**Columbia Plateau**

**Physical Features**

The largest of Washington’s regions, the Columbia Plateau occupies nearly one-third of the state. Native grasslands, sagebrush, shrubs, and small trees are scattered across the Columbia Plateau region. Isolated mountain ranges are found in this region, including the Blue Mountains. Millions of years ago, vast lava flows covered the region in basalt, leaving behind one of the largest lava plateaus in the world. Ice Age floods cut coulees into the basalt of the scablands.

**Climate and Natural Resources** 

The Columbia Plateau, also referred to as “Dry Falls”, is one of the driest regions in the world. The summers are hot and dry. In fact, drought and fire are not uncommon in this dry land. Winters in this region are cold and gray. Most precipitation occurs between late fall and early spring. Annual average precipitation ranges from six inches to 25 inches. While snow falls in the Columbia Plateau, it rarely lasts long before melting. The region has large rivers, rich with salmon. The fertile soil of the Columbia Plateau provides the basis for the region’s agriculture. Waterways, including rivers and lakes, teem with a variety of fish. In addition to the Columbia River, two other great rivers that dominate this dry landscape are the Snake and the Yakima. In the summer, livestock graze on the abundant hay, and grains on the slopes of the mountains. 

**Industry**

The Columbia Plateau contains some of the most productive and fertile agricultural regions in the world. River water is irrigated to bring water to the farms. This valuable farmland produces legumes, wheat, and other grains. With several powerful rivers in this region, dams and hydroelectricity have helped build the Northwest’s economy.

**Native American Tribes** 

The Plateau tribes moved into what is now Washington as the glaciers began to melt more than 20,000 years ago. These Native American tribes lived in small villages near streams and rivers. They depended on salmon for food. They also used horses for hunting and gathering wild plants and roots for food. The Nez Perce, which means “pierced nose” in French, were one of the largest of the Plateau Tribes. The Yakama and Palouse tribes also settled in the Columbia Plateau. The Native Americans in this region still hold many cultural events throughout the year, such as powwows and potlatch ceremonies to celebrate good fortune.



**Major Cities and Landmarks**

The Columbia River bisects the Columbia Plateau region and is home to the Grand Coulee Dam, which produces more hydroelectric power than anywhere else in the United States. Spokane is the largest city in the Columbia Plateau region. Other major cities in this region are Yakima, Walla Walla, Pullman and the Tri Cities: Pasco, Richland, Kennewick.

