species.

Birds include Anna's hummingbird and Wilson's warbler. The spotted owl can be found in both old-growth and second-growth redwood forest, along with great horned owls, western screech-owls, and northern pygmy-owls. A variety of shore birds and waterfowl occur in the coastal part of the province. Species of concern include marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl.

Salamanders, such as the Pacific giant salamander, are numerous in the cool, moist litter of the redwoods, especially near streams and rivers. The banana slug is also found here. Streams and rivers are used by anadromous fish.

Sierran Steppe--Mixed Forest--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--This province covers the southernmost portion of the Cascade Mountains, the northern Coast Range, the Klamath Mountains, and the Sierra Nevada. Most of the area is covered with steeply sloping to precipitous mountains crossed by many valleys with steep gradients. The long west slope of the Sierra Nevada rises gradually from 2,000 feet (600 m) to more than 14,000 feet (4,300 m); the east slope drops abruptly to the floor of the Great Basin, about 4,000 feet (1,200 m). Much of this region has been glaciated.

Climate.--Temperatures average 35 to 52F (2 to 11C), but fall with rising elevation. The base of the west slope receives only about 10 to 15 inches (250 to 380 mm) of rainfall per year and has a long, unbroken dry summer season. At higher elevations, the dry summer season shortens and precipitation rises to as much as 70 inches (1,790 mm), with a larger portion falling as snow. Prevailing west winds influence climatic conditions for the whole region. East slopes are much drier than west slopes. Winter precipitation makes up 80 to 85 percent of the total; at high elevations, it is mostly snow. The greatest total precipitation reported is on slopes between 3,000 and 7,000 feet (900 and 2,100 m), which support the luxuriant mixed conifer forests of the montane zone. The subalpine zone coincides with the altitude of greatest snowfall, where precipitation is 40 to 50 inches (1,020 to 1,280 mm) per year.

Vegetation.--Vegetation zones are exceptionally well marked. The lower slopes and foothills, from about 1,500 to 4,000 feet (460 to 1,200 m), are covered by coniferous and shrub associations. On higher slopes, digger pine and

blue oak dominate, forming typical open or woodland stands. Most of the low hills are covered by close-growing evergreen scrub, or chaparral, in which buckbrush and manzanita predominate. Several oaks are common associates.

The montane zone lies between about 2,000 and 6,000 feet (600 and 1,800 m) in the Cascades, 4,000 and 7,000 feet (1,200 and 2,100 m) in the Central Sierras, and 5,000 and 8,000 feet (1,500 and 2,400 m) or more in the south. The most important trees are ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, Douglas-fir, sugar pine, white fir, red fir, and incense cedar; but several other conifers are also present. The giant sequoia (big tree) is one of the most spectacular species, but it grows only in a few groves on the western slope. Dense chaparral communities of manzanita, buckbrush, and buckthorn may appear after fire, sometimes persisting for years. Within the Sierran rain shadow, on the dry eastern slopes, Jeffrey pine replaces ponderosa pine. At lower elevations, pine forests are replaced by sagebrush-pinyon forest, part of the Intermountain Desert Province.

The subalpine zone begins at from 6,500 to 9,500 feet (1,980 m to 2,900 m), depending on latitude and exposure, and extends upslope about 1,000 feet (300 m). Mountain hemlock, California red fir, lodgepole pine, western white pine, and whitebark pine are important. Conditions are severe, and timberline varies from about 7,000 feet (2,100 m) in the north to 10,000 feet (3,000 m) in the south. Lodgepole pine is said to have climax characteristics near the upper limits of this zone. The alpine zone covers the treeless areas above timberline.

Soils.--Ultisols are extensive on mountain slopes where air is humid; dry Alfisols predominate at lower elevations. Entisols occupy the narrow floodplains and alluvial fans of the valleys.

Fauna.--Common large mammals include mule deer, mountain lion, coyote, and black bear. Smaller mammals include golden-mantled squirrel, bushytail wood rat, flying squirrel, red fox, fisher, yellow-haired porcupine, long-eared chipmunk, and Trowbridge's shrew.

Common birds are mountain quail, Cassin's finch, Hammond's flycatcher, Lincoln's sparrow, Audubon's warbler, pine siskin, Oregon junco, blue goose, Williamson's sapsucker, and mountain chickadee. Birds of prey include the western screech-owl, Cooper's hawk, northern pygmy-owl, and great gray owl. The California mountain kingsnake also lives here. The bark beetles *Ips emarginatus* and *I. integer* infest ponderosa and lodgepole pine.

California Coastal Range Open Woodland--Shrub--Coniferous Forest--Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--This province occupies the central part of the California Coast Ranges and the mountains of southern California. The Coast Ranges are gently to steeply sloping low mountains underlain by shale, sandstone, and igneous and volcanic rocks. Elevations range from 500 to 2,500 feet (150 to 800

m); some peaks rise to 5,000 feet (1,500 m). Stream valleys are narrow and widely spaced. The mountains of southern California are steeply sloping to precipitous; high mountains have unstable slopes and sharp crests; valleys are narrow. Elevations range from 2,000 to 8,000 feet (600 to 2,400 m); some peaks reach 12,000 feet (3,700 m).

Climate.--The climate is characterized by hot, dry summers and rainy, mild winters. Temperatures average 53 to 65F (12 to 18C) in the Coast Range, but are only 32 to 60F (0 to 16C) in the mountains of southern California, always falling with rising elevation. Precipitation, which ranges from 12 to 40 inches (310 to 1,020 mm) per year, is evenly distributed through fall, winter, and spring, and increases with elevation. Most of this is rain; the little snow that falls in winter melts quickly. Frost and short periods of freezing weather occur occasionally in winter. Coastal areas have a more moderate climate than the interior and receive some moisture from fog in summer.

Vegetation.--The montane vegetation of this region consists of species with thick, hard evergreen leaves. One climax association, dominated by trees, is called sclerophyll forest. The other, called chaparral, is a shrub climax. These two associations appear in alternating patches in almost every part of the region, but chaparral occupies the greater area. The forest consistently appears on northfacing slopes and on wetter sites; chaparral occupies southfacing slopes and drier sites.

The most important evergreen trees of the sclerophyll forest are California live oak, canyon live oak, interior live oak, tanoak, California laurel, Pacific madrone, golden chinkapin, and Pacific bayberry. Several deciduous trees, shrubs, and herb associates are also characteristic.

The chaparral community of fire-adapted shrubs extends over a wide area with a diversity of habitats. It includes at least 40 species of evergreen shrubs with varying degrees of dominance and importance. Some are so dense that they practically eliminate understory vegetation; other types support a highly productive understory. The most important species are chamise and manzanita. Other common species are Christmasberry, California scrub oak, mountain mahogany, and many species of ceanothus. At higher elevations and near the ocean, chaparral is often interspersed with, or alternates with, coniferous forests.

The interior valleys have sagebrush and grassland communities. A riparian forest with many broadleaf species grows along streams.

Soils.--The pattern of Alfisols, Entisols, and Mollisols in this region is complex. Mollisols are usually found along the coast; Alfisols occur in the north; and the south consists mostly of Entisols.

Fauna.--Mule deer are the most important large mammals. Other large mammals include the coyote, mountain lion, California bobcat, gray fox, wood rat, and spotted and striped skunks. Small mammals peculiar to chaparral include the Merriam chipmunk, California mouse, and five-toed kangaroo rat.

