

Summary: Land and Climate

Land and Water of the Midwest

The Midwest lies in the middle of the country. Canada lies to the north. The Midwest is mostly flat, with some hilly areas. The Great Lakes are in the eastern part of this region. This area has deep forests. In the north, pine forests can survive the cold winters. The Great Plains lie to the west of the Great Lakes. In these states, the climate is drier. Prairie grasses cover much of the land. Farmers turned prairies into farmland. They grow corn and wheat.

The five Great Lakes are the world's largest body of fresh water. Glaciers created these five lakes. Rivers and canals connect them to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Ships can reach the lakes through these waterways.

The Mississippi River is another great waterway. With its tributaries, the Missouri and Ohio rivers, it is part of the largest river system in the country. Dams and levees help stop flooding. Locks on waterways help ships pass waterfalls. Before railroads, travel on waterways was faster and less expensive than traveling on land.

Climate, Plants, Animals

The Midwest can have severe weather. It has no ocean nearby to warm the land in winter and cool it in the summer. The Great Lakes are not as big as an ocean, but they affect the climate. They add moisture to the air.

Winters are cold, and there are big snowstorms called blizzards. People wear layers of clothes and use covered walkways. They go skiing, skating, and ice fishing. In the summer, there are tornadoes with strong, whirling winds.

Plants and animals also adapt to the climate. Prairie grass has deep roots to find water. Some birds migrate to warmer places in the winter. Prairie dogs live underground. Buffalo once lived on the Great Plains. They had thick fur. Hunters killed most of them for their skins. Then people started protecting buffalo. Now there are about 150,000 buffalo in the United States.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

prairie *noun*, dry, mostly flat grassland with few trees

tributary *noun*, a river or stream that flows into another river

levee *noun*, a high river bank that stops the river from overflowing

lock *noun*, part of a waterway that is closed off by gates



After You Read

REVIEW What are the major regions and waterways of the Midwest?

Circle the words that name a region or waterway of the Midwest.

REVIEW How have people and wildlife adapted to the climate of the Midwest?

Underline sentences that tell what people, animals and plants do to survive in cold winters and hot summers.