

NORTH AMERICA: WESTERN U.S.

Except for Florida, and the few states with oil-driven economies, the West is the fastest-growing part of America. Ever since World War II, there has been a steady population shift from the Northeast and Midwest to the West and the South. The western states, except Washington and Oregon, are deserts that depend on irrigation projects. The West has the nation's most dramatic landscape: the tallest mountains, highest plateaus, deepest canyons, wettest rainforests, and driest deserts. The region is bracketed by the Coast Ranges, Cascades, and Sierra Nevada Mountains on its western edge and the massive Rocky Mountains to the east. Between them lie the high basins and plateaus sometimes referred to as the Intermountain Area, whose flat lands are partially covered by smaller mountain ranges.

ARIZONA_A

Area: 113,950 sq.mi.(295,130 km²). Population: 5,320,000. Capital: Phoenix, 1,390,000. Economy: Electronics, manufacturing, copper, metals, cotton, cattle, tourism. □ Reservoirs, irrigation, and air conditioning have transformed a barren desert into a booming industrial and agricultural economy. Most of the population lives and works in the hotter and drier southern half of the state. Tucson (500,000) and Phoenix are agricultural and industrial centers. Arizona's Hopi, Navajo, and Apache tribes make up the nation's largest Indian population (120,000). Near Phoenix is America's first apartment house, Casa Grande, an 800-year-old, four-story adobe (sun-dried brick) structure. The majestic Grand Canyon is the product of 6 million years of erosion by the Colorado River (with help from rain and snow runoff). The rocks at the bottom of the nearly 1 mile (1.6 km) deep canyon are 2 billion years old.

CALIFORNIA_B

Area: 158,700 sq.mi.(411,033 km²). Population: 34,700,000. Capital: Sacramento, 415,000. Economy: Aircraft, space equipment, electronics, oil, produce, and cotton. □ The manufacturing and agricultural output of the most populous state rank it as the world's sixth largest economy. The mild, Mediterranean climate permits year-round agriculture in the wide, fertile, and irrigated 500 mi.(800 km) Central Valley. California is the leading industrial state as well as producer of fruits, nuts, vegetables, cotton, and flowers. Los Angeles (3,740,000) is sunny, colorful, flat, sprawling, and plagued by smog. It is the nation's second-largest city, the most multi-racial, and the top manufacturing center. The part called Hollywood is the entertainment capital of the world. San Francisco (790,000) is L.A.'s opposite, confined to a small peninsula with breathtaking hills, cable cars, Victorian houses, chilly summer fog, and the Golden Gate Bridge. The fastest-growing cities are San Diego (1,250,000) and San Jose (900,000). California's varied landscape includes a dramatic coastline, snowcapped mountains, fertile valleys, dense forests, and hot deserts. The tallest peak in the 48 states is Mt. Whitney (14,494 ft., 4,418 m). Sixty miles away is Death Valley, the lowest (-282 ft., -86 m) and hottest place in the Western Hemisphere. California's redwoods are the world's tallest trees, the sequoias are the largest, and the 4,000-year-old bristlecone pines are the oldest.

COLORADO_C

Area: 104,200 sq mi.(269,878 km²). Population: 4,500,000. Capital: Denver, 575,000. Economy: Oil, coal, precision manufacturing, minerals, cattle, tourism. □ With an average elevation of 6,800 ft.(2,073 m), Colorado is the highest state. It has over half of the 50 Rocky Mountain peaks taller than 14,000 ft.(4,268 m). The headwaters of the Colorado and Rio Grande Rivers and tributaries of the Missouri originate in these mountains. Manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism have replaced mineral wealth as the basis for the state's expanding economy. Colorado's mountains have enormous deposits of shale oil. Because population centers are on the dry, eastern slopes, water is brought through mountain tunnels in order to tap the greater runoff on the western side of the Great Divide. Denver is the commercial hub, with over 3/4 of the state's population living in its greater metropolitan area. The Air Force Academy is in Colorado Springs; in a nearby mountain is the headquarters of the North American Air Defense Command.

IDAHO_D

Area: 83,560 sq.mi.(216,420 km²). Population: 1,350,000. Capital: Boise, 200,000. Economy: Potatoes, timber, silver, food processing, minerals. □ Scenic beauty abounds in this sparsely populated, mountainous state, whose northern panhandle has been designated a wilderness preserve. Tourists are attracted to the thousands of lakes and streams, caverns, high waterfalls, and steep canyons—Hells Canyon, on the Snake River, is deeper than the Grand Canyon. Most cities and farms are located on the highly irrigated Snake River Plain in the south. Here the nation's largest potato crop is grown and the largest Mormon community, outside of Utah, resides. A huge navigation project along the Snake River has opened a sea route from Idaho to the Pacific Ocean via the Columbia River. Idaho is the leading producer of silver, phosphate rock, and molybdenum (used in hardening steel).

MONTANA_E

Area: 147,260 sq.mi.(381,377 km²). Population: 925,000. Capital: Helena, 25,800. Economy: Oil, coal, minerals, wheat, cattle. □ Montana means "mountain" in Spanish, but 3/5 of the state lies in the eastern high plains where wheat, cattle, and sheep are the dominant industries. The state's most dramatic scenery is at the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park on the Canadian border, where some 60 glaciers are on the move. Most of the earliest white settlers of the state came in search of gold and silver; the smaller cities in this thinly populated state began as Rocky Mountain mining towns.