The most common birds seen in the dry summer season are wrentit, common bushtit, and rufous-sided towhee. In October, white-and-golden-crowned sparrows, several races of fox sparrows, hermit thrushes, ruby-crowned kinglets, and Audubon's warblers are present. The California condor is classified as an endangered species.

Reptiles, including the coast horned lizard and gopher snake, are numerous in all vegetation types. Amphibians appear to be scarce, except for the Pacific treefrog.

DRY DOMAIN

Tropical/ Subtropical Steppe Division

Tropical steppes border the tropical deserts on both the north and south, and in places on the east as well. Locally because of altitude, plateaus and high plains within what would otherwise be desert have a semiarid steppe climate. Steppes on the poleward fringes of the tropical deserts grade into the Mediterranean climate in many places. In the United States, they are cut off from the Mediterranean climate by coastal mountains that allow tropical deserts to extend farther north.

The division has a hot semiarid climate where potential evaporation exceeds precipitation, and where all months have temperatures above 32F.

Steppes typically are grasslands of short grasses and other herbs, and with locally developed shrub- and woodland. On the Colorado Plateau, for example, there is pinyon-juniper woodland. To the east, in Texas, the grasslands grade into savanna woodland or semideserts composed of xerophytic shrubs and trees, and the climate becomes semiarid-subtropical. Cactus plants are present in some places. These areas are able to support limited grazing, but are not generally moist enough for crop cultivation without irrigation. Soils are commonly Mollisols and Aridisols, containing some humus.

The Temperate Steppe Ecoregion is comprised of prairie grasslands, evergreen and deciduous forests, and sagebrush and chaparral shrublands. Prairie grasslands occur in an environment with irregularities in weather patterns, including wet and dry spells, which occur often enough to impose severe stresses on wildlife. Drought years can cause rapid declines in some species, especially birds, as the abundance and quality of vegetation is markedly decreased.

Many grassland species live in burrows, including burrowing owls, prairie dogs, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, black-footed ferrets, and American badgers. Burrows provide a more stable microclimate during hot summers and cold winters, and shelter from predators and grassland fires. Animals that do not utilize burrows have adapted to speed in order to escape predators, including the swift fox and pronghorn. Even quail and grouse often run instead of flying to escape predation, staying close to the ground and using the vegetation as cover.

Grassland animals tend to occur in large social groups and tend to be more social than their forestland counterparts. Prairie dogs live in large, highly organized social units, while their eastern woodland counterpart, the woodchuck, rarely interacts with its own species. Flocking species are also more prevalent in grasslands than in forestlands. Socialization enables the members of a flock to more readily detect predators, but also to convey other information, such as mating status, which is difficult to ascertain in open grassland where sound is muffled and perches are few. Raptors are also more common in grasslands than other habitats, as open spaces favor animals with good vision and provide an abundance of prey items.

Compared with other habitats, grasslands tend to have low bird species diversity and abundance as they are structurally simple and less complex than other habitat types, and thus provide birds with few niches to exploit. Bird species tend to differentiate themselves based on the cover and height of the grassland vegetation, with the horned lark and burrowing owl selecting areas with low, scattered vegetation, and the savanna sparrow and bobolink selecting high, dense herbaceous cover.

Deer, elk, and pronghorn are found in the intermountain grasslands, which can not support Temperate Steppe species that require a supply of green grass year-round. Ground squirrel diversity is especially high in the intermountain grasslands, with 19 of the 22 species of ground squirrels in North America found in this region.

Evergreen and deciduous forests are found at higher elevations and along streams and other aquatic areas. Aspen is an important component of these forests. American beaver use aspen limbs and foliage for food and to build dams and lodges. Snowshoe hare feed on aspen twigs and bark during winter, and aspen buds are important in the winter diet of ruffed grouse. American badger, ground squirrels, and other burrowing animals are common in this habitat.

Colorado Plateau Semidesert Province

Land-surface form.--The Colorado Plateau Province consists of tablelands with moderate to considerable relief in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Elevations of the plateau tops range from 5,000 to 7,000 feet (1,500 to 2,100 m), with local relief ranging from 500 to more than 3,000 feet (150 to 900 m) in some of the deeper canyons that dissect the plateaus (such as the Grand

Canyon of the Colorado River). In some areas, volcanic mountains rise 1,000 to 3,000 feet (300 to 900 m) above the plateau surface. Stream valleys are narrow and widely spaced. The Colorado River, which crosses the northern part of the province, is the region's only large stream. Many other streams flow year-round, but the volume of water fluctuates considerably.

Climate.--Due to the region's generally high altitude, the climate is characterized by cold winters. Summer days are usually hot, but nights are cool; accordingly, the diurnal variation in temperature is considerable. Annual average temperatures are 40 to 55F (4 to 13C), decreasing with rising elevation. Average annual precipitation is about 20 inches (510 mm), except on the higher mountains; some parts of the province receive less than 10 inches (260 mm). Summer rains are thunderstorms, with ordinary rains arriving in winter. Thus, this province differs from the Intermountain Semidesert Province, which generally lacks summer rains.

Vegetation.--Vegetational zones are conspicuous but lack uniformity. In the lowest zone, there are arid grasslands, but the shortgrass sod seldom covers the ground completely, leaving many bare areas. Xeric shrubs often grow in open stands among the grasses, and sagebrush is dominant over extensive areas. A profusion of annuals and perennials blooms during the summer rainy season. At low elevations in the south, several kinds of cactus and yucca are common. Cottonwoods and, more rarely, other trees grow along some of the permanent streams.

The woodland zone is the most extensive, dominated by open stands of two-needle pinyon pine and several species of juniper, often termed a pygmy forest. Between the trees the ground is sparsely covered by grama, other grasses, herbs, and various shrubs, such as big sagebrush and alderleaf cercocarpus.

The montane zone extends over considerable areas on the high plateaus and mountains, but it is much smaller in area than the pinyon-juniper zone. Vegetation in the montane zone varies considerably from area to area. In the south, especially in Arizona, ponderosa pine is the dominant forest tree. Douglas-fir is associated with ponderosa pine or else grows in more sheltered locations or at higher elevations. In Utah, by contrast, lodgepole pine and aspen are dominant.

The subalpine zone is characterized by abundance of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. On San Francisco Mountain in northern Arizona, the spruce is often associated with bristlecone pine. Because only a few isolated mountains rise above timberline, the alpine zone is not extensive.

South of the Mogollon Rim in Arizona, toward the American Desert, lies a foothill forest. The principal trees are Mexican pinyon, alligator juniper, and various species of oak. Forests of ponderosa pine and common Douglas-fir

carpet moist canyons and northfacing slopes. Pointleaf manzanita is a common evergreen shrub.

Soils.--Entisols occur along the floodplains of major streams. Aridisols cover plateau tops, older terraces, and alluvial fans. Badlands of rough broken land are extensive in the mountains and on plateaus.

Fauna.--Major mammals are the mule deer, mountain lion, coyote, and bobcat; elk are locally important. Pronghorn antelope are the primary large mammal in the arid grasslands. Smaller species include the blacktail jackrabbit, Colorado chipmunk, rock squirrel, wood rat, white-footed mouse, cliff chipmunk, cottontail, porcupine, and gray fox. The ringtail cat and spotted skunk occur rarely.

