Flowing rivers deposit sediment onto floodplains.

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Flowing rivers help people to move goods from one place to another.

Flowing rivers can generate electricity.

Flowing rivers carry water that can be used to irrigate crops.

Flowing rivers provide habitats for many species of plants and animals.

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Flowing rivers are places for fun, inspiration, and recreation.

Flowing rivers carry water that can be used for drinking and bathing.

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Rushing River (Habitat 1):

The clear, fast-flowing water of a rushing river is constantly mixing with the air. This is important for many of the aquatic animals that live here. These include baby caddisflies and stoneflies. Trout like to swim in the cold, flowing water. Salmon lay their eggs in the open gravel, where the eggs get lots of oxygen. Many of California's animals depend on fast-flowing rivers as a home and source of food.

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Freshwater Marsh (Habitat 2):

The still waters of a freshwater marsh provide a perfect home for many kinds of animals and plants. While visiting a freshwater marsh in California, you might hear the beautiful song of a red-winged blackbird. These birds like to sing while sitting on top of the long stalks of cattails or tule reeds. Another sound you might hear is the call of frogs. The birds and frogs like to eat the many insects that live near the water, such as dragonflies and mosquitoes.

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Woodland (Habitat 3):

Trees like willows and cottonwoods grow along the banks of California's rivers. The trees provide homes for many different kinds of birds and mammals. Raccoons forage for insects and shellfish in the river. Foxes, skunks, and opossums look for food near the water. Muskrats dig dens along the riverbanks where tree roots hold the soil together. Dippers build nests on riverbanks. The dipper is a bird that fishes for insects along flowing streams. It can even swim underwater. This ecosystem depends on the steady flow of clean, fast-moving water to stay healthy.

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Delta (Habitat 4):

The slow-moving water of a delta is dark and muddy. In California deltas, many kinds of animals live in the muck. These animals include baby midges and dragonfly larvae. Many fish, such as sturgeon live in deep water. Turtles and frogs live along the water's edge, where birds, such as great blue herons, hunt for them and other tasty creatures. Animals here depend on the river to provide a home and food.

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Estuary (Habitat 5):

The plants and animals that live in California's estuaries can tolerate both fresh and salty water. Pickleweed gathers salt in its fat stems. Salt grass has glands that secrete salt onto the surface of its leaves. Crabs, fish, and insects live in the brackish water. One common insect is the rat-tailed maggot. This is the larval stage of a fly that looks similar to a honeybee. Mammals, such as the salt marsh harvest mouse and birds, such as the clapper rail live here. Animals and plants here depend on the river to provide the correct mix of fresh and salt water for them to survive.

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Coast (Habitat 6):

Several important animals that live in the coastal waters off California spend part of their lives in rivers. These animals include salmon and steelhead trout. They also include a long eel-like fish called a lamprey. Lampreys live up to seven years in a river before going out to sea. They grow up in a pool made by their parents. The water of rivers carries nutrients to many of the habitats located along the coast. Where rivers meet the sea, populations of plankton and diatoms can increase. These form the basis of ocean food chains.

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