

Progress Monitoring Probe 11

Mountain Ecosystems

Have you ever looked into the distance and seen a steep and rugged peak? If so, you have probably seen a mountain. A mountain is a land formation that is much higher than the land that surrounds it. Mountains are usually narrower at the top than they are at the bottom, and they normally exist in ranges consisting of peaks, ridges, and valleys.	12
Mountains affect life in many ways. They influence climate all over the world. High mountain ranges have the most impact. These big mountains act as barriers to air masses coming from the ocean.	23
Ocean winds carry moist air inland. Because of their size and shape, mountains block this air and force it upwards. The water in the air then cools and forms clouds. When the clouds become full, they release their water as rain or snow. That is why it is usually wet on the ocean side of a mountain range, while deserts often form on the other side.	46
Mountains are sometimes called nature's water towers. All of the world's major rivers begin in the mountains. These mountain rivers flow into lakes, and they eventually spill into the oceans. People use mountain water to grow food, to make electricity, and to drink. Every day, one out of every two people on Earth drinks water that started in the mountains!	57
You might think of mountains as tough and stable. However, mountain ecosystems can be fragile. An ecosystem is a system of plants, animals, and other life forms living together. Because the sides of mountains are so steep, soil easily wears away, or erodes. This can harm the plants that live there. When plants die	63
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Mountain Ecosystems (Continued)

from lack of soil, the animals that feed on those plants suffer, too. Deep-rooted plants, like trees, help by holding the soil in place.	288
Mountains are a dramatic and beautiful part of the landscape, and many people like to hike, ski, and fish there. You can see, though, that mountains play a much greater role in peoples' lives. They are an important and valuable part of the planet Earth.	300
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