The most abundant resident birds are the bushtit, pinyon jay, plain titmouse, black-chinned hummingbird, Woodhouse's jay, red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, red-shafted flicker, and rock wren. Summer residents include the chipping sparrow, nighthawk, black-throated gray warbler, northern cliff swallow, lark sparrow, and mourning dove. Common winter residents are the pink-sided junco, Shufeldt's junco, gray-headed junco, red-backed junco, Rocky Mountain nuthatch, mountain bluebird, robin, and Steller's jay. Turkeys are locally abundant during winter. Reptiles include the horned lizard, collared lizard, and rattlesnake.

Southwest Plateau and Plains Dry Steppe and Shrub Province

Land-surface form.--This is a region of flat to rolling plains and plateaus occasionally dissected by canyons at the western end of the Gulf Coastal Plain and the southern end of the Great Plains. The Stake Plains of Texas are included in this province. Elevations range from sea level to 3,600 feet (1,100 m) on the Edwards Plateau and to 6,500 feet (1,980 m) near the Rocky Mountain Piedmont. A mesa-and-butte landscape is characteristic of certain parts.

Climate.--The climate is semiarid. Summers are long and hot, and winters are short and mild. Annual temperatures average 60 to 70F (16 to 21C). The frost-free season ranges from about 130 to considerably more than 300 days. Precipitation, which falls mostly during the growing season, is about 30 inches (770 mm) in the eastern part of the province and decreases to 10 to 15 inches (255 to 380 mm) in the western part. Annual evaporation is 71 to 79 inches (1,800 to 2,000 mm). From May to October, potential evaporation is about twice the precipitation.

Vegetation.--This province is characterized by arid grasslands in which shrubs and low trees grow singly or in bunches. On the plains of northwestern Texas and eastern New Mexico, xerophytic grasses (blue grama and buffalo grass) are the characteristic vegetation. However, in much of this area, mesquite (*Prosopis*) grows in open stands among the grasses. On the Edwards Plateau,

oak and juniper are often mixed with grasses and mesquite, and on steep rocky slopes these trees may form closed stands. Due to low rainfall, they rarely grow higher than 20 feet (6.1 m). The most characteristic tree is Ashe juniper. Over much of the Plateau, the characteristic vegetation is grass, especially prairie three-awn (needlegrass); trees and shrubs are present only in very open stands. On slopes leading down to the Rio Grande, the ceniza shrub dominates. Live oak forest is found along the Gulf Coast. A unique semiarid forest consisting of small trees and shrubs with Mexican affinities occupies the Rio Grande delta. The endangered sabal palm is native here.

Soils.--Soils in this region are varied, but the different orders are well correlated with the different plant communities. The mesquite-live oak savanna, for example, is the only Entisol area in the region. Soils of the mesquite-buffalograss and juniper-oak savannas are almost entirely Mollisols; an island of Alfisols within the area corresponds to the boundaries of the mesquite-oak savanna. In the mesquite-acacia savanna, Mollisols, Alfisols, and Vertisols occur. On sandy soils in the Staked Plains of Texas, a thick growth of low shin oak practically excludes every other type of plant.

Fauna.--The northern limit of distribution of several mammals coincides generally with the northern boundary of this province. The Mexican ground squirrel and gray fox live to the south of this boundary, but not to the north. Whitetail deer are abundant, and armadillo are present. The fox squirrel is hunted in wooded areas along streams. Chief furbearers are the ringtail and raccoon. The Edwards Plateau contains several scattered limestone caverns that support huge populations of Mexican freetail bats.

The threatened golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo inhabit northwestern areas where the Ashe juniper is present. Wild turkey, mourning dove, scaled quail, and bobwhite are common game birds, and several species of hawks and owls are present.

Arizona-New Mexico Mountains Semidesert--Open Woodland--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--This area consists mostly of steep foothills and mountains, but includes some deeply dissected high plateaus. Elevations range from 4,500 to 10,000 feet (1,370 to 3,000 m), with some mountain peaks reaching as high as 12,600 feet (3,840 m). In many areas, the relief is higher than 3,000 feet (900 m). Isolated volcanic peaks rise to considerable heights in the northwest.

Climate.--Climate varies considerably with altitude. Average annual temperature is about 55F (13C) in the lower foothills and 40F (4C) on the upper mountain slopes. Average annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 35 inches (260 to 890 mm), increasing with rising elevation. During late spring, there is a moisture deficit until the arrival of summer rains, which appear as

thunderstorms. Rains also come in early autumn and winter. In the mountains, most precipitation is snow.

Vegetation.--Vegetational zones resemble those of the Rocky Mountains (described below), but occur at higher elevations. The foothill zone, which reaches as high as 7,000 feet (2,100 m), is characterized by mixed grasses, chaparral brush, oak-juniper woodland, and pinyon-juniper woodland. At about 7,000 feet (2,100 m), open forests of ponderosa pine are found, although pinyon and juniper occupy southfacing slopes. In Arizona, the pine forests of this zone are strongly infused with Mexican species, including Chihuahuan and Apache pine. Pine forest is replaced at about 8,000 feet (2,400 m) on northfacing slopes (a little higher elsewhere) by Douglas-fir. Aspen is common in this zone, and limber pine grows in places that are rockier and drier.

At about 9,000 feet (2,700 m), the Douglas-fir zone merges into a zone of Engelmann spruce and corkbark fir. Limber pines and bristlecone pines grow in the rockier places. An alpine belt covers relatively small areas above 11,000 feet (3,400 m).

Soils.--Detailed information about orders of soils is lacking for much of this area. The Four Corners region is composed mostly of Entisols. Alfisols and Inceptisols dominate upland areas. Stony land and rock outcrops occupy large areas on the mountains and in the foothills.

Fauna.--The most common large mammal is the mule deer. Mammalian predators include mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats. Small mammals are the deer mouse, longtail weasel, porcupine, golden-mantled ground squirrel, Colorado chipmunk, red squirrel, wood rat, pocket gopher, longtail vole, Kaibab (Abert) squirrel, and cottontail.

Some of the more common birds are the northern pygmy-owl, olive warbler, red-faced warbler, hepatic tanager, mountain bluebird, pygmy nuthatch, white-breasted nuthatch, Mexican junco, Steller's jay, red-shafted flicker and the Rocky Mountain sapsucker. Goshawks and red-tailed hawks are present. The only widely found reptile is the short-horned lizard.

Tropical/ Subtropical Desert Division

South of the Arizona-New Mexico Mountains are the continental desert climates, which have not only extreme aridity, but also extremely high air and soil temperatures. Direct sun radiation is very strong, as is outgoing radiation at night, causing extreme variations between day and night temperatures and a rare nocturnal frost. Annual precipitation is less than 8 inches (200 mm), and less than four inches (100 mm) in extreme deserts. These areas have climates that Trewartha (1968) calls BWh.

The region is characterized by dry-desert vegetation, a class of xerophytic plants that are widely dispersed and provide negligible ground cover. In dry periods, visible vegetation is limited to small hard-leaved or spiny shrubs, cacti, or hard grasses. Many species of small annuals may be present, but they appear only after the rare but heavy rains have saturated the soil.

In the Mojave-Sonoran Deserts (American Desert), plants are often so large that some places have a near-woodland appearance. Well known are the treelike saguaro cactus, the prickly pear cactus, the ocotillo, creosote bush, and smoke tree. But much of the desert of the Southwestern United States is in fact scrub, thorn scrub, savanna, or steppe grassland. Parts of this region have no visible plants; they are made up of shifting sand dunes or almost sterile salt flats.

