

My Region and the Western United States

Knowledge Organiser

Year 5

The Western United States

The USA is one of the **23 countries** which make up the continent of **North America**. The country is divided into **four regions**: **the West, the Midwest, the Northeast and the South**.

The Western region of the USA consists of **13 states**: **Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming**.



Volcanoes and earthquake zones of the Western United States

One of the large tectonic plates is the **North American Plate**. The edges of the North American Plate exhibit all three of the **major plate boundary type of movements**. California, Oregon and Washington have **earthquakes and even volcanoes!** Hawaii also has many **active volcanoes**, and **extinct volcanoes** can be found throughout the Western United States.

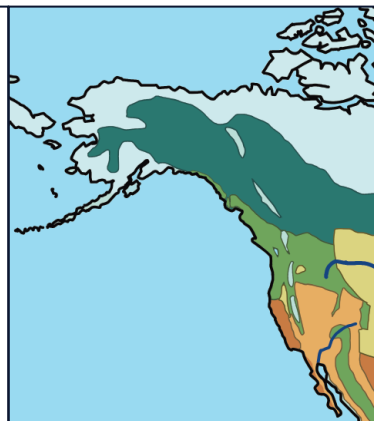
An example of the volcanic zones in the Western United States is the **Cascade Range** which is formed by thousands of small volcanoes. Rising above this volcanic platform are a few large volcanoes, like **Mount Saint Helens**, which dominates the landscape.



The vegetation belts of the Western United States

The Western United States extends across a wide range of **vegetation belts**, including the following: tundra, coniferous forest, desert and dry shrub, Mediterranean shrub and temperate grassland.

	tropical rainforest
	temperate forest
	desert
	tundra
	taiga (boreal forest)
	grassland
	savannah (tropical grassland)
	freshwater
	marine
	ice



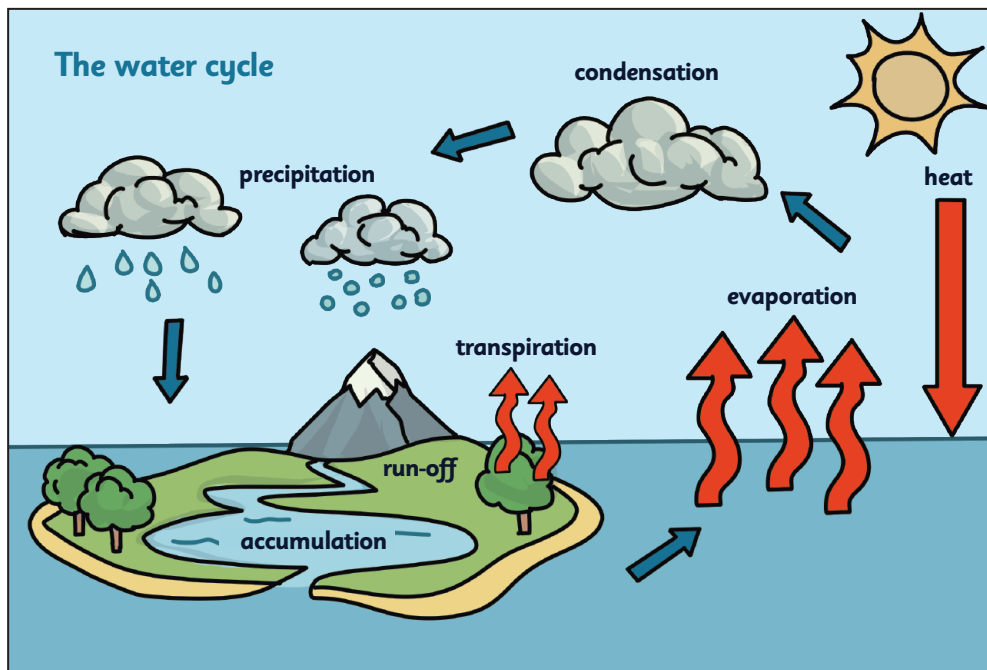
The biomes and climate zones of the Western United States

A biome is a large area on the Earth's surface defined by the **types of animals and plants** living there. We can also consider these "**life zones**" ("bio" means life). The Western United States includes tropical rainforest, desert and tundra biomes, to name a few.

Climate change is an ongoing issue that affects each of these vegetation belts. We have seen the devastation of forest fires, particularly across desert areas of California, which have destroyed homes and habitats for humans and animals alike. In addition, the **polar ice caps** are reducing rapidly, and northern Alaska is directly impacted as it lies within the **Arctic Circle**.

The water cycle

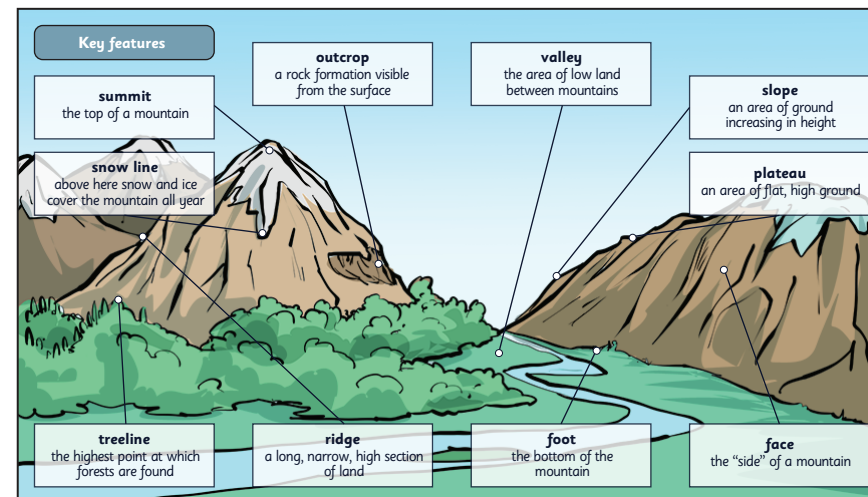
The water cycle has **four main parts**: evaporation, condensation, precipitation and accumulation.



- Evaporation** happens when the Sun causes the water in the rivers, lakes and oceans to heat up and turn into a water vapour gas, which then goes into the air. Water from plants and trees also enters the atmosphere. This is called transpiration.
- As the water vapour rises during the evaporation stage, it cools down and turns back into liquid, causing droplets to form, becoming clouds. This is called **condensation**.
- When a cloud becomes too full and heavy, the water falls to the ground as **precipitation**. Precipitation can take the form of rain, sleet, hail or snow.
- When water falls back to Earth as precipitation, the Earth absorbs some of the water that falls to the ground. When the ground cannot absorb the water, it flows over the land, known as 'run-off'. The water that runs over the ground accumulates in rivers, lakes and oceans. This is called **accumulation**.

What are mountains?

Mountains are areas of land much **higher** than the land surrounding them. They are higher and usually steeper than a hill. They are normally over **600 metres high**. They are usually found in a group called a **mountain range**. Lines of ranges form mountain belts.



What are rivers?

A river is a naturally **moving body of water**. It flows from its source on high ground, across the land, and then into another body of water. This could be a lake, the sea, an ocean or even another river.

