

Glossary

AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

B

barrier island a long ridge of sand or narrow island that lies parallel to the shore

benthic zone the region near the bottom of a pond, lake, or ocean

benthos the organisms that live at the bottom of the sea or ocean

C

coral reef a limestone ridge found in tropical climates and composed of coral fragments that are deposited around organic remains

E

estuary an area where fresh water from rivers mixes with salt water from the ocean; the part of a river where the tides meet the river current

eutrophication an increase in the amount of nutrients, such as nitrates, in a marine or aquatic ecosystem

L

littoral zone a shallow zone in a freshwater habitat where light reaches the bottom and nurtures plants

M

mangrove swamp a tropical or subtropical marine swamp that is characterized by the abundance of low to tall trees, especially mangrove trees

N

nekton all organisms that swim actively in open water, independent of currents

P

plankton the mass of mostly microscopic organisms that float or drift freely in the waters of aquatic (freshwater and marine) environments

S

salinity a measure of the amount of dissolved salts in a given amount of liquid

salt marsh a maritime habitat characterized by grasses, sedges, and other plants that have adapted to continual, periodic flooding; salt marshes are found primarily throughout the temperate and subarctic regions

W

wetland an area of land that is periodically underwater or whose soil contains a great deal of moisture