The Subtropical Desert Ecoregion is composed of the Mohave, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan deserts. In contrast to the cooler deserts of the Temperate Desert Ecoregion, the hotter deserts of the Subtropical Desert Ecoregion tend to have a more diverse flora and fauna. The northern limits of many species common in Mexico are found in this ecoregion, such as brown-crested flycatcher, vermilion flycatcher, black-tailed gnatcatcher, hooded skunk, pocketed free-tail bat, coatimundi, and jaguar. The Sonoran Desert is the most floristically diverse of the three deserts, and as a result, has the greatest diversity of wildlife. The desert tortoise, which is federally listed as a threatened species (in the Mojave Desert only), is found in this ecoregion. Long-lived and once common, desert tortoises have suffered population declines due to adverse impacts associated with human activities. The Sonoran pronghorn is classed as an endangered species; few of these animals are left in southern Arizona. The mottled bobwhite quail is also an endangered species. Large ungulates are mostly absent from this ecoregion. Pronghorn antelope and mule deer are the most widely distributed large game animals.

Wildlife species in the Subtropical Desert have evolved numerous means to deal with water scarcity and other rigors of the hot desert. Presence of standing water in winter and new herbaceous growth in spring provide water and forage for most wildlife. During summer and fall, some species, such as the desert kangaroo rat and other rodents, derive water from the seeds in their diet. However, collared peccaries and many desert rodents can avoid or digest cactus spines and obtain water from the plants' succulent tissues.

Black-throated sparrows secrete highly-concentrated urine and dry feces, and thus need little drinking water. In contrast, most other desert-living bird species show few adaptations for coping with water scarcity and simply fly to water sources to meet their needs. Reptiles and small mammals are active mostly at night and retreat to cool burrows, or seek shelter under vegetation or in rock outcrops to avoid the midday sun and reduce water loss.

Salt balance is an important physiological function in desert animals. Chuckwallas are able to excrete salt from their nostrils by sneezing, without losing much water. Many other lizard species, including Desert Iguanas, also have salt glands for excreting salt.

The structure of live vegetation is probably the most important habitat feature in these deserts. Cacti provide breeding and housing habitats for bats and birds, including elf owl, cactus wren, Gila woodpecker and gilded flicker. Lizards use cacti and shrubs for feeding and breeding and climb creosotebush to escape hot ground temperatures during the day. Small mammals such as the blacktailed jackrabbit, desert cottontail, kangaroo rat, wood rat, toads and reptiles utilize the root systems of the creosote bush and other shrubs as protection for burrow openings and to hide from predators such as coyote, bobcat, golden eagle, great horned owl, red-tailed hawk, and ferruginous hawk.

A dominant pedogenic process is salinization, which produces areas of salt crust where only salt-loving (halophytic) plants can survive. Calcification is conspicuous on well-drained uplands, where encrustations and deposits of calcium carbonate (caliche) are common. Humus is lacking and soils are mostly Aridisols and dry Entisols.

Chihuahuan Desert Province

Land-surface form.--This province is mostly desert. Practically the only permanent streams are a few large rivers that originate in humid provinces. The Rio Grande and the Pecos Rivers and a few of their larger tributaries are the only perennial streams. The area has undulating plains with elevations near 4,000 feet (1,200 m), from which somewhat isolated mountains rise 2,000 to 5,000 feet (600 to 1,500 m). Washes, dry most of the year, fill with water following rains. Basins with no outlets drain into shallow playa lakes that dry up during rainless periods. Small whirlwinds constantly play over these dry playas when they are heated by summer sun. Extensive dunes of silica sand cover parts of the province. In a few places there are dunes of gypsum sand, the most notable being the White Sands near Alamogordo in southern New Mexico. In scattered areas, small beds and isolated buttes of blackish lava occur.

Climate.--Summers are long and hot. Winters are short, but may include brief periods when temperatures fall below freezing. Average annual temperatures range from 50 to 65F (10 to 18C). The climate is distinctly arid; spring and early summer are extremely dry. Mean annual precipitation at El Paso, Texas, is 8.65 inches (221 mm). In July, summer rains usually begin, torrential storms that are mostly local and continue through October. The northern part of the province also receives winter rains, which are more gentle and widespread.

Vegetation.--A number of shrubs, most of them thorny, are typical of the Chihuahuan Desert. They frequently grow in open stands, but sometimes form low, closed thickets. In many places, they are associated with short grass, such

as grama. Extensive arid grasslands cover most of the high plains of the province. On deep soils, honey mesquite is often the dominant plant. Cacti are also abundant, particularly prickly pears, but they are smaller in size and fewer in number of species than in the Sonoran Desert. The desert is characterized by yuccas, so much so that one has been adopted as the state flower of New Mexico. A few cottonwoods and other trees grow beside the widely separated rivers. Creosote bush, which covers great areas in characteristic open stands, is especially common on gravel fans. Though creosote bush is the most abundant plant cover of the province, other species like lechuguilla are also abundant. Another distinctive plant is candelilla, or wax plant. On rocky slopes, the ocotillo is conspicuous. Juniper and pinyons, limited to rocky outcrops, are prominent around the Stockton Plateau in western Texas.

Some isolated mountains in the Chihuahuan Province rise high enough to carry a belt of oak and juniper woodland. On a few of the highest mountains, there are pines among the oaks, in some places forming nearly pure stands. Douglas-fir and white fir occupy a few sheltered upper slopes in the Santa Catalina Mountains.

Soils.--In the western and northern portions of this province, the soils are primarily Aridisols. Both Aridisols and Entisols are present in the south.

Fauna.--Pronghorn antelope and mule deer are the most widely distributed large game animals. Whitetail deer inhabit parts of Texas. The collared peccary or javelina is common in the southern part of the region. The blacktail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, kangaroo rat, wood rat, and numerous smaller rodents compete with domestic and wild herbivores for available forage. Mammalian predators include the coyote and bobcat.

The black-throated sparrow is one of the most abundant birds of the province. Greater roadrunner, curve-billed thrasher, and Chihuahuan raven are also common. Scaled quail and Gambel's quail occupy most of the area, and bobwhite populations reach into its eastern portion. Raptors include the golden eagle, great horned owl, red-tailed hawk, ferruginous hawk, and the rare zone-tailed hawk.

The many reptiles include the common chuckwalla, Texas horned lizard, desert spiny lizard, and various species of rattlesnakes.

American Semidesert and Desert Province

Land-surface form.--The American Desert includes the Mojave, Colorado, and Sonoran Deserts. Its topography is characterized by extensive plains, most gently undulating, from which isolated low mountains and buttes rise abruptly. Elevations range from 280 feet (85 m) below sea level to 4,000 feet (1,200 m) in valleys and basins, with some mountain ranges reaching as high as 11,000 feet (3,400 m). The mountains are rocky and rise abruptly from their outwash

aprons and alluvial faces. There are areas of interior drainage, such as the Salton Trough, but a large part of the province drains to the sea through underground seepage or through washes that are dry most of the year. The Colorado River, which crosses the eastern part of the province, is the only sizable stream.

Climate.--Summers are long and hot; the highest temperature ever measured in the United States was 134F (57C) in 1913 at Death Valley. The average annual temperature is 60 to 75F (15 to 24C). Though winters are moderate, the entire province is subject to occasional frosts. In winter the rains are widespread and usually gentle, but in summer they are usually thunderstorms. In the Colorado and Mojave Deserts of southeastern California, there are virtually no summer rains. No part of the province has regular rains, and a year or more may pass without measurable rainfall, especially in the region's western part. Average annual precipitation is 2 to 10 inches (50 to 250 mm) in the valleys, but may reach 25 inches (610 mm) on mountain slopes. The evaporation rate in summer is very high.

