



The Pacific Northwest Region

The Pacific Northwest is described in Indian legends; reports from Russian, Spanish, and English explorers; descriptions from Lewis and Clark; and by more recent visitors as bountiful, beautiful, and varied. All paint glowing word pictures of mountains, sea, forests, rivers, canyons, glaciers, harbors, and deserts.

The Rocky Mountain, Cascade, and Coast ranges connect valleys and plains fed by rivers providing the water that is a major resource of the Pacific Northwest.

The Columbia River and coastal streams supply power, transportation, and water supplies for communities, commerce and industry, irrigation, recreation, fish, and wildlife.

The climate of the Pacific Northwest is as varied as its topography. Predominant weather systems in the northern reaches of the Pacific Ocean and storms are borne inland by prevailing westerly winds. Good supplies of rain and snow fall in the western part of the region. Storm clouds are usually depleted when they reach the high, dry, interior reaches. On the eastern slopes of the mountains, the weather changes and dry winds draw moisture from semi-arid lands on the high plateaus and deserts.

This varied climate has created a broad mix of vegetation ranging from rain forests, vast timbered tracts, and verdant valleys to dusty, dry sagebrush and juniper-covered plateaus and plains.

Water has always been important in development of the Pacific Northwest and is one of the keys to the region's future. The Columbia River system is the Northwest's river highway. Its flows stem from highlands in Canada to Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Nevada. Surface water totals 200 million acre-feet annually. Canada provides 54 million acre-feet from streams flowing south into the Columbia. More than 600 miles of shoreline, including estuaries, beaches, tidelands, and rockbound

shores, run along the Washington and Oregon coasts.

A land-locked closed basin lies completely in Oregon, enclosed in the southern part of the high central Oregon plateau.

More than 170 million acres of land are classified into use types. Cropland totals 20 million acres. There are 85 million acres of forest land and 58 million acres of rangeland. The last category, about eight million acres, includes five million acres of barren land and mountain rock outcroppings and three million acres of concentrated population.

Communities are situated in low-lying good soil areas adjacent to streams. Some of the region's most fertile soil has been developed for residential or industrial settlement. Major population centers are Seattle-Tacoma, Portland-Vancouver, Spokane, Eugene, Salem, and Boise. The 1990 census counted more than 10.4 million people in the Pacific Northwest. National projections estimate the population will reach 16 million by 2030, with heaviest concentrations of people in the two largest metro areas, a megalopolis stretching from Everett, Washington, to Eugene, Oregon.

Economic leaders in the region are agriculture, timber, and tourism. Largest employers are service industries, manufacturing, and retailing. Employment is predicted to increase from 5.7 million employed in 1990 to 6.9 million in the year 2000, an increase of 20.7 percent. Nationwide employment during the same period is expected to increase by about 13.4 percent.

Predicted growth in all segments of Northwest society is expected to bring heavy demands for municipal and industrial water supplies, electric energy, irrigation flows, recreation, and other essential uses. Demands will add to pressure and stress on all natural resources in the Pacific Northwest.

