



Physical Geography

California is the third largest state (by land area) after Alaska and Texas. Within that area we can find diverse features including mountain ranges, rivers, broad valleys, deep canyons, deserts, and coastal bays and beaches.

The Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys fill up the middle of California and together make up the Central Valley. Near the border with Mexico is the Imperial Valley. The flat land, rich soil, and water sources in those valleys makes it some of the most productive **agricultural land** in the world. The Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers join together to form the California Delta and then flow west into the San Francisco Bay. This is the only place where water from the Sierra Nevada Mountains reaches the ocean.

East of the Great Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada stretches 400 miles from the northern **volcanoes** of Mt. Shasta and Mt. Lassen to the Tehachapi Mountains in the south. The winter **snowpack** here provides an important water source for crops and cities in many areas of the state. Mountains along the coastline north of Point Conception are called the Coast Ranges, and shorelines in this area tend to be rocky with only small beaches. In Southern California, cities like Los Angeles and San Diego are on a coastal plain where it is more likely to find large, sandy beaches. The narrow strip of coastal land is separated from the Mojave Desert by the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains, and from the Imperial Valley by the Peninsular Ranges.