Rainforests of Oregon Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 353 | Lexile 850

Along Oregon's coast and lower valleys, temperate rainforests thrive where ocean storms meet mild air. These forests receive more than six feet of precipitation in many places, spread across long seasons of drizzle. Winters are cool rather than bitter, and summers are cloudy enough that soil stays moist beneath towering trees. The result is a living skyline of Sitka spruce, western hemlock, Douglas-fir, and red alder.

Rain is only part of the water story. Fog drifting in from the Pacific clings to branches and epiphytes, then drips to the ground like a slow second shower. Fog drip—the moisture that condenses on needles and moss—can equal several inches of rain each summer. Streams fed by this steady supply run cold and clear, sheltering young salmon and trout in gravel beds shaded by overhanging roots and ferns.

Old-growth stands are famous for structure. A layered canopy lets different plants share light. Fallen "nurse logs" rot slowly, holding water like sponges and sprouting new trees along their backs. Sword ferns spread in green fans, while banana slugs recycle leaf litter into nutrients. This maze of branches, cavities, and downed wood creates homes for species such as the marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and Pacific wren.

Disturbance shapes these forests, but fire is less common here than in drier parts of Oregon. Windstorms blow gaps in the canopy; landslides rearrange slopes after heavy rain. Decay returns minerals to the soil, and the enormous biomass stores carbon for decades. When logs jam a stream, pools deepen, creating cool refuges for fish during warm spells.

People depend on these rainforests, too. Logging built towns, and today many tracts are managed as working forests. Careful strategies—such as leaving streamside buffers, retaining snags, and harvesting selectively—aim to protect water quality and wildlife while providing wood. Restoration crews plant native trees, remove fish-blocking culverts, and partner with tribes and local groups. Managing Oregon's rainforests means balancing timber, salmon, recreation, and climate benefits over the long term.

1. **Which statement best expresses the central idea of the passage?**
   A. Oregon's temperate rainforests are shaped by abundant moisture and complex habitats, and people manage them to balance ecology and human needs.
   B. Oregon's forests are dry most of the year and burn frequently.
   C. Only old, untouched forests can support wildlife.
   D. Rainforests exist in Oregon only because of salmon.

2. **Which factor supplies water to these forests in addition to rainfall?**
   A. Groundwater pumped to tree tops
   B. Fog that condenses on needles and moss and drips to the ground
   C. Snowmelt from high desert plateaus
   D. Artificial irrigation systems

3. **Which feature of old-growth forests most directly supports new tree growth?**
   A. Frequent surface fires
   B. A single, uniform canopy height
   C. Nurse logs that hold water and nutrients for seedlings
   D. Lack of downed wood

4. **How are salmon and forests connected as described in the passage?**
   A. Salmon remove fog, which dries the forest.
   B. Forests depend on salmon for all their nutrients.
   C. Trees grow only where salmon spawn.
   D. Shaded, cool streams aid salmon, and logjams create pools that shelter fish.

5. **Which management practice is presented as helping protect habitat while allowing harvest?**
   A. Leaving streamside buffers and retaining snags
   B. Clear-cutting to remove all shade
   C. Draining wetlands to speed tree growth
   D. Removing downed logs from streams

6. **Why are wildfires generally less common in these rainforests than in drier regions of Oregon?**
   A. There is no vegetation to burn.
   B. Firefighters live in every stand of trees.
   C. Cool, moist conditions and frequent storms limit ignition and spread.
   D. Laws prevent lightning from striking the coast.

7. **Select ALL features from the passage that increase biodiversity in Oregon's rainforests.**
   ☐ A multilayered canopy
   ☐ Removing all moss and epiphytes
   ☐ Downed wood such as nurse logs and logjams
   ☐ Streamside shade that helps fish

Answer Sheet

1. **A** – Oregon’s temperate rainforests are shaped by moisture, structure, and human management.

2. **B** – Fog drip adds significant water beyond rainfall.

3. **C** – Nurse logs provide moisture and nutrients for seedlings.

4. **D** – Shaded, cool streams and logjams create fish habitat.

5. **A** – Streamside buffers and snags protect ecosystems during logging.

6. **C** – Moist, cool conditions make fire rare.

7. **A, C, D** – Multilayered canopy, downed wood, and shaded streams all enhance biodiversity.
