

4.5 Aquatic Ecosystems

Lesson Objectives

-  Discuss the factors that affect aquatic ecosystems.
-  Identify the major categories of freshwater ecosystems.
-  Describe the importance of estuaries.
-  Describe and compare the distinct ocean zones that make up marine ecosystems.

Lesson Summary

Conditions Underwater Aquatic ecosystems are determined mainly by the depth, flow, temperature, and amount of dissolved nutrients of the water.

- ▶ The **photic zone** is the sunlit upper layer of water where photosynthesis can occur.
- ▶ The **aphotic zone** is the dark lower layer where photosynthesis cannot occur.
- ▶ The benthic zone is found on the bottoms of lakes, streams, and oceans. The organisms that live on the floor of a body of water are called **benthos**.

Freshwater Ecosystems Freshwater ecosystems include flowing-water ecosystems, standing-water ecosystems, and freshwater **wetlands**. **Plankton** are common. They form the base of many aquatic food webs.

Estuaries **Estuaries** are wetlands formed where rivers meet the sea. They contain a mixture of fresh and salt water. Most of the food produced in estuaries enters food webs as tiny pieces of organic matter, or detritus.

Marine Ecosystems Marine ecosystems are found in the ocean.

- ▶ The intertidal zone is the shallowest and closest to land. It is exposed to the rise and fall of tides each day.
- ▶ The coastal ocean is the relatively shallow border of water that surrounds the continents.
- ▶ The open ocean begins at the continental shelf and extends outward. The open ocean can be divided into the photic zone and the aphotic zone.

Conditions Underwater

1. What are the four main factors that affect aquatic ecosystems?

2. What does the depth of the water determine?

3. What distinguishes the photic zone from the aphotic zone in an aquatic ecosystem?

Chapter 54 Ecosystems Answer Guide

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