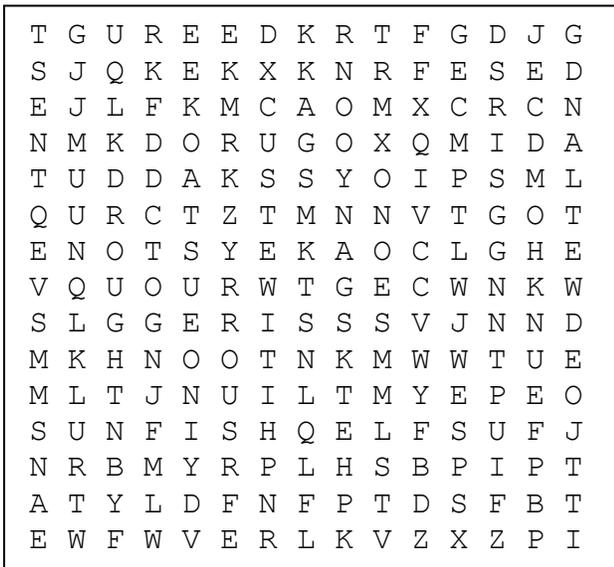




# Alligator Ecosystems

The American Alligator lives in wetland ecosystems throughout the Southeastern United States, including freshwater marshes, forested wetlands, and ponds. Nearly all aquatic life in these wetlands is connected to alligators. As a top predator in their ecosystem, they undergo an extraordinary change in body size and feed on different prey items as they grow. Their prey can include invertebrates such as insects and insect larvae, amphibians such as frogs and tadpoles, fish such as sunfish and bass, reptiles such as turtles and smaller alligators, mammals such as deer and raccoons, and wading birds such as egrets and ibis. Alligators are considered keystone species within their ecosystem, meaning that their presence in the ecosystem allows many other organisms to survive there. They create trails and dig holes which provide refuge for wading birds and fish during the dry season, and their nests provide elevated areas for nests of other reptiles and germination of plants less tolerant of flooding. Through their behaviors and diets, alligators help to maintain an important and beautiful North Carolina ecosystem.

Can you find words from the paragraph above in the following word search?



CONSUMER, DEER, DROUGHT, FROGS, GERMINATION, IBIS, INSECTS, KEYSTONE, NEST, SUNFISH, TURTLES, WETLAND

Fill in ways that other members of wetland ecosystems are impacted or depend on alligators:

