Nevada is located in the Great Basin, an area in which all rivers and streams drain into interior basins rather than the ocean. The Great Basin is roughly centered on the junction of Nevada, Utah, Idaho, and Oregon. The Great Basin, which is a high-elevation desert basin, consists of alternating north-south mountain ranges and low-elevation valleys. Nevada’s highest peak, the 13,141-foot Mount Charleston in the Spring Mountains of southern Nevada, is only 100 miles from the Nevada-Oregon border. The Great Basin is characterized by a high-elevation desert climate, in which cool, moist air from the Pacific Ocean meets the Sierra Nevada mountain range on the California-Nevada border, and then descends into the interior basin, leading to large temperature variations. The vegetation of the Great Basin is dominated by sagebrush in low elevation valleys, pinyon-juniper woodlands at middle elevations, aspen-fir forests at high elevations, and alpine environments at the highest elevations. The southernmost portion of Nevada falls in the Mojave Desert, a hot and arid region that receives only 4 inches of precipitation on average per year. Consequently, the vegetation of the Mojave Desert is composed of drought-resistant shrublands such as creosotebush and saltbush. The northernmost region of Nevada lies in the Columbia Plateau, a region that receives more precipitation and experiences milder temperatures on average than the Great Basin. The dominant vegetation of the Columbia Plateau is a mosaic of sagebrush and perennial bunchgrasses known as sagebrush steppe. This state topography map and other geospatial data for Nevada can be found online at: http://www.epa.gov/nerlesd1/land-sci/gap.htm

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