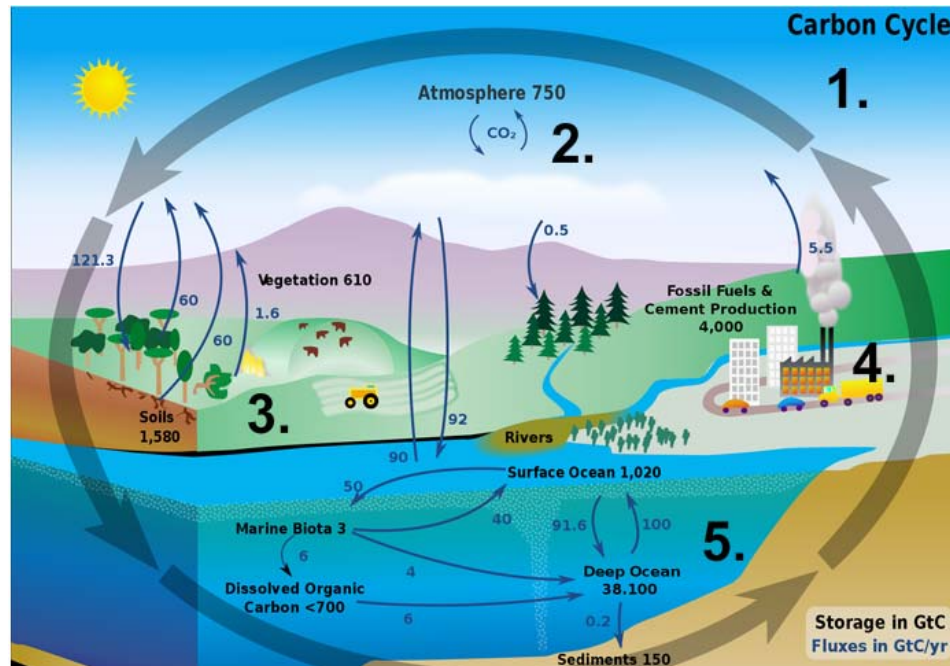


Interactive: The Carbon Cycle



Label	Description
1	The carbon cycle describes how carbon moves between air, water, and land on Earth. Carbon is recycled throughout Earth and all of its living organisms. Like the water cycle, the carbon cycle really has no beginning or end; it is simply a cycling of carbon through various materials.
2	Most carbon in the atmosphere exists as carbon dioxide gas. Carbon enters the atmosphere through plant and animal respiration—it is what you breathe out with every breath. It also enters the atmosphere through the burning of carbon-bearing fuels, like wood and fossil fuels; through the decay of plant and animal material; and through the production of cement.
3	Carbon is an essential part of all living things and is found in all plant and animal materials. Plants remove carbon from the atmosphere and use it for photosynthesis; they later return it to the atmosphere when they die and decay. Thus, carbon is moved from the atmosphere to the bodies of plants by photosynthesis. It is moved to the bodies of animals when they eat plants or other animals that have eaten plants.
4	After plants and animals die, their bodies decay and release some carbon back to the atmosphere. But some of the decaying material may be buried deep underground for millions of years and turn into fossil fuels. The carbon in these materials moves back to the atmosphere when humans extract and burn fossil fuels.
5	The oceans also store and move large amounts of carbon. The shells of many marine organisms contain carbon. When those organisms die, the carbon becomes a part of the sediment that underlies the oceans. The oceans also soak up some carbon from the atmosphere and hold it as dissolved carbon. Near the ocean surface, some of this dissolved carbon moves back into the atmosphere.