The Water Cycle

Our water comes from the ocean, as shown on figure 1, and returns to the ocean in a never-ending cycle. Water evaporates from the ocean and becomes vapor in the air. Carried overland by winds, it condenses and falls as rain or snow, part of which is absorbed by soil, part evaporated, and part used by trees and plants. The remainder returns to the ocean through streams that drain the land. During its journey, water modifies the face of the earth by erosion and other processes. The cycle moves at a varying pace (sometimes there is drought, occasionally flood), but move it does and thus replenishes the supply for land and people.

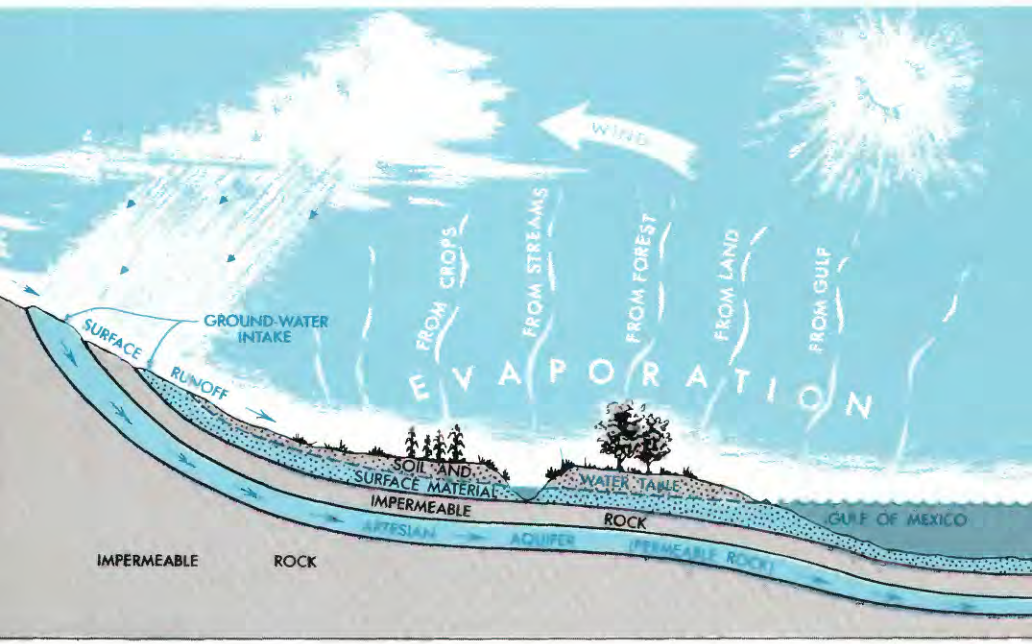

FIGURE 1.—Water, a renewable resource. Moisture from the Gulf of Mexico is carried by winds over the land and falls as rain. Part is absorbed by the ground, part is used by vegetation, part again evaporates, and part runs back to the Gulf in streams.