

## Ecology Lecture Final

### Chapter 18: Community Structure

#### Concepts:

1. Communities can have distinct or gradual boundaries.
2. The diversity of a community incorporates both the number and relative abundance of species.
3. Species diversity is affected by resources, habitat diversity, keystone species, and disturbance.
4. Communities are organized into food webs.
5. Communities respond to disturbances with resistance, resilience, or switching among alternative stable states.

#### Communities and boundaries

- A community is an assemblage of species living together in an area.
- Species composition changes across a landscape; with changes in environmental conditions, some species are better able to survive.
- The zone in which each species grows reflects different tolerance ranges for various environmental conditions, and the ability to compete with other species.
- Community zonation also occurs in aquatic communities.



#### Categorizing communities

- Communities are often categorized by their dominant organisms or by physical conditions that affect the distribution of species.
- Examples: Beech-maple forest communities of Ontario are dominated by beech and maple; sagebrush communities of Wyoming are dominated by sagebrush.
- Aquatic systems are often categorized by physical characteristics (e.g., stream or lake communities) or by dominant organisms (e.g., coral reef communities).
- Ecologists rarely study every species in a community; rather, they focus on a subset of species that live in an area.

#### Ecotones

- Ecotone: a boundary created by sharp changes in environmental conditions over a relatively short distance, accompanied by a major change in the composition of species.
- Example: Ecotones exist where a forest community and a field community come together.
- Some species move between adjacent communities; most species live in one of the communities and spread into the ecotone.
- Ecotones support a large number of species, including those from adjoining habitats, and species specifically adapted to the ecotone.
- Line-transect surveys can demonstrate the existence of an ecotone.
- Sharp changes in the distribution of species should occur across the ecotone.
- Example: Serpentine soils are low in nutrients and contain heavy metals that are toxic to many plants.
- In southern Oregon, researchers conducted a line-transect survey spanning serpentine and non-serpentine soils.
- Some species were restricted to one soil type; the highest number of species occurred within the ecotone.

#### Interdependence vs. independence

- Interdependent communities: communities in which species depend on each other to exist.
- Independent communities: communities in which species do not depend on each other to exist.
- Plant biologist Frederic Clements proposed that most communities are interdependent and act as superorganisms.

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**R Barnett**



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