PARAGRAPH 1

The deserts, which already occupy approximately a fourth of the Earth's land surface, have in recent decades been increasing at an alarming pace. The expansion of desertlike conditions into areas where they did not previously exist is called **desertification**. It has been estimated that an additional one-fourth of the Earth's land surface is threatened by this process.

Directions: *Mark your answer by filling in the oval next to your choice.*

1. The word "threatened" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- ○ restricted
- ○ endangered
- ○ prevented
- ○ rejected

PARAGRAPH 3

Even in the areas that retain a soil cover, the reduction of vegetation typically results in the loss of the soil's ability to absorb substantial quantities of water. The impact of raindrops on the loose soil tends to transfer fine clay particles into the tiniest soil spaces, sealing them and producing a surface that allows very little water penetration. Water absorption is greatly reduced, consequently runoff is increased, resulting in accelerated erosion rates. The gradual drying of the soil caused by its diminished ability to absorb water results in the further loss of vegetation, so that a cycle of progressive surface deterioration is established.

2. According to paragraph 3, the loss of natural vegetation has which of the following consequences for soil?

- ○ Increased stony content
- ○ Reduced water absorption
- ○ Increased numbers of spaces in the soil
- ○ Reduced water runoff

PARAGRAPH 5

There is little doubt, however, that desertification in most areas results primarily from human activities rather than natural processes. The semiarid lands bordering the deserts exist in a delicate ecological balance and are limited in their potential to adjust to increased environmental pressures. Expanding populations are subjecting the land to increasing pressures to provide them with food and fuel. In wet periods, the land may be able to respond to these stresses. During the dry periods that are common phenomena along the desert margins, though, the pressure on the land is often far in excess of its diminished capacity, and desertification results.

3. The word "delicate" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- ○ fragile
- ○ predictable
- ○ complex
- ○ valuable

4. According to paragraph 5, in dry periods, border areas have difficulty

- ○ adjusting to stresses created by settlement
- ○ retaining their fertility after desertification
- ○ providing water for irrigating crops
- ○ attracting populations in search of food and fuel

PARAGRAPH 6

Four specific activities have been identified as major contributors to the desertification process: overcultivation, overgrazing, firewood gathering, and overirrigation. The cultivation of crops has expanded into progressively drier regions as population densities have grown. These regions are especially likely to have periods of severe dryness, so that crop failures are common. Since the raising of most crops necessitates the prior removal of the natural vegetation, crop failures leave extensive tracts of land devoid of a plant cover and susceptible to wind and water erosion.

5. The word "progressively" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- ○ openly
- ○ impressively
- ○ objectively
- ○ increasingly

6. According to paragraph 6, which of the following is often associated with raising crops?

- ○ Lack of proper irrigation techniques
- ○ Failure to plant crops suited to the particular area
- ○ Removal of the original vegetation
- ○ Excessive use of dried animal waste

7. The phrase "devoid of" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- ○ consisting of
- ○ hidden by
- ○ except for
- ○ lacking in

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