

**FOSS Landforms Module
Glossary
2005 Edition**

Aerial photograph: A photograph of the Earth's surface taken from an airplane or spacecraft flying above the Earth. (TG)

Alluvial fan: A fan-shaped landform deposited at the end of a steep canyon where the slope becomes flatter. Fans are usually found in arid regions, like Death Valley. (TG)

Bar scale: A ruler line on a topographic map that shows the scale. (TG)

Base: The bottom of a mountain. (TG)

Basin: A low area in which sediments are often deposited. (TG)

Bench mark: A surveyor's marker usually placed permanently in the ground at a known position and elevation. (TG)

Bird's-eye view: A view of the Earth's surface looking downward from a height. (SS)

Boundary: The limit or border of an area or region. (TG)

Canyon: A V-shaped valley cut by a river or stream. (TG, SS)

Cartographer: A person who makes maps. (TG, SS)

Channel: The course a stream follows; the deepest part of a river, stream, or harbor. (SS, TG)

Compass: An instrument for determining directions by means of a magnetic needle swinging freely, pointing to magnetic north. (SS)

Contour interval: The distance in elevation between contour lines. (TG, SS)

Contour line: A line on a topographic map that connects points of equal elevation. (TG)

Crust: The solid, rocky outer shell of the Earth. (SS)

Dam: A construction or wall across a river that holds back the water flowing through the river, creating a reservoir or lake. (TG)

Delta: A fan-shaped (triangular) deposit of earth materials at a mouth of a stream. (TG)

Deposition: The process by which eroded earth materials settle out in another place. (TG)

Drainage basin: A system of rivers and streams that drains an area like the Colorado Plateau. (TG)

Ecosystem: A community of living things, all the nonliving things that surround it, and the relationships between them. (SS)

Elevation: Vertical distance or height above sea level. (TG, SS)

Erosion: The breakdown and removal of soil and rock by water, wind, or other forces. (TG, SS)

Estuary: The wide, deep tidal mouth of a river where fresh water mixes with sea water. (SS)

Fault: A break in the Earth's crust along which blocks of rock move past each other. (SS)

Fjord: A long, deep, U-shaped valley inlet formed by a glacier and filled with sea water. (SS)

Flash flood: A flood that rises and falls rapidly with little or no advance warning, usually as the result of very heavy rainfall over a relatively small area. Flash floods can be caused by sudden heavy rainfall, dam failure, or the thaw of an ice jam. (TG)

Flood: A very heavy flow of water, which is greater than the normal flow of water and goes over the stream's normal channel. (TG)

Flood plain: Land that is covered by water during a flood, formed from sediments deposited by a river. (SS, TG)

Geologist: A person who studies the Earth and the materials of which it is made. (SS)

Glacier: A large mass or body of moving ice. (TG, SS)

Gorge: A narrow, deep valley with nearly vertical rocky walls. (SS)

Grid: A network of vertical and horizontal lines that form squares. (TG)

Intermittent lake: A lake that contains water only during certain times of the year, such as the rainy season. (TG)

Intermittent stream: A stream that has water flowing in it only during certain times of the year. (TG)

Interpret: To figure out the symbols, textures, colors, and patterns to put together an image of the land covered by a map. (TG)

Key: An explanation of symbols used on a map. (TG)

Landform: A shape or feature of the Earth's surface, like a delta or canyon. (TG)

Legend: A key on a map. A legend gives explanations for the symbols on a map. (SS)

Levee: A natural or artificial wall of earth material along a river or sea that keeps the land from being flooded. Artificial levees are built to control flooding. (SS, TG)

Lock: Part of a canal used to raise or lower boats between bodies of water at different elevations. (SS)

Mantle: The partially molten zone inside the Earth between the crust and the core. (SS)

Map: A representation, usually on a flat surface, of an area or the features of an area. (SS, TG)

Meander: A curve or loop in a river. (TG, SS)

Model: A representation of an object or process. (TG)

Moraine: A mound or ridge of unsorted soil and rock deposited directly by glacial ice. (SS)

Multispectral scanner: A device that senses and records data about light of different wavelengths. (SS)

Peak: The highest point of a mountain. (TG)

Perennial stream: A stream that always has water flowing in it. (TG)

Plateau: A large, nearly level area that has been lifted above the surrounding area. (TG)

Profile: A side view or cross-section of a landform such as a mountain. (TG)

Pueblo: The Spanish word for "town." (SS)

Rapids: Fast-moving water in a river that flows over rocks and other obstructions. (TG, SS)

Representative fraction: Something that tells the scale of a map as a ratio between distance on a map to distance in the real world. (TG)

Ridge: A narrow area of high land between two valleys. (TG)

Riverbank: The high ground on the side of a river. (SS)

Riverbed: The bottom of a river. (SS)

Scale: A ratio, fraction, or graphic ruler that shows the relationship between size on a map and size in the real world. (TG, SS)

Sea level: The average height of the ocean's surface, zero elevation. (TG)

Sediment: Tiny bits of rock, shell, dead plants, or other materials transported and deposited by wind, rain, or ice. (SS, TG)

Slope: The angle or slant of a stream channel or land surface. (TG)

Source: Where something comes from; its beginning. (SS)

Stratovolcano: A volcano made of alternating layers of lava, ash, and other material blown out by explosive activity. (SS)

Structure: Something built by people, like a building. (TG)

Subtropical: Relating to the regions bordering the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. (SS)

Surveyor: A person who gathers information about the sizes, shapes, and positions of land features. (SS, TG)

Symbol: An object or picture that represents something else. (SS, TG)

Tectonic plate: One of the rigid pieces of the Earth's crust. (SS)

Topographic map: A map that uses contour lines to show the shape and elevation of the land. (TG, SS)

Tributary: A stream flowing into another stream or river. (SS)

Uplift: A high area in the Earth's crust, produced by movement that raises the rocks, such as molten rock pushing up from below. (SS)

Valley: A low area between higher areas through which a river or stream often flows. (TG)

Water table: The surface of the zone of rock, soil, or sediments that is saturated by groundwater. (SS)