Vegetation.--Vegetation is usually very sparse, with bare ground between individual plants. Cacti and thorny shrubs are conspicuous, but many thornless shrubs and herbs are also present. On the Sonoran Desert plains, the most widely distributed plant is the creosote bush, which covers extensive areas in nearly pure stands. On some parts of the plains the arborescent cacti (cholla) are also common. Mesquite is less widespread and grows only along washes and watercourses.

At the base of the mountains, on the gentle rocky slopes called bajadas, the vegetation is dominated by paloverde, ocotillo, and saguaro, but bitterbrush is also a common shrub. Vegetation below 3,000 feet (900 m) in the Mojave Desert is mostly creosote bush and various *Atriplex* (saltbush) species. The desert mountains are exceptionally barren, and many are almost devoid of vegetation.

Along the higher northern edge of the province is a belt where the Joshua tree is prominent. At a still higher level is a belt of junipers and pinyons.

Interior basins characterized by ephemeral shallow playa lakes are a conspicuous feature of the Mojave Desert. Soils near these playas contain alkali in quantities varying with distance from the lake, resulting in a zonation of several species of vegetation according to their tolerance for salts.

Soils.--Gravel or bare rock covers the ground near the bases of some mountains, and much bare rock is exposed on the mountains because the heavy, violent desert rainstorms allow little soil to accumulate on the steep slopes. Entisols occur on the older alluvial fans and terraces and in the better-drained basins. Aridisols dominate throughout the rest of the province.

Fauna.--Large ungulates are almost absent from the desert. Desert mule deer and peccary live chiefly in the paloverde-cactus shrub community. The Sonoran pronghorn antelope is classified as an endangered species; few are left in southern Arizona. Carnivores, including the desert kit fox and coyote, are small and usually nocturnal. The western spotted skunk is common. Nocturnal burrowers, particularly kangaroo rats and pocket mice, dominate. Merriam kangaroo rat is closely associated with creosote bush. Other important species are the longtail pocket mouse and antelope ground squirrel.

Many desert birds are very selective in their type of habitat. Greasewood may furnish a permanent residence for the loggerhead shrike. Areas where tall cacti are plentiful furnish homes for many birds, including the Gila woodpecker, elf owl, and purple marten. Gambel's quail, the cactus wren, and the roadrunner are common in the southern part of the region. The masked bobwhite quail is an endangered species that has been reintroduced.

Reptiles include numerous species of snakes and lizards, such as the Gila monster, the only poisonous lizard in the United States. The desert tortoise is becoming increasingly rare and is everywhere protected.

Endemic species, common in the Mojave Desert, include five species of desert pupfish living in highly saline lakes in Death Valley.

Temperate Steppe Division

Temperate steppes are areas with a semiarid continental climatic regime in which, despite maximum summer rainfall, evaporation usually exceeds precipitation. There is a cool climate with at least one month of average temperatures below 32F (0C). Winters are cold and dry, summers warm to hot. The vegetation is steppe, sometimes called shortgrass prairie, and semidesert. Typical steppe vegetation consists of numerous species of short grasses that usually grow in sparsely distributed bunches. Scattered shrubs and low trees sometimes grow in the steppe; all gradations of cover are present, from semidesert to woodland. Because ground cover is generally sparse, much soil is exposed. Many species of grasses and other herbs occur. Buffalo grass is typical of the American steppe; other typical plants are the sunflower and locoweed.

The semidesert cover is a xerophytic shrub vegetation accompanied by a poorly developed herbaceous layer. Trees are generally absent. An example of semidesert cover is the sagebrush vegetation of the middle and southern Rocky Mountain region and the Colorado Plateau.

In this climatic regime, the dominant pedogenic process is calcification, with salinization on poorly drained sites. Soils contain a large excess of precipitated calcium carbonate and are very rich in bases. Mollisols are typical in steppe lands. The soils of the semidesert shrub are Aridisols with little organic content,

pedogenic and (occasionally) clay horizons, and (in some places) accumulations of various salts. Humus content is small because the vegetation is so sparse.

Great Plains- Palouse Dry Steppe Province

Land-surface form.--This region is characterized by rolling plains and tablelands of moderate relief in a broad belt that slopes gradually eastward from an altitude of 5,500 feet (1,520 m) near the foot of the Rocky Mountains to 2,500 feet (760 m) in the Central States. The plains are notably flat, but there are occasional valleys, canyons, and buttes. In the northern section, badlands and isolated mountains break the continuity of the plains. The Palouse region occupies a series of loess-covered basalt tablelands with moderate to high relief, ranging in altitude from 1,200 to 6,000 feet (370 to 1,800 m).

Climate.--This region lies in the rain shadow east of the Cascade Range and the Rocky Mountains. The climate of the Great Plains grasslands is a semiarid continental regime. The average annual temperature is 45F (7C) throughout most of the region, but can reach as high as 60F (16C) in the south. Winters are cold and dry, and summers are warm to hot. The frost-free season ranges from fewer than 100 days in the north to more than 200 days in Oklahoma. Precipitation ranges from 10 inches (260 mm) in the north to more than 25 inches (640 mm) in the south, with maximum rainfall in summer. Evaporation usually exceeds precipitation, and the total supply of moisture is low. When precipitation does occur, it is often in the form of hail or blizzards, and tornadoes and dust storms are frequent.

The climate of the Palouse grassland east of the Cascades is similar to that of the Great Plains grasslands east of the Rockies, except for the timing of precipitation: on the Palouse dry steppe, there is a winter maximum.

Vegetation.--Steppe, sometimes called shortgrass prairie, is a formation class of short grasses usually bunched and sparsely distributed. The steppe in this province is dry, with 6-7 arid months per year. The Great Plains grasslands east of the Rockies have scattered trees and shrubs, such as sagebrush and rabbitbrush, and support all gradations of cover, from semidesert to woodland. Because ground cover is scarce, much soil is exposed.

Many species of grasses and herbs grow in this province. A typical grass is buffalo grass; sunflower and locoweed are typical plants. Other grasses include grama, wheatgrass, and needlegrass. Many wildflower species bloom in spring and summer. The blazingstar and white prickly poppy are usually abundant. The alien Russian-thistle, also known as tumbleweed, is sometimes abundant.

Except for the presence of shrubs, the Palouse grassland resembles the Great Plains shortgrass prairie. The dominant species, however, are distinctive. They include bluebunch wheatgrass, fescue, and bluegrass.

Soil.--In this climatic regime, the dominant pedogenic process is calcification; salinization is dominant on poorly drained sites. Soils contain a large excess of precipitated calcium carbonate and are rich in bases. Mollisols are typical. Humus content is small because vegetation is sparse.

Fauna.--Large herds of buffalo migrated with the seasons across the steppe plains. Now the pronghorn antelope is probably the most abundant large mammal, but mule deer and whitetail deer are common where brush cover is available along stream courses. The whitetail jackrabbit occupies the northern part of the province, with the blacktail jackrabbit in the area south of Nebraska. The desert cottontail is widespread. The lagomorphs, prairie dogs, and several other small rodents are preyed upon by the coyote and several other mammalian and avian predators; one, the blackfooted ferret, is classified as an endangered species. The thirteen-lined ground squirrel is common here; both prairie dogs and ground squirrels are preyed upon by badgers. The Washington and Columbia ground squirrels inhabit large areas of the Palouse grassland.

