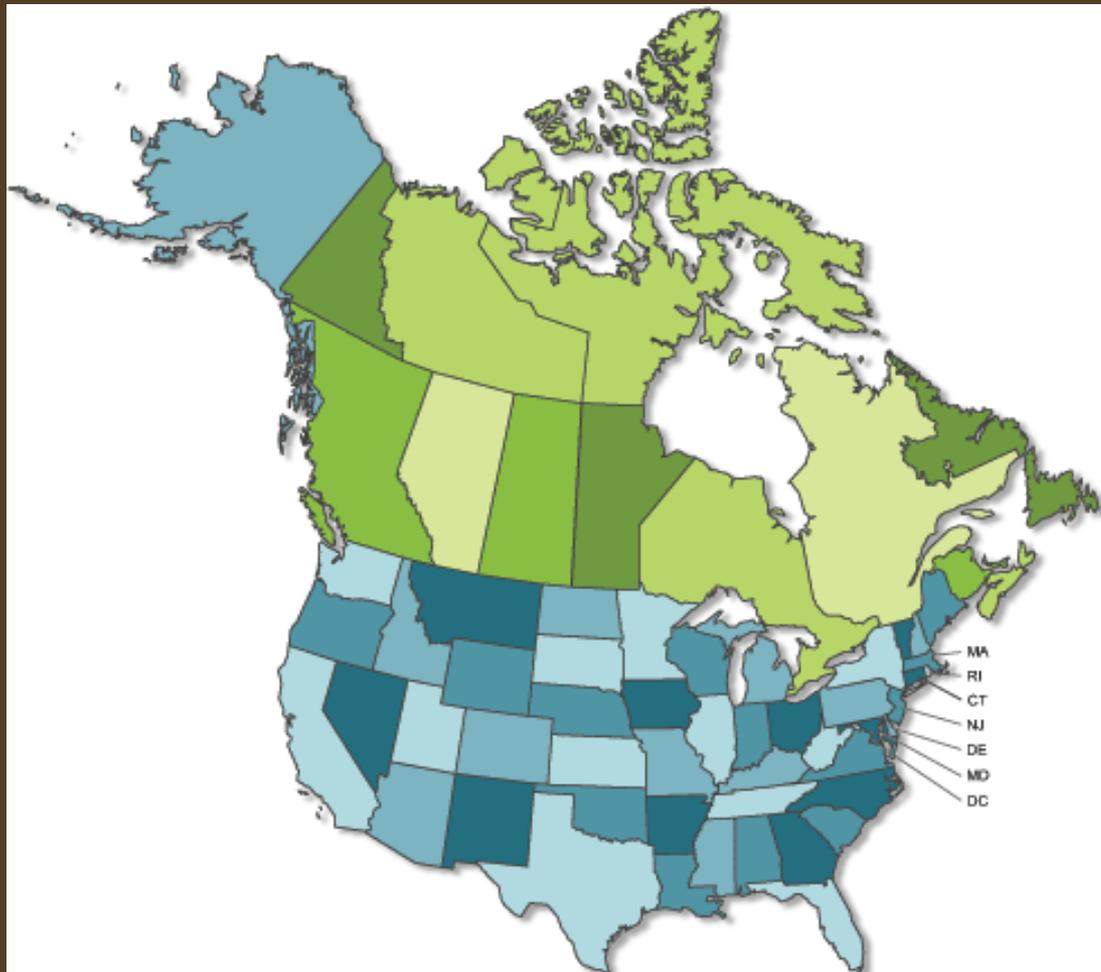


The Physical Features of NORTH AMERICA



**Canada and the United States
make up the region that covers
most of North America.**



This region is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west.



The Arctic Ocean lies to the north of this region.



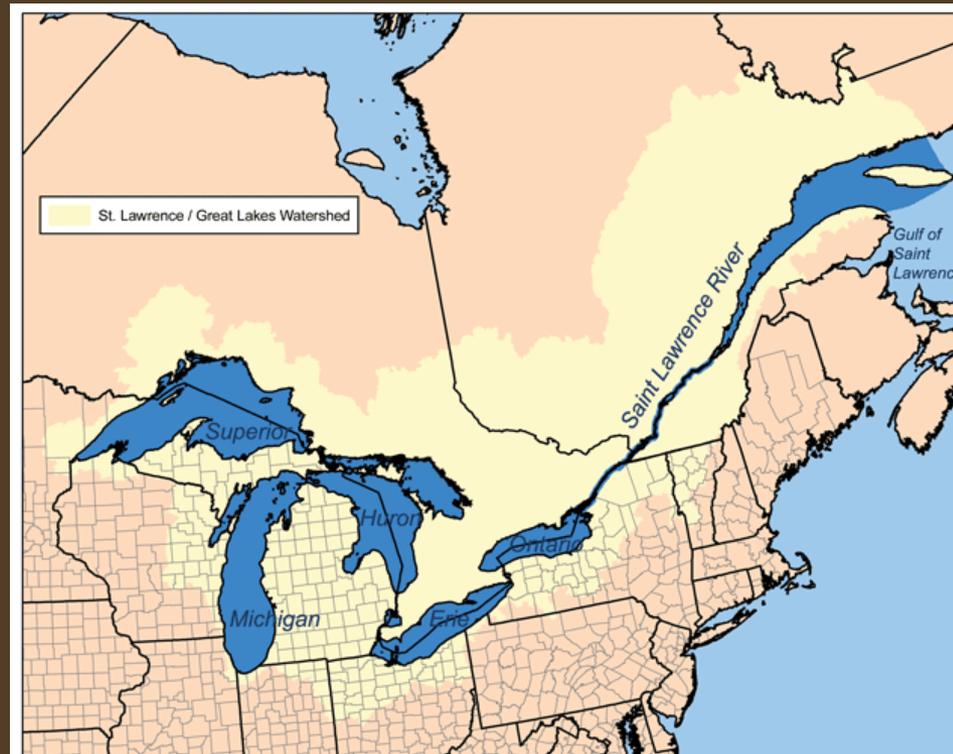
The Gulf of Mexico lies to the south. North America is the third largest continent in the world.



