

Geography of the Pacific Northwest

Did you know that the place where we live is called the Pacific Northwest? Our home is known for its beautiful mountains and its cool, clear lakes. It is also known for a large body of saltwater called Puget Sound.

You and I live near several lakes, such as Horseshoe Lake, Long Lake, and Wye Lake. You may have fished or swam in these lakes during the summer months! We also live close to Puget Sound beaches. Have you waded in salt water or hunted crabs beneath rocks? Lakes and beaches are a big part of our homeland.

Our Pacific Northwest mountains are also famous. We can see the Olympic Mountains on a clear day when we look to the west. We can see the Cascade Mountains when we look to the east. Both mountain ranges are high above sea level, but our highest mountain is Mount Rainier.

Mount Rainier stands majestically 14,410 feet above sea level. It is the tallest single peak in the lower 48 states. It is famous for its permanent glaciers, which make Rainier look snowy all year. It is also famous for its beautiful wildflower meadows and ancient forests. Both icy glaciers and old-growth forests ring this monumental volcano.

Yes -- Mount Rainier is an active volcano! Although it hasn't had a big eruption since 1854, it could erupt at any time. If that happens, all of us living in the Pacific Northwest will be affected by melting glaciers and volcanic rubble.

As we study the animals of the Pacific Northwest, we will look at a map to see where they live. Of course, we know that God created animals to live in certain places and not in other places. Elephants don't roam the Olympic Mountains, and Roosevelt Elk can't survive in the Arizona desert! You will soon recognize our animal neighbors and discover their habitats on a local map. Let's get going by first understanding the geography of the Pacific Northwest, shall we?

On your map, we labeled the major land features of our homeland. Here they are, with a description of each:

Puget Sound

Puget Sound is part of the Pacific Ocean. It is a special body of salt water that is home to many marine creatures. Mammals such as seals, sea lions, otters, and several species of whales live here. These mammals get their food from saltwater fish and plants. Puget Sound water is cold all the time, so the marine animals that live in it are specially created to survive cold waters.

Puget Sound is about 100 miles long. It is part of the Salish Sea, which begins north of us, in Canada. It is about 450 feet deep on average; 930 feet at its deepest point. The water temperatures range between 47° F in January to 54° F in August. Brrrrr!

The Puget Sound Lowlands

Right here, where we live, is called the Puget Sound Lowlands. This is because our home is bounded on two sides by large mountain ranges – we are in the low place between them! Animals that live here are also common to the mountains. Our climate is very mild, with plentiful food to sustain these animals – grasses, berries, trees, insects, etc.

The Olympic Mountains

The Olympic Mountains are to the west of us, on the Olympic Peninsula. Every evening the sun sets behind them! This mountain range is home to Blacktail deer, Roosevelt elk, mountain goats, marmots, American black bears, and many more. Birds, such as sooty grouse and tiny winter wrens live here. Some animals are carnivores, such as cougars, and others are herbivores, such as chipmunks. All these animals are suited to life in the mountains.

The Cascade Mountains

From where we live, we can watch the sun rise over the Cascade mountains. This is a very large mountain range, beginning in Canada and going all the way to northern California. Mt. Rainier is part of the Cascade Range, as are Mount Baker, Adams, and St. Helens.

You may think that the same animals live in the Cascade Mountains as the Olympic Mountains. This is true for some, but not for all! Mountain goats, wolves, and grizzly bears are native to the North Cascades, but not to the Olympics.

Now that you have read about our Pacific Northwest home, answer these questions on your notebook paper. **Please write in complete sentences.**

1. Which direction are the Olympic Mountains from us?
2. Which direction are the Cascade Mountains from us?
3. What are two of the lakes near our home?
4. What is the largest body of water in the Puget Lowlands?
5. Name four animals which live in the Pacific Northwest.
6. Name an animal that lives in the Cascades but not in the Olympics.