

Open Space Resources goals and policies, and associated ordinances. For more information on the Special Management Areas Overlay, please refer to the Land Use Element.

Please refer to Appendix E for a list and description of the County's open space and natural areas.

### **Figure 6.1: Los Angeles County Open Space Areas**

#### **Issues**

##### **1. Open Space Preservation**

Increased population growth and ongoing development activities continue to impact the County's open space areas. Open space areas are vital for the recreational, scenic and wilderness opportunities they provide. Leap frog development and sprawl affects the ability to preserve biotic diversity and to provide appropriate recreational amenities. Because of sprawling development, the County's open space areas are increasingly fragmented or isolated, which decreases connectivity.

##### **2. Open Space Acquisition and Planning**

The acquisition and conservation of open space areas is a challenging and expensive endeavor. Additionally, there is no coordinated master plan in the County to acquire, manage and preserve the County's remaining open space areas. Working in partnership with conservancies and other stakeholders that can purchase and acquire open space land is an important part of the County's open space acquisition strategy. A coordinated and collaborative effort to manage and fund a countywide open space master plan is needed to adequately protect the County's remaining open space areas.

#### **Goals and Policies for Open Space Resources**

Goal C/OS 1: Open space areas that meet the diverse needs of the County.

- Policy C/OS 1.1: Support the acquisition of new open space areas throughout the County.
- Policy C/OS 1.2: Implement programs and policies that enforce the responsible stewardship and preservation of open space areas throughout the County.
- Policy C/OS 1.3: Create an established network of open space areas that provide regional connectivity, between the southwestern extent of the Tehachapi Mountains to the Santa Monica Mountains, and from the southwestern extent of the Mojave Desert to the Puente Chino Hills.
- Policy C/OS 1.4: Increase and improve access to open space and natural areas for all users.
- Policy C/OS 1.5: Protect natural resources, natural areas, and open spaces on park properties.
- Policy C/OS 1.6: Prioritize open space acquisitions for lands that contain unique ecological features, streams, watersheds, woodlands, grasslands, and/or offer linkages that enhance wildlife movements and genetic diversity.

Goal C/OS 2: Effective collaboration in open space resource preservation.

- Policy C/OS 2.1: Establish new revenue generating mechanisms to leverage County resources to enhance and acquire open space and natural areas in the County.

- Policy C/OS 2.2: Participate in the development of multi-benefit open spaces throughout the County.
- Policy C/OS 2.3: Improve understanding and appreciation for natural areas through preservation programs and educational facilities.
- Policy C/OS 2.4: Collaborate with public, non-profit, and private organizations to acquire and protect open space land.

### **III. Biological Resources**

The biotic resources found in the County are some of the most diverse in the country. They represent unusual or relatively undisturbed examples of the original plant and animal species that are indigenous to the County, and in many cases are not found outside of Southern California. Maintaining these resources is important, as new plant or animal species may still be found within a few miles of major urban centers, and the scientific and economic values of such biotic diversity is immeasurable.

#### **Background**

The County began to inventory biotic resources and identify important areas of biological diversity in the 1970s. The primary mechanism of the General Plan to conserve biological diversity is the Significant Ecological Area (SEA) Program. The SEA Program allows the County to implement many of its conservation goals and policies through biological resource assessments and land use regulations.

#### **Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs)**

SEAs are defined as ecologically important land and water systems that support valuable habitat for plants and animals, and are often integral to the preservation of rare, threatened or endangered species and the conservation of biological diversity in the County. An Ecological Transition Area (ETA), a subset of an SEA, identifies areas where the natural ecological features or systems have been degraded as a result of past or ongoing land use activities, but are deemed functionally integral to the SEA.

Conservation of the County's biotic diversity is the main objective of the SEA Program, and connectivity between important natural habitats plays a vital role in maintaining biotic communities. The SEAs are not preserves, but areas where facilitating a balance between new, appropriately designed development and resource conservation are important in the County.

SEAs are part of the County's Special Management Areas Overlay Map and are regulated through General Plan goals and policies, and the Significant Ecological Area Ordinance. There are 31 SEAs in the County, as depicted in Figure 6.2, which identify diverse habitats from the ocean to the Mojave Desert. The SEA boundaries encompass ecological systems that include areas outside of the County's jurisdiction, such as cities and the national forest. For more information on the Special Management Areas Overlay, please refer to the Land Use Element. For background information on the SEA Program and descriptions of the SEAs, please refer to Appendix E.

A balance between development and the conservation of the County's unique biotic diversity can be achieved through an additional level of environmental review that proposed projects must undergo when located within an SEA. This review is conducted by members of the Significant Ecological Area Technical Advisory Committee (SEATAC), an advisory committee to the Regional Planning

Commission. The SEATAC members specialize in various areas of biology. Prior to the project design phase, SEATAC will review the biological resources and constraints and recommend a site design that will reduce or avoid impacts to sensitive resources. The process is designed to provide careful evaluation of projects within SEAs to ensure that the ecological function of the SEA is maintained.