This large region contains two sub-regions, Canada and Alaska make up the northern part. The 48 continental United States makes up the southern part.



West of the Great lakes, the two sub-regions are separated by the 49th parallel of latitude. East of the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River separates the two sub-regions.



If you look at the physical map of this region, you see mountains running along both sides with a large, flat area in the center. This flat area runs from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. It is made up of shield and plains.



The term **shield** refers to the large core of very old rock that lies at the base of each continent.



In North America, this rock core was exposed thousands of years ago. During the ice ages, **glaciers** scraped across the land, taking the soil with them. They left just a thin layer of soil in eastern and central Canada.



Plains are flat or gently rolling areas of land. Much of the soil that glaciers scraped from the Canadian Shield ended up on the plains of Canada and the United States.



The glaciers that scraped the shield also dug hug holes that became the **Great Lakes**.



These lakes lie between Canada and the United States. They are the world's largest group of **freshwater** lakes. The St. Lawrence River connects the Great Lakes to the ocean.



To the far north are many smaller lakes and Hudson Bay. The region extends past the Arctic Circle and ends with a scattering of islands.



In the Atlantic Ocean, off the southeast coast of Newfoundland, lie the Grand Banks. The ocean is very shallow here.



**Far to the west, in the Alaska Range,
is the highest peak in North
America. Mount McKinley rises
20,320 feet above sea level.**



Two major mountain ranges run through the continental United States. In the east, the Appalachians are a gentle range of rounded peaks and deep valleys.



In the west, the Rocky Mountains jut up into jagged, snowcapped peaks. The Rockies reach all the way from Alaska to New Mexico.



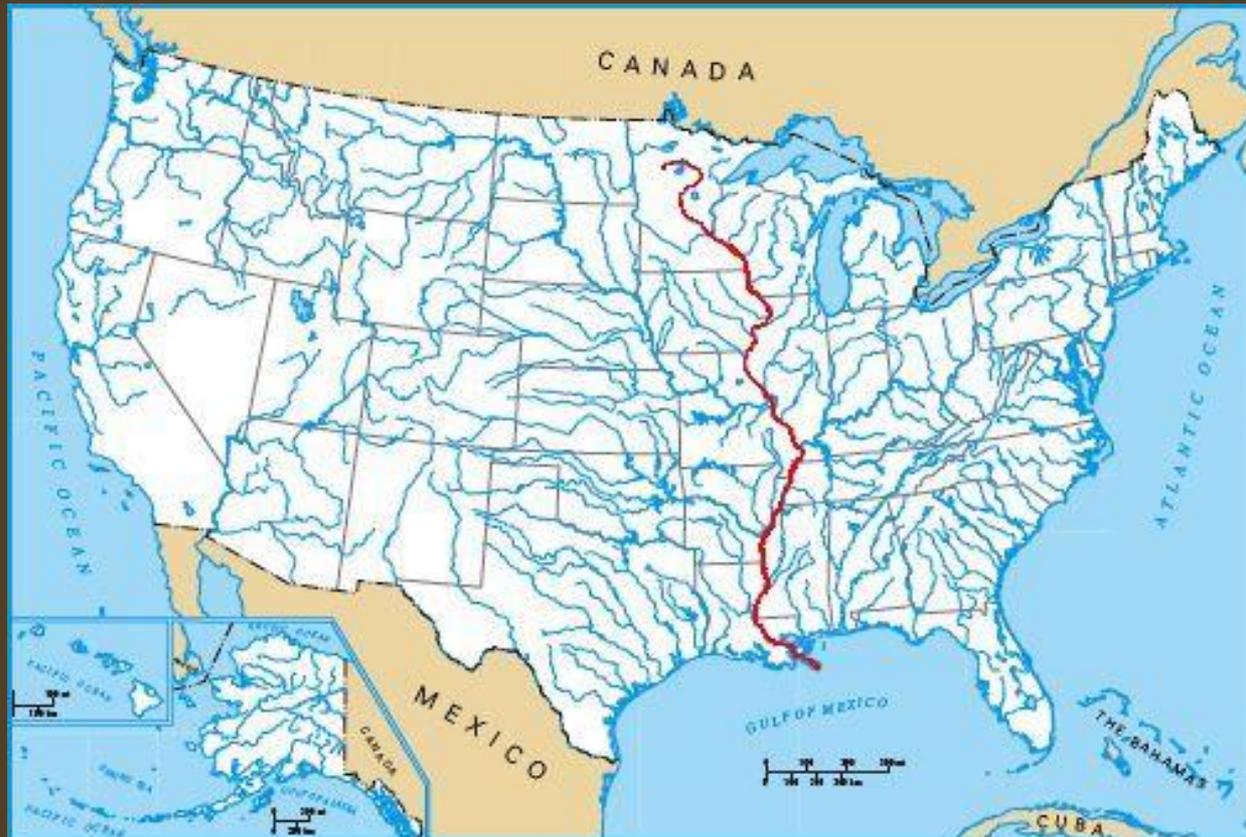
Between these two ranges, wide plains stretch across the middle of the continent.



This vast, mostly flat region extends about 2,500 miles north and south. From the Rockies, the dry and treeless Great Plains slope down to the central lowlands.



A large system of rivers drains most of the plains between the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians.



These rivers all flow into the muddy Mississippi River. The Mississippi empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

