

Stream Web of Life Cards

Duckweed

We are small, multicelled plants. We grow very fast in quiet pools along the stream edge. Here we may provide shade and cover for tadpoles or juvenile salmon. We provide food for aquatic insects, mallard ducks, and raccoons.

Phytoplankton

We are small, single-celled plants. We cannot run away when zooplankton, salmon, aquatic insects, and snails come to eat us.

Sedges

We are a plant that grows in wet areas along the edge of the stream. Beetles eat our roots. Ruffed grouse and mallard ducks eat our seeds.

Algae

We are small, multicelled, plantlike organisms. We must grow and multiply very fast because so many animals eat us. Some of these animals are aquatic insects, crayfish, tadpoles, and mallard ducks.

Stream Web of Life Cards

Alder

We are trees and shrubs that grow near streams. When we drop branches, they may fall into the stream, adding to the woody debris. We shade the stream in summer. When we drop our leaves into the stream, algae may grow on them or aquatic insects and crayfish may eat them. Ruffed grouse feed on our catkins. Raccoons use us for shelter.

Oak

We are big trees. We may grow in forests and open prairie areas. Mallard ducks, ruffed grouse, raccoons, and humans use our acorns. Land insects such as grasshoppers and beetles may be found on our leaves. The osprey may rest on our branches while eating a salmon. The leftover salmon parts fall to the ground and become fertilizer for us.

Stonefly larvae

We live on or under rocks or stones in the stream. That is where our name comes from. Some of us eat plants. Others of us eat small insects and zooplankton. Fish like to eat us. We also are eaten by raccoons and mallard ducks.

Zooplankton

We are tiny animals that are eaten by many aquatic insect larvae, juvenile salmon, and other small swimmers. We need nutrients from phytoplankton, rotting leaves, and animals.

Stream Web of Life Cards

Snails

When we spot a water strider, beetle, salmon, or raccoon, we just pull our foot into our shells. Then we hope we don't get eaten. Our eyes and mouth are on our foot. Pretty odd? Nope! The phytoplankton and algae we eat grow where we crawl.

Caddisfly larvae

We build little homes around our soft bodies from tiny pieces of gravel or pieces of leaves and twigs. We eat plants and leaves that drop into the stream. We try to hide from mallard ducks, crayfish, and raccoons.

Beetle

I hide under leaves or swim fast to keep from being eaten by frogs or salmon. I just want to eat my mayfly larvae and greens.

Mayfly larvae

We eat zooplankton and plants. Many animals eat us, including stoneflies, beetle larvae, salmon, and mallard ducks.

Juvenile salmon

Once we come out of our gravel nest we are very hungry. We need to eat a lot of food to grow. As we get bigger, we eat bigger food. We eat both plants and animals, including phytoplankton and everything from zooplankton to beetles. There are many of us, because we are eaten by mallard ducks, raccoons, osprey, belted kingfishers, great blue herons, and otters.

Grasshoppers

Sometimes we come to the stream in search of water, but mostly we get water from the tree and grass leaves we eat. Ruffed grouse, raccoons, and frogs will eat us if we don't hop fast enough!

Crayfish

We are the stream sanitation department. We clean up anything dead, often using the body of a dead animal for a temporary home. We also eat algae, caddisfly larvae, and worms. Raccoons, otters, and some people consider us a delicacy.

Tadpoles

We are vegetarians, eating only plants and producers such as phytoplankton and algae. When I grow up, I will be carnivorous, eating other animals just like my parents do, who are frogs. Very few of my hundreds of brothers and sisters will survive to have their own eggs, because so many animals like to eat us. We must watch out for raccoons, otters, great blue herons, and belted kingfishers.

Stream Web of Life Cards

Mallard duck

We live near the stream and on the water. We eat sedge, acorns, and duckweed. We also eat aquatic insects, fish eggs, tadpoles, small frogs, and fish. We even will scavenge on dead salmon. We have many ducklings each Spring, because so many are eaten by great blue herons and otters.

Ruffed grouse

We are forest-loving birds. We like to eat grasshoppers, beetles, berries, sedge seeds, acorns, alder leaves and catkins, wild grape, and woody plants. Very few animals eat us once we are adults. Our chicks may be eaten by raccoons.

Frog

We are mainly carnivorous animals. As you see in cartoons, we love to eat insects. We also enjoy snails and small crayfish. When feeding along the edge of the stream, we have to watch out for mallard ducks, otters, raccoons, and great blue herons.

Osprey

We are called “fish hawks” because our main diet is fish. We also may eat snakes, frogs, and ducklings. We need large trees to roost in and to build safe nests for our young.

Stream Web of Life Cards

Raccoon

I just love water! Clean, clear water where I can catch my food and wash it, too! I am not afraid of any other stream animals. I like to eat duckweed, acorns, grasshoppers, caddisfly larvae, stonefly larvae, snails, frogs, fish, crayfish, and small creatures found in the water and mud along the shore.

Otter

I would rather play than eat. I play every chance I get—even with my food! I like to eat crayfish, fish, beetles, and frogs.

Great blue heron

I can see a frog hiding in the cattails, and I sneak up on him with my big, wide feet. If the frog gets away, I'll poke in the mud with my long bill to find crayfish or snap at a young salmon. I also enjoy snakes and grasshoppers.

Belted kingfisher

Our loud cry can sound like a crazy laugh as we swoop over the stream. We eat any small swimmers we can catch: crayfish, frogs, small snakes, beetles, and even young birds. We nest in a burrow that is 3 to 7 feet deep in soft soil on banks or cliffs.

Habitat component

Sun

Habitat component

Woody debris

Large branches, logs, and logjams provide shade and create deep pools of cool water.

Habitat component

Water quality

Consistent water temperatures and high oxygen levels are important to the stream. Plants growing on the stream banks shade the water. This helps to keep it cool. Woody debris and boulders help mix oxygen into the water.

Habitat component

Riffles, runs, gravel

Boulders and cobbles create riffles where aquatic insects live. Each type of salmon likes different types and sizes of gravel in a streambed.

Stream Web of Life Cards

Habitat component

Silt

Habitat component

Salmon carcass