Summary: Land of the Midwest

Physical Features 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 once covered much of the land. Farmers have turned prairies into farmland, where they grow corn and wheat.

The Great Lakes make up the world’s largest body of fresh water. Rivers and canals connect the lakes to the Atlantic Ocean and to 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.

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. None of the Great Lakes is as large as an ocean, but they affect the climate. The lakes add moisture to the air and cause lake effect snow.

Winters are cold, and fierce snowstorms can occur. People wear layers of clothes and use covered walkways. They go skiing, skating, and ice fishing. In the summer, tornadoes with strong, whirling winds often strike.

Plants and animals also adapt to the climate. Prairie grass has deep roots to find moisture. 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.