

Ecological Framework

An ecosystem is a system in which the biotic (plants, animals, people), the non-biotic (landforms, soil, water, climate) endure as a unit in nature. Those units are represented by means of an ecosystem framework. An ecosystem framework can help us understand what makes one ecosystem special, how ecosystems differ from one another and how they are distributed. An ecosystem framework can also help us understand the relationship between people and the environment in a more holistic manner.

Canada has defined a hierarchical system of ecosystems. At a simple level there are 20 ecozones, consisting of 15 terrestrial and 5 marine units. The terrestrial part of Canada is further subdivided into 53 ecoprovinces and 194 ecoregions. More detailed levels have been mapped but are not presented here. Lines dividing ecosystems on a map often represent general areas where one ecosystem unit merges with another.

Regardless of the level in the hierarchy, each unit is distinguished from others by its unique mosaic of plants, wildlife, climate, landforms and human activities. The ecoregion level is the foundation of the maps used on this site. Most of the thematic layers are presented as maps according to Canada's 194 ecoregions, rather than by other geographic frameworks such as administrative units, although provinces/territories are superimposed on these maps for reference purposes.