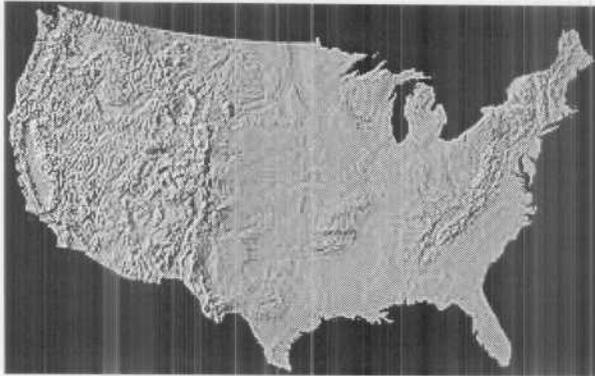




GEOLOGIC PROVINCES OF THE UNITED STATES



*Digital shaded relief map of the United States.
[Click here to enlarge \(35 MB\).](#)*

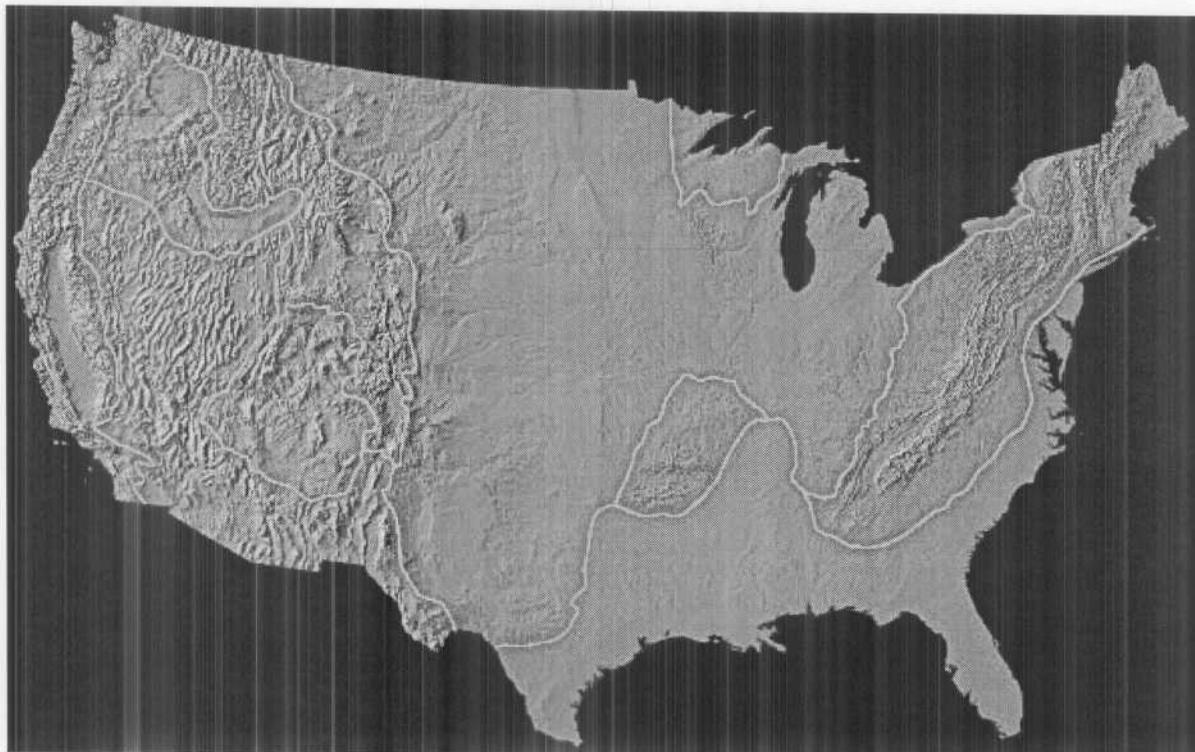
Records of an active Earth

The richly textured landscape of the United States is a product of the dueling forces of plate tectonics, weathering and erosion. Over the 4.5 billion-year history of our Earth, tectonic upheavals and colliding plates have raised great mountain ranges while the forces of erosion and weathering worked to tear them down. Even after many millions of years, records of Earth's great upheavals remain imprinted as textural variations and surface patterns that define distinctive landscapes or provinces.

The diversity of our nation's landscapes can be easily seen on the shaded relief image to the left. The stark contrast between the 'rough' texture of the western US relative to the 'smooth' central and eastern regions. Differences in roughness (topographic relief) result from a variety of processes acting on the underlying rock. As you might guess, the plate tectonic history of a region strongly influences the rock type and structure exposed at the surface, but differences in rates of weathering and erosion that accompany changing climates have a profound impact on the land too. If you spend a moment observing the map above you will probably be able to distinguish the boundaries between several geologic provinces test your observational skills).

Each province has its own fascinating geologic history and unique features. Our National Parks preserve some of them most scenic elements of our country's rich geological heritage. We invite you to explore them with us by clicking on the map or links below.

Move mouse over region to view province names, click region to go!



[| Geomorphic province home](#) | [Geologic time](#) | [Plate tectonics](#) |

[| Pacific Mountain System](#) | [Columbia Plateau](#) | [Basin and Range](#) |
[| Colorado Plateau](#) | [Rocky Mountain System](#) | [Laurentian Upland](#) | [Interior Plains](#) |
[| Interior Highlands](#) | [Appalachian Highlands](#) | [Atlantic Plain](#) |
[| List of parks by province or plate tectonic setting](#) |

[| USGS Geology in the Parks home](#) | [NPS Park Geology Tour home](#) |

This site is a cooperative endeavor of the
[US Geological Survey Western Earth Surface Processes Team](#)
and the [National Park Service](#).

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