

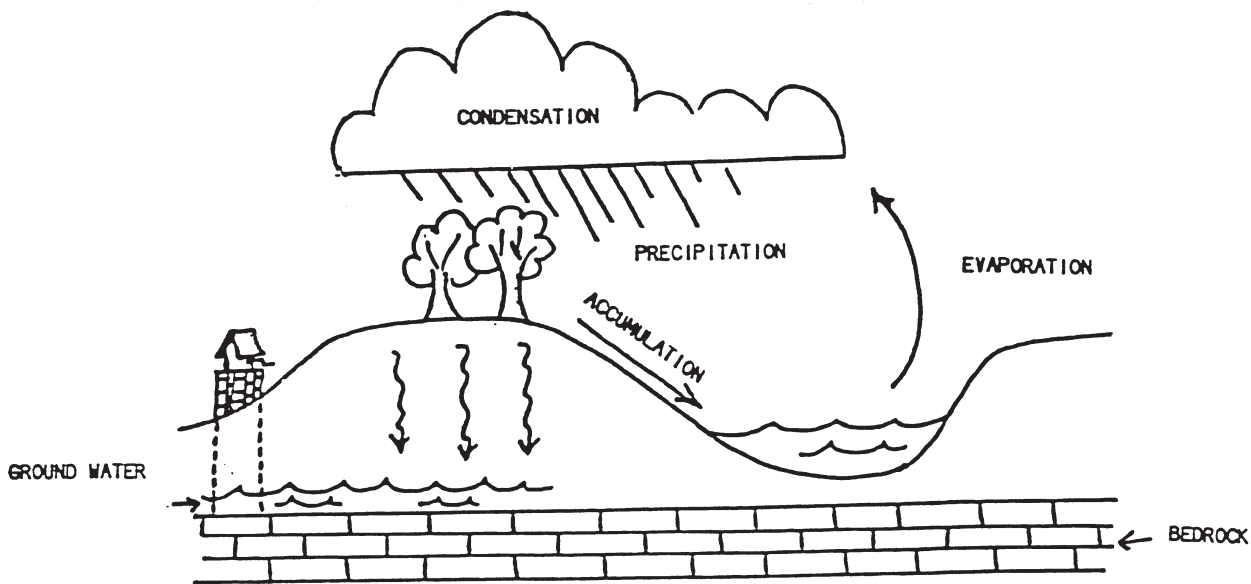


# THE WATER CYCLE

There are four main parts of the water cycle as the illustration above shows. Precipitation is rain, snow, sleet, or hail. Some of this water is soaked up by the roots of trees and other plants. Some of it collects in streams, rivers, lakes, or oceans. This is referred to as accumulation. Percolation occurs when water soaks into the earth and accumulates as ground water. Humans can later pump this water out through wells.

Water in rivers, lakes, and oceans is heated by the sun until it changes into a gas and starts to rise in the air. This process is called evaporation. The water vapor continues to rise until it gets cold enough to form a cloud. This process is called condensation.

When the water droplets become heavy enough, they fall back to earth as rain, snow, sleet, hail, or other forms of precipitation, and the cycle starts all over again. The water cycle affects ecosystems. Depending on the amount of precipitation, different ecosystems are formed.



The amount of water present in an area influences the types of plants that are able to grow there. Therefore, one of the factors that determines what kind of an ecosystem exists in an area is the amount of precipitation the area receives.

# THE WATER CYCLE (cont.)

The riparian ecosystem is found along a stream or river. During winter rains, a large amount of water is collected in the stream. Plants that need a large amount of water can then grow here. Those plants, in turn, provide homes and shade for many animals such as fish, frogs, salamanders and insects. As summer approaches, the stream may be the only source of water for the plants and animals that live nearby. By fall, many parts of the stream may be dry due to evaporation, water soaking into the ground, and use by plants and animals. Those living things that survive during the dry season await the life-giving winter rains.

