THE LIVING WORLD
Western Desert

read

quiz

The Big Picture

ecosystems — *rainforests*

The Living World

cold environments — or — *hot deserts**

Location



Located in the Southwest of the USA

It extends across several states including California, New Mexico and Arizona.

About

The Western Desert extends over 200,000 square kilometres. The Western Desert comprises three deserts, the Sonoran Desert, the Mojave Desert and the Chihuahuan Desert. Population density is low except for major cities such as Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Opportunities

Mineral resources – Many minerals are extracted from the ground including coal, rare elements used in manufacturing, copper (Sonoran desert) and uranium (Grand Canyon).

Energy – In the Sonoran Desert, enough solar energy is being produced to power 100,000 homes. A dam on Lake Mead generates HEP. Oil is extracted in Arizona.

Tourism – Many tourists visit natural attractions such as the Grand Canyon. Lake Mead is popular for water sports. Las Vegas attracts over 31 million visitors every year.

Farming – Most farming is commercial. In the Coachella Valley water is extracted from aquifers to grow crops. Irrigation canals used for large-scale agriculture.

Challenges

Water – Precipitation levels in the Western Desert are very low at around 55mm per year. The Hoover Dam was constructed on the Colorado River for drinking water and irrigation.

Inaccessibility – Access in the Western Desert is limited to major cities such as Chicago and Las Vegas. Major routes such as Route 66 provide links to major urban areas.

Temperature – Temperatures can exceed 49°C in the Western Desert which makes it very challenging to for people, such as farmers, to work outside. High temperatures lead to rapid evaporation and a shortage of water.

Key Terms

Ecotourism – Travel that conserves the environment and benefits locals.

Inaccessibility – Very difficult to travel or impossible to travel to or reach.

Irrigation – Applying controlled amounts of water to crops.

Non-renewable energy – Energy from sources that will run out e.g. oil.

Population density – a measurement of the number of people in an area.

Renewable energy – Energy from sources that will eventually run out e.g. solar.