The lesser prairie chicken, once abundant, is now classified as threatened. Sage grouse, greater prairie chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse are present in the area. Among the many smaller birds are the horned lark, lark bunting, and western meadowlark. Two bird species are unique to the shortgrass prairies east of the Rockies, the mountain plover and McCown's longspur. Mountain plovers, which resemble killdeer, live in small flocks often seen feeding in freshly plowed fields. Construction of stock ponds has created an important "duck factory" in the northern Great Plains.

Southern Rocky Mountain Steppe--Open Woodland--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--The Rocky Mountains are rugged glaciated mountains as high as 14,000 feet (4,300 m). Local relief is between 3,000 feet (900 m) and 7,000 feet (2,100 m). Several sections have intermontane depressions ("parks") with floors less than 6,000 feet (1,800 m) in altitude. Many high-elevation plateaus composed of dissected, horizontally layered rocks lie in Wyoming and Utah.

Climate.--The climate is a temperate semiarid steppe regime with average annual temperatures ranging from 35 to 45F (2 to 7C) in most of the region, but reaching 50F (10C) in the lower valleys. Climate is influenced by the prevailing west winds and the general north-south orientation of the mountain ranges. East slopes are much drier than west slopes; individual mountain ranges have similar east-west slope differences region wide. Winter precipitation varies considerably with altitude. Total precipitation is moderate, but greater than on the plains to the east and west. In the highest mountains, a considerable part of annual precipitation is snow, although permanent snowfields and glaciers cover only relatively small areas. Bases of these mountains receive only 10 to 20

inches (260 to 510 mm) of rainfall per year. At higher elevations, annual precipitation increases to 40 inches (1,020 mm), and average temperatures fall.

Vegetation.--A striking feature of the region is its pronounced vegetational zonation, controlled by a combination of altitude, latitude, direction of prevailing winds, and slope exposure. Generally, the various zones are at higher altitudes in the southern part of the province than in the northern, and they extend downward on east facing and north facing slopes and in narrow ravines and valleys subject to cold air drainage. The uppermost (alpine) zone is characterized by alpine tundra and the absence of trees. Directly below it is the subalpine zone, dominated in most places by Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Below this area lies the montane zone, characterized by ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, which frequently alternate--ponderosa pine dominates on lower, drier, more exposed slopes, and Douglas-fir is predominant in higher, moister, more sheltered areas.

After fire in the subalpine zone and in the upper part of the montane zone, the original forest trees are usually replaced by aspen or lodgepole pine.

Grass, often mixed with sagebrush, regularly covers the ground in open ponderosa pine forests and some treeless areas. These treeless openings are usually small, and they often alternate (depending on slope exposure) with ponderosa pine forest. At the lower edge of the montane zone, they may open onto the adjacent grass and sagebrush belt.

Below the montane belt is the foothill (woodland) zone. Dry rocky slopes in this zone often have a growth of shrubs in which mountain-mahogany and several kinds of scrub oak are conspicuous. Along the border of the Colorado Plateau Province, ponderosa pine and pinyon-juniper associations frequently alternate, depending on slope exposure.

Unforested parks are a conspicuous feature of this province. Many are dominated by grasses, but some are covered largely by sagebrush and other shrubs, such as antelope bitterbrush.

Soils.--In the Rocky Mountains, soil orders occur in zones corresponding to vegetation, ranging from Mollisols and Alfisols in the montane zone to Aridisols in the foothill zone. In addition, because of steep slopes and recent glaciation, there are areas of Inceptisols.

Fauna.--Common large mammals include elk, deer, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, bobcat, beaver, porcupine, and black bear. Grizzly bear and moose inhabit the province's northern portions. Small mammals include mice, squirrels, martens, chipmunks, mountain cottontails, and bushytail woodrats.

Common birds include the mountain bluebird, chestnut-backed chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, ruby-crowned kinglet, pygmy nuthatch, gray jay, Steller's jay, and Clark's nutcracker. Rosy finches are found in the high snowfields. Blue and ruffed grouse are the most common upland game birds. Hawks and owls inhabit most of the region.

Middle Rocky Mountain Steppe--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--Most of central Idaho and the Salmon River Mountains are formed by granitic intrusions that collectively make up the Idaho Batholith, with altitudes ranging from 3,000 to 7,000 feet (900 to 2,130 m). The batholith is deeply dissected, with a relief greater than 3,000 ft, and its granite is heavily weathered over large areas. East of the batholith is a basin-and-range area consisting of mountains, alluvial fans at their bases, and floodplains along the streams draining the valleys. To the west lie the Blue Mountains, which seldom exceed 8,000 feet (2,400 m) but have at least one peak 10,000 feet (3,050 m) high. The Snake River crosses the province at the bottom of Hells Canyon, which is deeper than the Grand Canyon. Many of the region's higher reaches have been glaciated.

Climate.--Despite the northerly latitudes and high altitudes of this region, its climates are surprisingly mild due to their proximity to the Pacific Ocean. Mean monthly temperatures at Canyon City, Oregon (near John Day), range from just above freezing to 68F (20C). In the mountain valleys of Montana, January temperatures average as much as 10F (6C) higher and summer temperatures 5 to 10F (3 to 6C) lower than on the Great Plains just to the east. The average length of the growing season is about the same as on the Great Plains, roughly 120 days. Temperature and snowfall, of course, vary greatly with altitude. Winds are from the west, with much of their moisture precipitated where they cross the Pacific ranges. Consequently, most of this portion of the Rocky Mountains is semiarid. Valleys get less than 20 inches (510 mm) of precipitation each year; up to 30 inches (770 mm) falls in the mountains, mostly as snow.

Vegetation.--Altitudinal zones are evident. Below the subalpine zone, Douglas-fir is the climax dominant, with grand fir as an associate west of the continental divide, chiefly on west facing slopes. Lodgepole pines and grasses grow principally in the basins and ranges in the eastern and southeastern part of the province. Below the Douglas-fir belt, ponderosa pine is dominant to the west of the continental divide, constituting a xerophytic forest. The lower slopes of the mountains and the basal plain are dominated by sagebrush semidesert or steppe.

Due to aridity, forests directly east of the Bitterroot Mountains are usually restricted to northern and eastern slopes. Although south- and west facing slopes receive comparable precipitation, they are hotter and evaporation is higher. Consequently, they support few trees and are covered by shrubs and grasses.

Soils.--Soils of the fans and valley floors, most of which lie below 2,000 feet (600 m), are Mollisols. These soils support sagebrush and grass. Above 2,000 feet, under coniferous forest, the soils are Alfisols. Areas recently glaciated or with steep slopes have Inceptisols.

Fauna.--Fauna in the Middle Rocky Mountain Province are like those elsewhere in the Rockies to the north and south. However, parts of the province are filled with mountain ranges that are isolated by stretches of arid territory. Each such range usually contains a group of species peculiar to the region, and some of these species may be found only in a single range.

Northern Rocky Mountain Forest-Steppe--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--The Northern Rocky Mountain Province consists of high, rugged mountains rising to more than 9,000 feet (2,700 m), with a local relief in excess of 3,000 feet (900 m). Most of the region has been glaciated. In the several Rocky Mountain trenches, there are flat or nearly flat valleys, some of which are several miles wide.

