

# Utah's Ecosystems

## *What is an Ecosystem?*

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Pre-visit activity, grades 3-6

### Objective

To help students understand the general concept/definition of an ecosystem and the four things needed in a "habitat."

### Materials

- "My Ecosystem" page (copy for printing at the end of this activity)
- Pencils, crayons, markers

### Background

The concept of an "ecosystem" is easy to understand once you break down the word. The first part comes from the Latin word "eco," which means home. "System" is a collection of relationships that work together to form a whole. So, an ecosystem is a collection of relationships that make a home for certain species. Everything -- and everyone -- can be an ecosystem. Your back yard is an ecosystem for the things that live there. The human body is an ecosystem filled with complex relationships and species, such as bacteria. The entire Earth can be one ecosystem. We determine the size of an ecosystem by first figuring out what area we want to study.

All ecosystems have habitats for their species. A habitat provides four things: Food, water, shelter, and space to reproduce or raise a family.

### Procedure

1. Define "ecosystem" and "habitat" for your students.

2. When it seems that everyone understands the concepts of the two terms above, ask them to list what all exists in the "ecosystem" of your classroom. Who "lives" in your classroom, and what kinds of relationships are there? Friends? Teacher-student relationships? Parents? Teacher's aides? Classroom pet? List as many as you can think of.

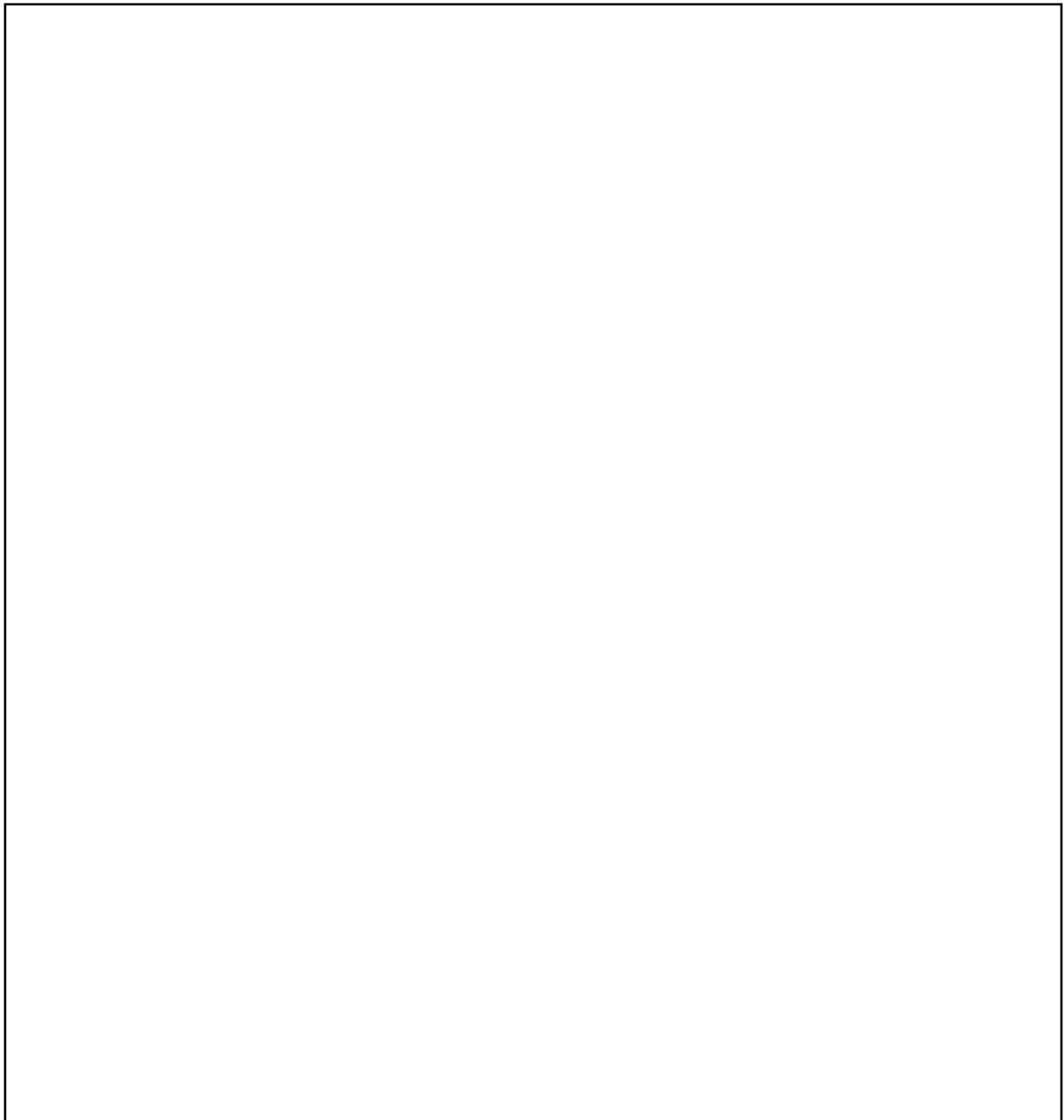
(Optional ecosystem – Map the ecosystem of your whole school. This could include administrators, children of various ages, lunchroom workers, custodians, the media/library specialist, and also the plants and animals living in and around outside the school.)

3. What feeds these relationships and people in your classroom "habitat?" While you may not need to get your basic food, water, and shelter here, does everyone have his or her own space? Is there special space set aside for certain activities or for people other than students and teachers? What about food and water -- is any available in the room?
4. Give each student a copy of the "My Ecosystem" page. Have them draw a picture of and label the things that live in their home "ecosystem." Who lives there with them? What relationships are there among those people? Are there pets? Plants in the yard? (If you'd rather avoid having students describe home life, have students draw and label their picture based on the lists you just made about the classroom or school ecosystem.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## My Ecosystem

Directions: Create your own ecosystem using your classroom, school, home, or neighborhood. Who lives there? What kinds of plants and animals are there? What are the relationships between the people that live there? What does their habitat look like? How do these organisms find food, water, and shelter? Draw and label the parts of your ecosystem below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw and label their own ecosystem. The box occupies the lower two-thirds of the page.