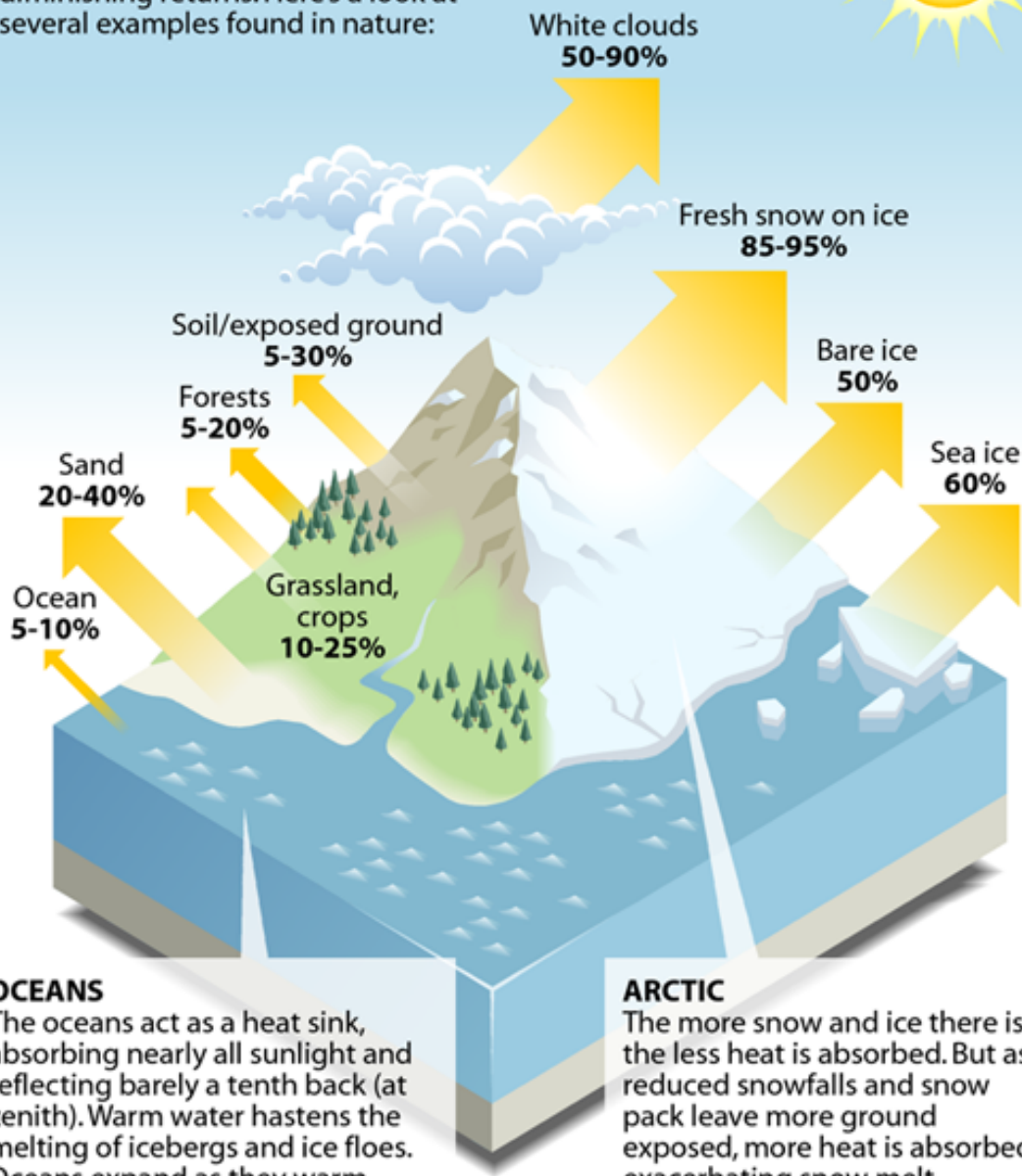


INFOGRAPHIC

Keeping Things Cool: The Albedo Effect

The albedo effect — the reflectivity of sunlight on various surfaces — is important in keeping the Earth cool. Clean, white clouds and fresh snow and ice reflect the most sunlight, while exposed land, water and vegetation have diminishing returns. Here's a look at several examples found in nature:



OCEANS

The oceans act as a heat sink, absorbing nearly all sunlight and reflecting barely a tenth back (at zenith). Warm water hastens the melting of icebergs and ice floes. Oceans expand as they warm, resulting in rising sea levels.

ARCTIC

The more snow and ice there is, the less heat is absorbed. But as reduced snowfalls and snow pack leave more ground exposed, more heat is absorbed, exacerbating snow melt.

Note: Illustration is diagrammatic and not to scale.

SOURCE: InsideClimate News research

PAUL HORN / InsideClimate News