Science at the Cienega
Vocabulary

**abiotic factors** – The non-living physical and chemical conditions (such as temperature, moisture, climate, etc.) in an environment.

**abundance** - The total or relative amount of something.

**adaptation** – A physical or behavioral characteristic that helps an organism survive in its environment.

**benthic macroinvertebrate** – A bottom dwelling, aquatic organism without a backbone, which can be seen with the naked eye.

**biodiversity** – The number of different types of organisms living in a location. Biodiversity is short for biological diversity.

**biotic factors** – The living components (plants and animals) in an environment.

**cienega** – The Spanish word for a wet, marshy area that is spring fed (a wetland).

**climate change** - A pattern of change affecting global or regional climate, as measured by such things as average temperature and rainfall, or a change in frequency of extreme weather conditions.

**density** – A measure of the amount of something in a given area.

**diversity** – The number of different kinds of something. A range of different things. Variety.

**drought** - A prolonged period of unusually low precipitation. A shortage of water usually results from this.

**ecology** – The study of the interactions of organisms with each other and their environment.

**ecosystem** – A community of living organisms (biotic factors) interacting with each other and their physical environment (abiotic factors).

**food chain** – The connection between organisms based on their energy relationships with each other. The hierarchy of who eats whom.

**habitat** – An area that includes all the necessities for an organism’s survival. For animals this includes food, water and shelter in a suitable arrangement.

**indicator** – A measure, trend, or fact that provides information about the state or level of something.
**larvae** - An immature form of an insect or other animal that undergo some metamorphosis to become an adult. (note: larvae is plural, larva is singular)

**life cycle** – The stages of development that an organism goes through from egg (or seed) to adult and death.

**macroinvertebrate** – An organism without a backbone which can be seen with the naked eye.

**phenology** - The study of recurring plant and animal life cycle stages (such as leafing out, flowering, migration, etc.).

**pollutant** – Anything that alters an environment, making it less suitable for certain uses including survival of some biological organisms

**preserve** – To maintain something in its original or existing state.

**quadrat** - A small area of habitat, typically of one square meter, selected at random to act as sample for surveying or assessing ecological conditions.

**riparian** – An area next to or including a wetland, river, or stream. Organisms that rely on such areas are considered to be “riparian species.”

**sample** - A small set or portion of something used to give information about the whole.

**scientific process** – The method used as the basis of modern science to conduct systematic investigations. Observations are made, questions are asked, a hypothesis is made and tested, data are gathered and analyzed. Results lead to answers or more testing.

**species** – A group of organisms capable of reproducing to form fertile offspring.

**transition zone** – An area located between two distinct habitats that contains characteristics of both its surrounding habitats. A transition zone exhibits a gradual change from one habitat to another.

**uplands** – The area of land that is higher in elevation (uphill from) a nearby wetland or riparian area. Upland soils are drier than wetlands which in turn influences the vegetation that occurs there.

**wetland** – An area of land that is either covered by or saturated with water either seasonally or permanently.