

Hydrologic Cycle

Water is one of the most important natural resources on Earth. Seventy-five percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. Most of the water, however, is sea water. Sea water becomes usable, safe for drinking, and free of harmful salt and minerals through the hydrologic cycle.

The hydrologic cycle begins with the sun. Energy from the sun turns water from the oceans, rivers, and land into water vapor. Air masses move the water vapor over land, where it condenses and becomes precipitation. Rain, sleet, snow, and hail are all forms of precipitation. Some precipitation evaporates while falling toward the earth, while some is intercepted by plants, buildings, and cars and evaporates. Most of the precipitation soaks into the soil and eventually returns to rivers and oceans.

People can survive on 1 gallon of clean water per day for drinking and cooking. Each American uses approximately 1500 gallons of water per day. This number was found by dividing the total water use in the United States by the population in the United States. These numbers are based on 2000 United States Geological Survey and United States Census data, which are the most accurate and up to date available. It is important to remember that water is a natural resource. What we put into our water and how we use the water today will affect the quality and availability of water in the future. Check out NRCS, Conservation and the Water Cycle for more information on the hydrologic cycle at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/factpub/aib326.html>.

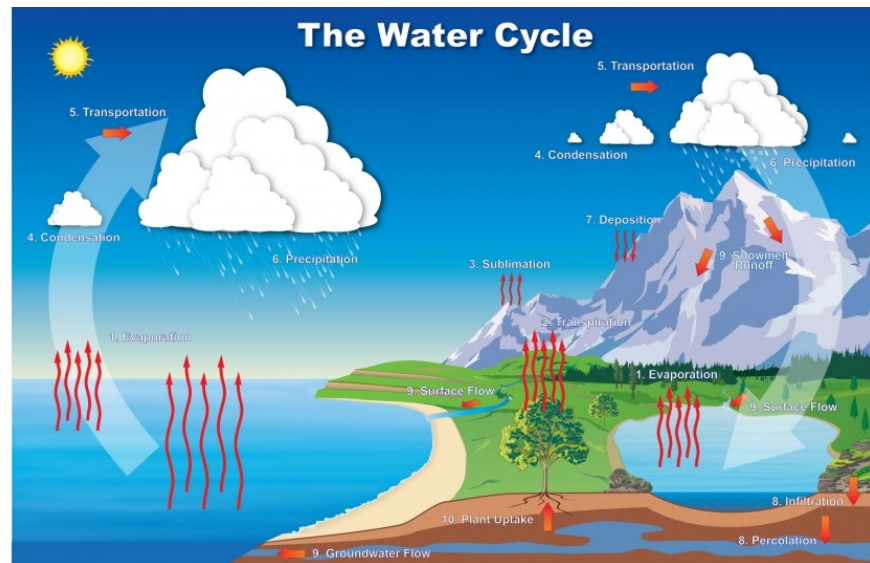


Image credit: Hydrologic Cycle
<http://www.noaa.gov/resource-collections/water-cycle>

U.S. Population

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-PHI-R&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-format=US-9S

U.S. Water Use

<http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/2004/circ1268/htdocs/text-total.html>