The largest cities, Billings (90,000) and Great Falls (60,000), are located in the high plains region. Rich in gold, silver, and precious stones, Montana has been called the "Treasure State," but oil has become the major source of revenue. Images of the "cowboy and Indian" past are perpetuated by rodeos and traditional Indian ceremonies.

NEVADA_F

Area: 110,550 sq.mi.(286,325 km²). Population: 2,250,000. Capital: Carson City, 55,000. Economy: Gambling, tourism, gold, minerals, manufacturing. □ The fastest-growing state is also the driest, because the Sierra Nevada Mountains screen out Pacific-bred storms. Nevada is totally dependent on irrigation projects. But there is no shortage of alcohol consumed by millions of visitors lured by gambling, entertainment, liberal divorce and marriage laws, and legalized prostitution. Ghost towns are a reminder of the 19th century rush for gold and silver. Mountain ranges, running north and south, line Nevada's high basin, which averages 5,000 ft.(1,524 m). The U.S. owns 87% of the land and operates test centers for nuclear energy and weaponry.

NEW MEXICO_G

Area: 121,620 sq.mi.(314,996 km²). Population: 1,880,000. Capital: Santa Fe, 63,000. Economy: Oil, natural gas, coal, uranium, electronics, cattle, sheep, tourism. □ This ruggedly beautiful state has a long human history: a stone age civilization, centuries of pueblo (village) dwellers, Spanish occupation, Mexican rule, Confederate occupation, and pre-statehood, U.S. territorial status. Santa Fe, the capital, uses the nation's oldest government building, built by the Spanish in 1609. The city's adobe architecture is unique among American cities. The first road in what is now the U.S. was built in 1581; it ran from Santa Fe to Mexico City. The U.S. government conducts space and nuclear energy operations around Albuquerque (460,000) the state's largest city and manufacturing center. New Mexico has huge uranium deposits. The first atomic bomb was created in Los Alamos and exploded near Alamogordo.

OREGON_H

Area: 97,040 sq.mi.(251,337 km²). Population: 3,525,000. Capital: Salem, 144,000. Economy: Timber products, wheat, food products, electronics. □ Two distinct climates characterize Oregon. West of the towering Cascades, the weather is mild and moist. In this region lie Oregon's vast forests and the fertile Willamette River Valley, with its major cities, industries, and productive farmland. Oregon is the nation's leading timber state. The eastern 2/3 of Oregon consists of a dry plateau subject to wide variations in temperature. Irrigation has made this a productive agricultural area. Portland (550,000), the largest city, is an important port on the Columbia River, which provides much of the Northwest's hydroelectric power. Some of Oregon's scenic attractions are Crater Lake (the country's deepest lake, occupying the crater of an extinct volcano), dramatically steep gorges on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, Pacific beaches with rugged cliffs, and the snow-capped Mt. Hood.

UTAH_I

Area: 84,912 sq.mi.(219,922 km²). Population: 2,350,000. Capital: Salt Lake City, 185,000. Economy: Oil, coal, heavy equipment, electronics, minerals. □ Utah is either desert or mountain. The state's wealth is in mineral deposits. Less than 10% of the land is arable. Most of the population resides on the only fertile land—a narrow strip lying between the Great Salt Lake and the Wasatch Range. The western part of the state, in the Great Basin, is the site of ancient Lake Bonneville. This area holds rock-hard salt flats and the Great Salt Lake, six times saltier than the ocean. Without outlets, fresh water flowing into the lake evaporates, leaving salt residues. The capital, Salt Lake City, is the headquarters of the Mormon Church, whose members make up 70% of the state's population. The city was founded in 1847 by the Mormon leader, Brigham Young. Utah's statehood was delayed by Congress for nearly 50 years until the church banned polygamy; the Mormon birthrate is still twice the national average. Near the Arizona border are two natural wonders: Monument Valley, with its giant red sandstone formations 1,000 ft.(305 m) above the desert floor, and Bryce Canyon, noted for the brilliant colors and bizarre shapes of its huge eroded rock structures.

WASHINGTON_J

Area: 68,190 sq.mi.(176,612 km²). Population: 6,100,000. Capital: Olympia, 43,000. Economy: Timber, aircraft, shipbuilding, fruit, fishing. □ The Puget Sound region contains hundreds of islands, natural harbors, forests, Mt. Rainier, two mountain ranges, and Mt. St. Helens, a volcanic peak that has had several eruptions since 1980. West of Puget Sound are the wet and primitive Olympic Mountains. Seattle (600,000), the largest city, is just one of many Washington locations for the aerospace giant, the Boeing Company. East of the Cascades is a large plateau formed by ancient lava deposits. This arid region has been made into a productive farming area with water and electricity supplied by dams on the Columbia River. Grand Coulee is the largest cement dam in the U.S. Washington grows more apples and hops (used in brewing beer) than any other state.

WYOMING_K

Area: 97,904 sq.mi.(253,571 km²). Population: 500,000. Capital: Cheyenne, 53,500. Economy: Oil, natural gas, coal, uranium, cattle, sheep. □ The ninth-largest state has the fewest people. Sheep and cattle raising are the major industries; herds are still driven by cowboys, many of whom are from Latin America. Despite its "Wild West" reputation, Wyoming is called the "Equality State"; it was the first to grant women the right to vote, to hold public office, and to serve on juries. It even had the first woman governor, who, in 1925, was allowed to finish out her deceased husband's term. Two of America's most beautiful national parks are in Wyoming's Rockies: Yellowstone, the oldest and largest, and Grand Teton. Casper (50,000) is the state's largest city.

