Ecoregions are units of bioregionalization, and the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources are usually similar within a region and may vary from one ecological region to another regardless of the hierarchical level. A Roman numeral classification scheme for ecoregions has been used to develop regional biological criteria and water quality standards, set management goals for nonpoint source pollution and air pollution control, and evaluate the effects of land use and natural resource development on the environment. Scientifically, ecoregions provide a meaningful framework for the study of forces that act on ecosystems, including their relationship with physical, biological, and historical geologic factors. These forces can be defined in terms of climate, biologic productivity, geology, hydrology, and vegetation, as well as habitat composition and condition. These factors are combined in a hierarchical approach to ecoregion development that includes regional and interregional studies and that links the ecosystems of the conterminous United States. Ecological regions are the fundamental geographic units for analyzing and managing ecosystems, and they are intended to provide the basis for a comprehensive environmental management program.

Ecoregions are areas where ecosystems (and the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources) are generally similar. The ecoregions of the United States are divided into three levels. Level I ecoregions are broad regions of similar climate and floristic and faunal composition. They are defined for use in national-scale ecological assessments, regional-scale studies, and for broad-scale studies of the natural environment. The Level II ecoregions have been developed to provide a more detailed picture of the geographic distribution of ecosystems and to allow for cross-state comparisons. Level II ecoregions are used in regional environmental assessments and for regional-scale studies. Level III ecoregions are used in local-scale environmental assessments and for local-scale studies. Level III ecoregions are the most detailed level of ecoregion classification and are used in local-scale environmental assessments and for local-scale studies. Level III ecoregions are the most detailed level of ecoregion classification and are used in local-scale environmental assessments and for local-scale studies.

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