Climate.--Severe winters are usual. The average temperature of the coldest month is below 32F (0C), and the average temperature of the warmest month is below 72F (22C). Summer days are often hot and nights cool. Precipitation averages 20 to 40 inches (510 to 1,020 mm) per year and is concentrated in fall, winter, and spring. Summers are usually dry, because westerly air masses draw the dry climate of the Pacific coast across the area. As a result, there is a distinct climatic gradient from north to south and east to west. Snowfall in winter is heavy, but permanent snowfields and glaciers cover only rather small areas.

Vegetation.--Mixed evergreen-deciduous forest predominates; Douglas-fir forest and cedar-hemlock-Douglas-fir forest are the two major types.

Well-marked life belts are a striking feature of the province. In the uppermost (alpine) belt, trees are absent. The subalpine belt is dominated in most places by Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. In the Bitterroot Range, mountain hemlock is said to be the climax tree of the subalpine belt. Western redcedar and western hemlock are characteristic of the montane belt. Associated trees include Douglas-fir (found throughout the region), along with western white pine, western larch, grand fir, and western ponderosa pine (found in the south). In these forests, areas that have been burned or cut are invaded first by larch, a deciduous conifer. White pine may crowd out the larch, then be replaced by hemlock, redcedar, and lowland white fir. Depending on latitude, the lower part of the montane belt may be interspersed with grass and sagebrush.

Soils.--Soils are mostly cool, moist Inceptisols. A variety of igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks form the mountain masses. But compared

to other parts of the Rocky Mountains, the shallowness and stoniness of soils play a relatively minor role in forest distribution. In the foothills of the Rockies and to the south of the glacial border, the loess and volcanic ash deposited on the slopes have helped to form excellent soils.

Fauna.--Large mammals in this province include black bear, deer, elk, mountain goat, mountain lion, and bobcat. Smaller mammals include Columbia ground squirrel, flying squirrel, marten, redtail chipmunk, and bushytail woodrat.

Some familiar birds are hawks, jays, chestnut-backed chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, and great gray owls. Blue and ruffed grouse are the most common game birds.

Temperate Desert Division

Temperate deserts of continental regions have low rainfall and strong temperature contrasts between summer and winter. In the intermountain region of the Western United States between the Pacific coast and Rocky Mountains, the temperate desert has characteristics of a sagebrush semidesert, with a very pronounced drought season and a short humid season. Most precipitation falls in winter, despite a peak in May. Aridity increases markedly in the rain shadow of the Pacific mountain ranges. Even at intermediate elevations, winters are long and cold, with temperatures falling below 32F (0C).

These deserts differ from those at lower latitudes chiefly in their far greater annual temperature range and much lower winter temperatures. Unlike the dry climates of the tropics, dry climates in the middle latitudes receive part of their precipitation as snow.

Temperate desert climates support the sparse xerophytic shrub vegetation typical of semidesert. One example is the sagebrush vegetation of the Great Basin and northern Colorado Plateau. Recently, semidesert shrub vegetation seems to have invaded wide areas of the Western United States that were formerly steppe grasslands, due to overgrazing and trampling by livestock. Soils of the temperate desert are Aridisols low in humus and high in calcium carbonate. Poorly drained areas develop saline soils, and dry lake beds are covered with salt deposits.

Northern, cooler desert regions, such as the Great Basin Desert, support far fewer wildlife species than southern, warmer deserts found in the Subtropical Desert Division due to a shorter growing season which results in lower plant productivity and a lower diversity and abundance of animal prey. Thermal regimes in northern deserts also limit the activity of wildlife, especially cold-blooded animals such as amphibians and reptiles, to short periods each year.

The Great Basin Desert, which is the largest desert in North America, is characterized by sagebrush and saltbush. This desert supports large populations

of pronghorn antelope, and also provides critical habitat for sage-grouse species that use sagebrush for food and cover.

Similarly to the Subtropical Desert division, wildlife of the Temperate Desert has adapted to survive under extreme environmental conditions, including low, erratic rainfall, and highly variable temperatures. Spadefoot toads have a special appendage on their hind foot that allows them to burrow into the soil to avoid daytime heat, and breeding activities are timed to occur during periods with summer thunderstorms. Many small mammals are able to survive on metabolically-produced water and secrete hyper-concentrated urea. Despite these adaptations, riparian areas are especially important in the desert. For example, of the 148 species of breeding birds in the Great Basin Desert, 131 are dependent upon riparian areas for all or part of their life requisites.

Reptiles such as the common garter snake, western rattlesnake and sagebrush lizard are found among the talus slopes, cliffs and rock outcroppings, which provide thermal and escape cover, nesting and feeding habitat. Bats use caves and rock outcroppings as roost and nursery sites. Deep, rugged cliffs are used by desert bighorn sheep for lambing, escape, and thermal cover. Raptors, including golden eagles and several species of hawks use cliffs and rock outcrops as nest and perch sites. The canyon walls of Snake River provide habitat for one of the highest densities of raptors in the world.

Due to the conversion of lands to agricultural and urban uses, species associated with native perennial bunchgrass communities, including the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, kit fox, and Idaho ground squirrel, have declined in numbers more than other species' groups in the region. These species rely on grassland vegetation for plant and insect forage, nesting and brood-rearing habitat, and hiding cover.

Intermountain Semidesert and Desert Province

Land-surface form.--The Intermountain Desert Province covers the physiographic section called the Great Basin and the northern Colorado Plateau in Utah. Much of this area is made up of separate interior basins; only a small part of it drains to the sea. The lower parts of many basins have heavy accumulations of alkaline and saline salts. Streams are rare and few are permanent. Many mountains rise steeply from the semiarid, sagebrush-covered plains. These mountains are generally well covered by vegetation, and their upper elevations usually bear sparse conifer forests.

Climate.--Summers are hot, but winters are only moderately cold. The average annual temperature ranges from 40 to 55F (4 to 13C). Spring comes early, except at higher elevations. Annual precipitation averages only 5 to 20 inches (130 to 490 mm), often falling as winter snow. Almost no rain falls during the summer months except in the mountains.

Vegetation.--Sagebrush dominates at lower elevations. Other important plants in the sagebrush belt are antelope bitterbrush, shadscale, fourwing saltbush, rubber rabbitbrush, spiny hopsage, horsebrush, and short-statured Gambel oak. All these shrubs tolerate alkali to varying degrees, essential to their survival on the poorly drained soils widespread in the region. On soils with the highest concentrations of salt, even these shrubs are unable to grow; they are replaced by plant communities dominated by greasewood or saltgrass.

Although sagebrush now dominates this zone, it may not represent climax growth, but rather a disclimax produced by overgrazing. In plots protected from fire, grasses typical of the Palouse grassland or mixed-grass steppe gradually become dominant.

Above the sagebrush belt lies a woodland zone dominated by pinyon pine and juniper, similar to the pinyon-juniper woodland of the Colorado Plateau.

In the montane belt above the woodland zone, ponderosa pine generally occupies the lower and more exposed slopes and Douglas-fir the higher and more sheltered ones. In the subalpine belt, the characteristic trees are subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce. Only a few mountains rise high enough to support an alpine belt.

Soils.--Aridisols dominate all basin and lowland areas; forest soils are found at higher elevations. Narrow bands of Entisols lie in stream floodplains and rocky landscapes. Salt flats and playas without soils are extensive in the lower parts of basins with interior drainage.

