**Ecology Exam Review:**

**TOPICS: Roles in the ecosystem, food chains and food webs, pyramids, carrying capacity, dynamic equilibrium, biodiversity, ecological succession, and the human impact**

**Ecology-** The study of how living things interact with both each other and their environment

**Ecosystem:**

A ecosystem must consist of BOTH biotic and abiotic factors. An ecosystem considers how both living AND nonliving things interact with each other.

**Biotic vs. Abiotic:**

**Biotic-** Living factors. Examples- Animals, plants, bacteria, fungi

**Abiotic-** NONliving factors. Examples- Sunlight, pH level, soil, water mineral availability, temperature, oxygen, and the atmosphere

**Roles in the Ecosystem:**

Living organisms in an ecosystem play specific roles. An organism may play more than one role in an ecosystem

**Autotroph-** an organism that makes its own chemical energy

**Heterotroph**- an organism that relies on other organisms for chemical energy

**Consumer**- a heterotroph that EATS other organisms

**Decomposer**- a heterotroph that BREAKS DOWN dead organisms

**Producer**- Organisms that make their own food by photosynthesis (PLANTS)

**Herbivore**- Organisms that eat plants (producers) ONLY

**Carnivore-** Organisms that eat meat (other consumers) ONLY

**Predator**- An organism that hunts for prey (food)

**Prey-** an organism that is hunted

**Parasite**- an organism that steals nutrients from a host and causes harm

**Food Chains:**

* Organisms in a food chain show the relationships between organisms in an ecosystem. Food chains show the **transfer of chemical energy throughout an ecosystem.**
* ALL food chains begin with **producers**. Producers (plants) **use energy from the sun to make chemical energy in the form of glucose.**
* ALL producers are eaten by HERBIVORES
* All HERBIVORES are eaten by CARNIVORES

The **arrows** in a food chain represent the **transfer of energy.**



**Food Webs:**

* Organisms can be involved in many different food chains.
* All of the food chains of an ecosystem are connected together in a **food web**.
* Once again, the **arrows** in a food web show the **transfer of chemical energy.**

**Pyramids:**

The organisms in an ecosystem can also be arranged into pyramids.

* The base of every ecological pyramid is made of PRODUCERS/AUTOTROPHS/PLANTS!!!!! **Plants support the entire ecosystem.**
* The second level of the pyramid is always herbivores**. Herbivores rely on the plants for food**. *There must always be more plants than herbivores*, because herbivores rely on plants for food.
* The next levels of the pyramid are some sort of predators or carnivores. **There must be more prey than predators***, because predators rely on prey for food*! **Each level of the pyramid gives energy to the next level.**





* The ecological pyramid also represents the transfer of energy.
* **Each level of the pyramid passes on CHEMICAL energy to the next level.**
* As you move up the pyramid, the amount of energy **DECREASES.**
* At each level of the pyramid, some energy is LOST TO THE ENVIRONMENT as heat.

**Types of Energy:**

**Solar energy**= SUN. Sunlight is used by producers ONLY to make glucose in photosynthesis

**Chemical energy** = FOOD. Chemical energy is transferred through the food chain.

**ATP**= CELLULAR ENERGY. All organisms need ATP. **ATP is NEVER transferred**- it is lost once it is used.

**Carrying Capacity:**



* The **carrying capacity** is the maximum number of a species that can **supported** by an ecosystem.
	+ This means that there is enough food, space, shelter, water, and other resources to support the population.

Once a population reaches carrying capacity, it **STAYS at the carrying capacity**. **REMEMBER**- Once the carrying capacity of a dance club is reached, everyone doesn’t run out. It stays at capacity and no one else comes in.

**Dynamic Equilibirum:**

**Dynamic**= Changing/moving

**Equilibrium**= Balance

A population at carrying capacity will be in a state of **dynamic equilibrium.**

* Dynamic equilibrium is the **homeostasis of the environment** where we see *small, regular changes overtime.*

**Biodiversity:**

**Bio**= Life

**Diversity** = Differences

**Biodiversity** means all of the **different types of life** in an ecosystem- trees, flower, squirrels, insects, bacteria, mushroom, foxes, etc.

* The more types of life there are, the more food chains there are. The more food chains there are, the more connections there are in the food web. The more connections there are in the food web, the **more stable an ecosystem is**.

The **more biodiversity** there is, the **more genetic diversity** there is. Genetic diversity of plants and animals is why we see many different characteristics and traits in nature. The biodiversity of the ecosystem increases the chances that we might find plants with life-saving chemicals.

**Most of our medicines and all of our foods come from nature.** If we remove life, or if we take away biodiversity, we are taking away chances to make discoveries in **medicine** and **agriculture.**

**\*\*WHY IS BIODIVERISTY IMPORTANT?\*\***

1. Biodiversity **increases the stability** of an ecosystem.
2. Biodiversity means **more genetic diversity**. Genetic diversity increases the chances of survival.
3. Biodiversity can lead to **discoveries in medicine.**
4. Biodiversity can lead to **discoveries in agriculture.**

**Ecological Succession:**

The biodiversity of life did not happen overnight. Genetic variation and evolution has created many different kinds of life over millions of years. Stable ecosystems do not form overnight either.

**Stable ecosystems form by ecological succession.**

**Ecological succession** is the **gradual growth** of an ecosystem over a long period of time. Ecological succession is a **sequence of events**. New organisms join the ecosystem in each step of succession, *which allow new organisms to move in over time.* Small plants always join the ecosystem first, which allows small herbivores to move into the ecosystem, and so on.



Overtime, ecosystems changes from **LESS BIODIVERSE** to **MORE BIODIVERE**.

Overtime, ecosystems change from **LESS STABLE** to **MORE STABLE.**



**The Human Impact:**

The human population is growing **exponentially.** As human population increases, we are consuming more and more of the finite resources of earth.

1. **Pollution** is effecting the quality of our atmosphere, soil, and water
	1. The **burning of fossil fuels** that run cars and factories puts a lot of **CO2** into the air, which **destroys the ozone layer** and causes **global warming**
	2. Pollution mixing with our atmosphere and can cause **ACID RAIN**
	3. Humans create a lot of **plastic** and other dangerous materials that cannot be broken down by decomposers
2. **Land Use**
	1. **Deforestation** is the removal of trees from stable ecosystems. **Deforestation decreases biodiversity** and destroys habitats.
	2. Humans use land for farming. The farming of a single crop, such as corn, **depletes the nutrients** in the soil and **decreases biodiversity**.

**Fossil Fuels**

* Water, soil, air, and trees are **renewable** sources of energy. This means that if we are careful, nature can replenish these resources over time.
* Fossil fuels, such as **coal, oil, and natural gas** are **nonrenewable**. There is only a limited amount of these fuels on earth, and once they are used up, they will be **gone forever.**
* Humans are trying to find renewable sources of energy to power our factories, cars, and heat our homes.