

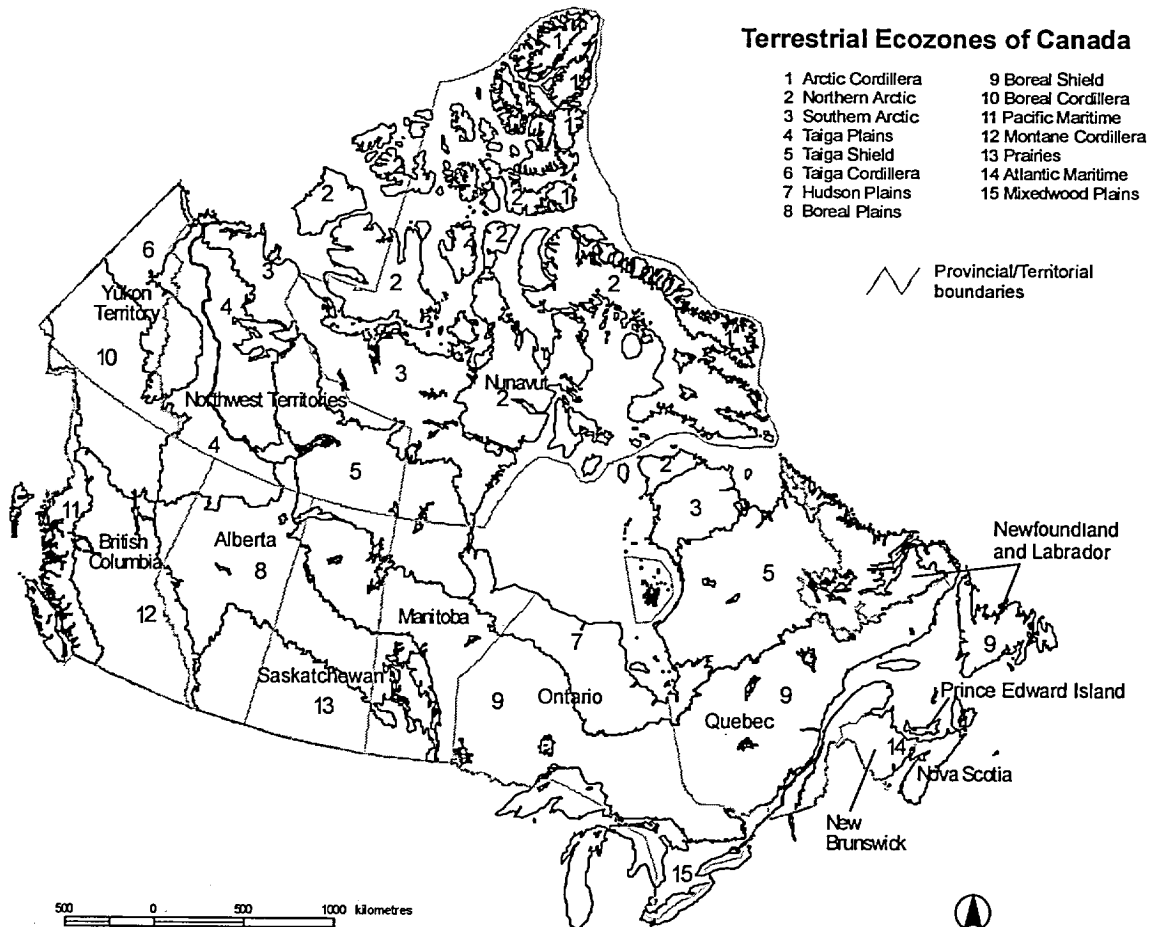
LAND

Ecological Land Classification

Since the late 1960s, governments, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and industry in Canada have collaborated to develop a common, hierarchical ecosystem spatial framework and terminology. This work gained momentum in the 1970s, especially following the creation of the Canada Committee on Ecological Land Classification. In 1991, a collaborative project was undertaken by a number of federal government agencies in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments to review previous work and establish a common, hierarchical ecosystem framework for ecosystems in Canada. The underlying principle for the initiative was the commitment and need to think, plan, and act in terms of ecosystems, i.e., to move away from an emphasis on individual elements to a more comprehensive and holistic approach.

The ecological land classification system delineates and classifies ecologically distinctive areas of the earth's surface on a subcontinental basis. This expertise is being used to develop a North America-wide classification system in collaboration with the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation.

A framework of standard ecological units facilitates communication and reporting between different jurisdictions and disciplines. It enhances the capability of government and nongovernmental organizations to assess and report on environmental quality and the sustainability of ecosystems. The national state of environment reports for Canada (1986, 1991, and 1996) have used ecozones (the largest unit in the ecological land classification system) as the principal reporting framework.



Note: An ecozone, like any ecosystem, is an area where organisms and their physical environment endure as a system. Because of the large size of ecozones, the types of criteria used to define them refer to broad, common characteristics. For instance, landforms and soils would be defined by large physiographic divisions such as mountain ranges. Typically, ecozones span provincial jurisdictional boundaries and vary considerably in size and diversity. Some are shared with other countries. Canada's Arctic ecozones represent roughly 20 percent of the world's total Arctic ecosystem; the prairie ecozone extends into the United States.