Fauna.--Few large mammals live in this province, but mule deer, mountain lion, bobcat, and badger occasionally venture into it. Sagebrush provides ideal habitat for pronghorn antelope and whitetail prairie dog. The most common species are such small mammals as ground squirrels, jackrabbits, kangaroo mice, wood rats, and kit foxes. In the lower life belts, some ground squirrels--especially the Belding and Townsend ground squirrels--become dormant during the hot, dry summer.

Bird species range from the burrowing owl to such specialized species as sage sparrow and sage thrasher, both found only in sagebrush habitat. Raptors include the American kestrel and golden eagle, along with the ferruginous hawk and various other species of western hawks. In early spring, groups of sage grouse engage in elaborate courtship displays.

Intermountain Semidesert Province

Land-surface form.--This province covers the plains and tablelands of the Columbia-Snake River Plateaus and Wyoming Basin. The plateaus include most of the Northwest's lava fields. Lying at about 3,000 feet (900 m), the plateaus are surrounded by lavas that have been folded or faulted into ridges. To the

south, the plateaus grade into the basins and ranges of the Intermountain Desert Province. The Wyoming Basin consists of plains at elevations of 6,000-8,000 feet (1,800-2,400 m) broken by isolated hills and low mountains 1,000-2,000 feet (300-600 m) higher. In the south, broad intermountain basins and isolated small mountain ranges merge into a dissected plateau. Sloping alluvial fans at the edges of the basins merge into flat plains in the center. Badlands are typical of the dissected areas along the region's outer edges.

Climate.--The climate of the plateaus is semiarid and cool, with an average annual temperature of about 50F (10C). Average annual precipitation ranges from less than 10 inches (260 mm) in the west (in the rain shadow of the Cascade Range) to 20 inches (510 mm) in the east. Precipitation is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, except during the summer months, when there is little rain.

The higher overall elevation of the Wyoming Basin gives it slightly lower average temperatures and precipitation than on the plateaus. Winters are cold, and summers are short and hot. Average annual temperatures range from 40 to 52F (4 to 11C), and the average growing season has fewer than 100 days in the south and 140 days in the north and east. Average annual precipitation ranges from 5 to 14 inches (130 to 360 mm), and is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year.

Vegetation.--The chief vegetation, sometimes called sagebrush steppe, is made up of sagebrush or shadscale mixed with short grasses. Moist alkaline flats support alkali-tolerant greasewood. Along streams in and near the mountains where the water is good, valley bottoms are lined with willows and sedges, which give way to greasewood and other alkali-tolerant plants as one moves away from the mountains. Lands in the Columbia River Basin with more than 10 inches (260 mm) of rainfall per year have an open cover of bunchgrass, and are excellent for raising wheat. A woodland of western juniper covers parts of central Oregon that get little rain.

Soils.--This province has extensive alluvial deposits in the floodplains of streams and in the fans at the foot of mountains. Dry lake beds are numerous, and there are extensive eolian deposits, including both dune sand and loess. In the Columbia River Basin, loess deposits are up to 150 feet (46 m) thick, and soils developed from them are correspondingly complex. Aridisols dominate all basin and lowland areas; Mollisols are found at higher elevations.

Soils in the Wyoming Basin are alkaline Aridisols. Subsoils contain a layer enriched with lime and/or gypsum, which may develop into a caliche hardpan. Because the basin is semiarid and weathering is therefore slight, soil texture and composition are governed by parent materials. Entisols are found in the Bighorn basin.

Fauna.--Because of its wilderness character, this region supports a great variety of wildlife species. In winter, seasonal changes force many birds and mammals to move from the mountains into the sagebrush semidesert, where they find suitable habitat alongside the area's permanent residents.

Major mammals are coyote, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, and bobcat. Smaller species include Wyoming ground squirrel, whitetail prairie dog, deer mouse, whitetail jackrabbit, and porcupine. During severe winters, elk and mule deer move into the desert. Moose are locally important in the dense willow thickets along the desert watercourses of eastern Idaho and western Wyoming.

This region is an important breeding and resting ground for migrating waterfowl. Mallards, pintails, green-winged teal, and gadwalls are most common. Canada geese are locally important. Sage grouse are the most abundant upland game bird. The numerous raptors here include Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, rough-legged hawk, red-tailed hawk, marsh hawk, prairie falcon, great horned owl, and burrowing owl.

Reptiles include sagebrush lizard, horned lizard, and prairie rattlesnake.

Nevada-Utah Mountains Semidesert--Coniferous Forest--Alpine Meadow Province

Land-surface form.--This province covers the highest areas of the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau, including valleys that are 5,000 feet (1,500 m) in elevation. Although some valleys are closed, none contain perennial lakes. Streams are rare and few are permanent. Many linear mountain ranges rise steeply from the semiarid plains, reaching altitudes up to 13,000 feet (3,960 m). They are composed mostly of folded and faulted sedimentary rocks block faulted to produce basins and ranges. To the east, on the Colorado Plateau, the mountains are formed from high-elevation plateaus composed of dissected, horizontally layered rocks.

Climate.--This region has a high-altitude variation of the temperate desert climate, with a very pronounced drought season and a short humid season. Most precipitation falls in winter, despite a peak in August. Winters are long, and climate varies considerably with altitude. Average annual temperatures range from about 38F (3C) 50F (10C) in the valleys to 50F (10C) 38F (3C) on upper mountain slopes. Average annual precipitation ranges from 5 to 8 inches (130 to 200 mm) in the valleys to 25 to 35 inches (640 to 890 mm) at higher elevations. A considerable portion of winter precipitation is snow, and summer afternoon thunderstorms are common on the Colorado Plateau.

Vegetation.--Sagebrush dominates at lower elevations. Other important plants in the sagebrush belt are shadscale, fourwing saltbush, rubber rabbitbrush, spiny hopsage, and horsebrush. All tolerate alkali to varying degrees, essential to their survival on the poorly drained soils widespread in the region. Where salt

concentrations are very high, even these shrubs are unable to grow; they are replaced by plant communities dominated by greasewood or saltgrass.

The woodland belt above the sagebrush zone is similar to the corresponding belt on the Colorado Plateau, with juniper and pinyon occupying lower mountain slopes. The belt is frequently interrupted as mountains give way to plains.

In the montane zone above the woodland belt, ponderosa pine generally occupies the lower and more exposed slopes and Douglas-fir the higher and more sheltered ones. Typical species of the subalpine belt are alpine fir and Engelmann spruce. Great Basin bristlecone pine, with some individuals more than 1,000 years old, occupies widely scattered peaks. Only a few mountains in this province rise high enough to support an alpine meadow belt.

Soils.--Aridisols dominate all basin and lowland areas; Mollisols and Alfisols are found at higher elevations in the mountains. Salt flats and playas without soil are extensive in the Great Basin.

Fauna.--Sagebrush shrublands provide ideal habitat for pronghorn antelope and whitetail prairie dog. Golden-mantled squirrels inhabit the region's ponderosa pine forests, and snowshoe hares along with red squirrels are found throughout the spruce-fir forests of Utah.

The sagebrush shrublands contain many species of birds, ranging from burrowing owls to such specialized species as sage sparrow and sage thrasher, both found in no other type of habitat. Various raptors prey on jackrabbits, including the American kestrel, ferruginous hawk, and golden eagle. The pinyon jay is typical of the pinyon-juniper forest, which also supports the plain titmouse and black-throated gray warbler, along with flocks of bushtits. Ponderosa pine forests contain the Steller's jay and dark-eyed junco. Many reptiles can be found; collared lizards are common.