

**FOSS California Environments Module**  
**Glossary**  
**2007 Edition**

**Adult:** The last stage in a life cycle when the organism is mature and can reproduce.

**Algae:** A large group of water organisms.

**Amphibian:** An organism, such as a spadefoot toad, that reproduces in water.

**Antenna (pl. antennae):** A feeler on the head of an isopod or insect.

**Bacteria:** Microorganisms that act as decomposers.

**Behavior:** The actions or responses of organisms to something in their environment.

**Brine pond:** A saltwater environment where brine shrimp live.

**Burrow:** A hole or tunnel dug by a small animal.

**Canopy:** The highest layer in the rain forest where there is a lot of sunlight.

**Carnivore:** An animal that eats other animals.

**Community:** The plants and animals in an ecosystem.

**Compete:** To rely on or need the same resource as another organism.

**Competition:** A demand for resources, such as food or water or space, by two or more organisms.

**Complete metamorphosis:** The cycle of growth changes for an insect. The stages include egg, larva, pupa, and adult.

**Component:** A part of something.

**Concentration:** The amount of a substance, such as salt, in an amount of another substance, such as water.

**Consumer:** An organism that cannot make its own food. Consumers eat other organisms.

**Crustacean:** An animal with a shell, jaw, and two pairs of antennae. Most crustaceans live in water. Crabs, lobsters, shrimp, and isopods are examples of crustaceans.

**Decomposer:** An organism that breaks down plant and animal material into simple chemicals. The chemicals can then be reused in the ecosystem.

**Desert:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth that receives less than 25 centimeters (10 inches) of rain each year.

**Digestion:** The process of reducing food into nutrients that can be absorbed by the body.

**Disease:** A sickness.

**Dormant:** An organism in an inactive or in a resting state, such as a dormant seed or egg.

**Ecologist:** A scientist who studies ecosystems.

**Ecosystem:** A community of organisms interacting with each other and with the nonliving environment.

**Egg:** The first stage of an animal's life cycle.

**Energy:** What makes organisms grow and move.

**Entomologist:** A biologist who studies insects.

**Environment:** Everything that surrounds and influences an organism.

**Environmental factor:** One part of the environment. An environmental factor can be nonliving, such as water, light, and temperature. It can be living, such as plants and animals.

**Evaporate:** To dry up and go into the air.

**Fertile:** The condition of being able to support growth and development. Soil can be fertile if it will support the growth of plants.

**Fertilizer:** Any natural or synthetic material used in soil to help plants grow.

**Food:** A form of chemical energy that organisms need to survive. Plants make their own food. Animals eat other organisms for food.

**Food chain:** A description of the feeding sequence of one set of organisms in an ecosystem, such as grass seeds, chipmunk, and hawk. Arrows point in the direction of the flow of energy from one organism to another.

**Food web:** A description of the feeding relationships between all of the organisms in an ecosystem. Arrows show the flow of energy from one organism to another.

**Forest floor:** The bottom layer of the rain forest where there is very little light.

**Function:** The purpose or use of something, such as the function of a body part.

**Fungus (pl. fungi):** An organism that lacks chlorophyll and absorbs nutrients from dead or living organisms. Mushrooms and yeast are examples of fungi.

**Gill:** A breathing structure of an animal that lives in water or very moist environments.

**Grassland:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth where the land is flat or hilly, such as a prairie.

**Herbicide:** A chemical used to kill plants.

**Herbivore:** An animal that eats plants.

**Insect:** An animal that has six legs, a head, a thorax, and an abdomen.

**Interact:** To act upon one another.

**Isopod:** A small crustacean with 14 legs that all function the same.

**Larva (pl. larvae):** The wormlike early stage in the life cycle of an insect.

**Living:** The condition of being alive.

**Matter:** Anything that takes up space.

**Mealworm:** The larva of a beetle.

**Microorganism:** A microscopic organism, such as bacteria and algae.

**Microscopic:** Too small to be seen with your bare eyes.

**Migrate:** To move from one area to another.

**Nocturnal:** To be active at night.

**Nonliving:** Something that has never been alive, or things that were once alive and are no longer alive.

**Nutrient:** A substance or raw material needed for the maintenance, growth, and development of an organism.

**Omnivore:** An animal that eats both plants and other animals.

**Optimum:** The best condition that is favorable to growth, development, and reproduction of an organism.

**Organism:** Any living thing, including all plants and animals.

**Parasite:** An organism that lives on or in another living organism.

**Pesticide:** A chemical developed to kill animals that are in some way harmful to humans.

**Petroleum:** A dark oil.

**Phytoplankton:** Microscopic plantlike organisms in aquatic environments that produce their own food. Zooplankton eat phytoplankton.

**Pill bug:** An isopod that can roll up into a ball.

**Pollination:** The moving of pollen to the female part of a flower.

**Pollute:** To make an environment unsuitable for organisms because of substances introduced into air, water, or soil.

**Predator:** An animal that hunts other animals for food.

**Producer:** An organism, such as a plant or alga, that makes its own food.

**Pupa (pl. pupae):** The stage of an animal's life cycle between the larva and the adult stages.

**Range:** An amount of variation or difference.

**Range of tolerance:** The varying conditions of one environmental factor in which an organism can survive.

**Recycle:** To use again.

**Reproduce:** To create offspring.

**Resource:** A material available for use by organisms. Food, water, air, shelter, space, or nutrients are examples of resources.

**Runoff:** Water that flows over the land and into bodies of water.

**Scavenger:** An animal that eats dead organisms.

**Sediment:** Tiny bits of rock, shell, dead plants, or other material that settle out of a fluid.

**Seed dispersal:** The movement of seeds away from the parent plant.

**Shelter:** A home or place that gives protection to organisms.

**Source:** The beginning of something, such as where a river starts.

**Sow bug:** An isopod that is flat, has long antennae, and can't roll up into a ball.

**Sprout:** To start to grow.

**Structure:** A physical feature or part of an organism.

**Survive:** To remain alive.

**Taiga:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth with fir and spruce trees.

**Temperate deciduous forest:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth with trees that shed their leaves in the fall and grow new leaves in the spring.

**Terrarium:** A container with plants growing inside.

**Terrestrial:** Refers to Earth's land environments.

**Thrive:** To grow and be healthy.

**Tropical rain forest:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth that is hot and wet all year.

**Tundra:** A major terrestrial environment on Earth where it is cold and dry.

**Understory:** The layer above the rain forest floor and below the rain forest canopy.

**Vernal pool:** A shallow, temporary pond.

**Yeast:** A type of fungus. Some types of yeast are used to make bread.

**Zooplankton:** Microscopic animals in aquatic environments. Insects and fish eat zooplankton.