The Living World: Ecosystems

AP Environmental Science · Vocabulary in context

Word	Example
ecosystem /ˈiːkəʊsɪstəm/	A pond is an **ecosystem**.
biotic /baɪˈɒtɪk/	Plants and animals are **biotic** parts of an ecosystem.
abiotic /ˌæbɪˈɒtɪk/	Sunlight and water are **abiotic** parts of an ecosystem.
predation /prɪˈdeɪʃn/	A fox eating a rabbit is an example of **predation**.
competition /ˌkɒmpəˈtɪʃn/	Two plants are in **competition** for light.
mutualism /ˈmjuːtʃuːəlɪzəm/	Bees and flowering plants benefit from **mutualism**.
commensalism	In **commensalism**, one species gains and the other is not affected.
parasitism /ˈpærəsɪtɪzəm/	A tick feeding on a deer is **parasitism**.
symbiosis /ˌsɪmbaɪˈəʊsɪs/	**Symbiosis** is a close relationship between two species.
resource partitioning /rɪˈzɔːs pɑːˈtɪʃənɪŋ/	**Resource partitioning** lets species share food by eating at different times.
biome /ˈbaɪəʊm/	A desert is a **biome** with little rainfall.
precipitation /prɪˌsɪpɪˈteɪʃn/	**Precipitation** includes rain and snow.
permafrost	**Permafrost** is ground that stays frozen all year.
salinity /səˈlɪnɪti/	**Salinity** is how salty water is.

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estuaries /ˈestjuːəriz/	**Estuaries** form where rivers meet the sea.
wetlands /ˈwetləndz/	**Wetlands** are areas covered with shallow water.
algae /ˈælgiː/	Green **algae** grow in ponds.
biogeochemical cycle	The carbon cycle is a **biogeochemical cycle**.
reservoirs	**Reservoirs** store water behind dams.
sink /sɪŋk/	A growing forest is a carbon **sink**.
source /sɔːs/	A leaf is a **source**: it makes sugar for the rest of the plant.
carbon cycle /ˈkɑːbən ˈsaɪkl/	The **carbon cycle** moves carbon through living things and the air.
photosynthesis /ˌfəʊtəʊˈsɪnθəsɪs/	Plants make sugar by **photosynthesis**.
cellular respiration /ˈseljʊlə ˌrespɪˈreɪʃn/	**Cellular respiration** releases energy from glucose.
decomposition /ˌdiːkɒmpəˈzɪʃn/	**Decomposition** breaks a big problem into small parts.
fossil fuels /ˈfɒsl ˈfjuːəlz/	Coal and oil are **fossil fuels**.
deforestation /diːˌfɒrɪˈsteɪʃn/	**Deforestation** destroys the homes of many animals.
nitrogen cycle /ˈnaɪtrədʒn ˈsaɪkl/	The **nitrogen cycle** moves nitrogen through soil, plants and air.

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nitrogen fixation /ˈnaɪtrədʒn fɪkˈseɪʃn/	**Nitrogen fixation** turns nitrogen gas into useful compounds.
nitrification /ˌnaɪtrɪfɪˈkeɪʃn/	**Nitrification** turns ammonium into nitrate.
assimilation /əˌsɪmɪˈleɪʃn/	Plants use **assimilation** to build proteins from nitrogen they take in.
ammonification /ˌæməˌnɪfɪˈkeɪʃn/	In **ammonification**, decomposers release ammonium from dead plants and animals.
denitrification /diːˌnaɪtrɪfɪˈkeɪʃn/	**Denitrification** returns nitrogen gas to the air.
phosphorus cycle /ˈfɒsfɔːrəs ˈsaɪkl/	The **phosphorus cycle** has no gas stage.
limiting nutrient /ˈlɪmɪtɪŋ ˈnjuːtrɪənt/	Phosphorus is often the **limiting nutrient** in lakes.
eutrophication /juːtrəfɪˈkeɪʃn/	**Eutrophication** happens when fertiliser runs into a lake.
water cycle /ˈwɔːtə ˈsaɪkl/	The **water cycle** moves water between the sea, air and land.
evaporation /ɪˌvæpəˈreɪʃn/	**Evaporation** dries wet clothes.
transpiration /trænspəˈreɪʃn/	**Transpiration** is the loss of water from leaves.
condensation /kɒnˈdenseɪʃn/	**Condensation** forms water droplets as moist air cools.
infiltration	**Infiltration** lets rain soak into the soil.
aquifers /ˈækwɪfəz/	**Aquifers** store water underground.

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primary productivity /ˈpraɪməri ˌprɒdəkˈtɪvɪti/	**Primary productivity** is how fast plants make new biomass.
gross primary productivity /grəʊs ˈpraɪməri ˌprɒdəkˈtɪvɪti/	**Gross primary productivity** is all the energy plants capture in photosynthesis.
net primary productivity /net ˈpraɪməri ˌprɒdəkˈtɪvɪti/	**Net primary productivity** is what is left after plants use some energy in respiration.
producers /prəˈdjuːsəz/	Plants are **producers**.
trophic level /ˈtrəʊfɪk ˈlevl/	Rabbits are at the second **trophic level**.
top predators	Wolves are **top predators**: nothing hunts them.
decomposers /ˌdiːkəmˈpəʊzəz/	Bacteria and fungi are **decomposers**.
detritivores	**Detritivores** like worms eat dead material.
thermodynamics /ˌθɜːməʊdaɪˈnæmɪks/	The laws of **thermodynamics** explain why energy is lost at each step of a food chain.
food chain /fuːd tʃeɪn/	A **food chain** shows who eats whom.
food web /fuːd web/	A **food web** links many food chains.
keystone species /ˈkiːstəʊn ˈspiːsiːz/	A **keystone species** has a large effect on its ecosystem.
feedback loops	**Feedback loops** can make a change bigger or smaller.

Word	Example
tropical rainforest /ˈtrɒpɪkl ˈreɪnfɒrɪst/	A **tropical rainforest** is hot and wet all year.
desert /ˈdezət/	A **desert** gets very little rain.
coral reef /ˈkɒrəl riːf/	A **coral reef** has many kinds of fish.

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