## **Figure 6.2: Los Angeles County Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs)**

### **Regional Habitat Linkages and Wildlife Corridors**

The SEAs play a critical role in identifying the County's biotic diversity, and providing an opportunity to connect these areas with similar areas of biological importance in adjacent counties. For example, the Puente Hills SEA identifies a regionally significant open space that connects the Puente Hills in Los Angeles County with the Chino Hills in Orange County. Similarly, the Santa Monica Mountains, Santa Susana-Simi Hills, Santa Clara River and Santa Felicia Creek SEAs identify important connections to habitats in Ventura County. The San Andreas SEA identifies the regionally significant connection between the Santa Clara River watershed, the San Gabriel Mountains, the Antelope Valley, and the Tehachapi Mountains. The Antelope Valley SEA identifies connections between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Mojave Desert, which provide wildlife movement opportunities along the drainages into vast open areas in Kern and San Bernardino Counties.

The County's SEAs are part of a greater habitat linkage that extends beyond the County boundaries and is part of an expansive system of habitat linkages. Figure 6.3 schematically identifies the regional habitat linkages that connect biologically sensitive resources in the County to resource areas in adjacent local jurisdictions. The areas depicted are based on national forest boundaries, the County's SEAs, and a series of missing linkage design studies conducted by the South Coast Wildlands Project, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring functional habitat connectivity across diverse wildland networks.

## **Figure 6.3: Regional Habitat Linkages**

### **Forests**

The national forests located within the County contain extensive biological resources. Two thirds of the Angeles National Forest has slopes steeper than 60 percent, with elevations ranging from 1,200 to 10,000 feet above sea level. Forests include a variety of vegetative communities, ranging from semi-desert to dense woodlands that support thousands of species of plants and animals. There are 240 miles of perennial rivers and streams, as well as 19 lakes and reservoirs. The forests not only support biotic communities, but play a major role in the health of major watersheds. The forest floor allows rainfall and snowmelt to replenish groundwater basins, providing the County with approximately 13 percent of its annual water supply. Surface water runoff fills streams and rivers, which support riparian habitats. Activities that occur in the forests have a potential impact not only on biotic resources, but also on the quality of local water supplies. To protect these forest functions, the U.S. Forest Service has identified two thirds of the forest as sensitive watershed areas.

### **Coastal Zones**

The biological resource value in the coastal zones, which include San Clemente Island, Santa Catalina Island, Marina del Rey, and the Santa Monica Mountains, is significant. The study and management of these resources are more rigorous than any other area in the County and any land disturbance is regulated through Local Coastal Plans and Programs, in conjunction with the

California Coastal Commission. For more information on the biological resources with the coastal zones, please refer to Appendix E.

## **Wetlands**

Wetlands and habitats associated with water bodies are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation that is typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Examples of wetlands include swamps, marshes, bogs, vernal pools, and playa lake areas. However, wetlands can also remain dry for long periods of time, making their identification and management potentially difficult. Wetlands contribute to water quality and the overall health of watersheds in several ways. They slow water flow, decrease erosion, filter water runoff, and provide habitat for many endangered plant and animal species.

## **Woodlands**

The County's oak woodlands are an important resource that provides an abundance of aesthetic, ecological, and economic benefits to County residents. Oak woodland habitats are the most diverse terrestrial ecosystems in California. Similarly, riparian woodlands, California walnut, juniper, and Joshua tree woodlands provide habitat for multiple species within a concentrated area.

## **Issues**

### **1. Preservation of Biotic Diversity**

Development continues to be the main cause of species decline in the Southern California region, where approximately 20 percent of the species on the federal endangered species list are found, and habitats for 39 (14 percent) of these species are found in the County. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act protects federally-listed species, as does the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) for state-listed species. However, as plant or animal species are linked to a larger ecosystem for survival, the State recognizes that each local jurisdiction should bolster all species of wildlife for their intrinsic ecological values. The County uses this holistic approach in its preservation goals and policies for biotic and ecological resources, and through the SEA program, where the County identifies and protects biotic communities and ecological systems rather than individual species and their habitats.

### **2. Forests Preservation**

The Angeles National Forest is the largest area of dedicated open space in the County, where a vast number of wildlife species depend for protection, foraging, and breeding. The County is responsible for the land use regulation of the nearly 40,000 acres privately-owned within the Forest boundary. Much of this land is in remote locations, subject to a high degree of natural hazards, and lacks adequate access to paved roads and water supply. The County does not encourage development in the national forests, and regulation is coordinated closely with the U.S. Forest Service.

### **3. Coastal Resource Preservation**

Biological resources in coastal zones are identified through Sensitive Environmental Resource Areas (SERAs), which contain terrestrial or marine resources that, because of their characteristics and/or vulnerability, require special protection. SERAs are comprised of the following sub-categories: Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs); Significant Woodlands and Savannahs; Significant Watersheds; Malibu Cold Creek Resource Management Area; and Wildlife Migration Corridor.

SERAs are not intended to function as isolated preservation areas, but rather as areas subject to strictly enforced environmental resource protections and land use regulations.

Biological resource management and regulation on Santa Catalina Island is implemented through the Santa Catalina Island Local Coastal Program. Island resources, such as SEAs, are identified in the Local Coastal Program and are subject to restrictive development regulations. Any changes to the SEA boundaries or associated regulations require an amendment to the Local Coastal Program and certification by the California Coastal Commission.

Land use regulation and jurisdictional authority in the Santa Monica Mountains Coastal Zone involves many public entities. In the unincorporated areas, biological resource protection is implemented through the Malibu Land Use Plan and the Malibu Coastal Program District, and by both the County and the California Coastal Commission.

#### **4. Wetlands Preservation**

The Federal Emergency Wetlands Resources Act establishes a national wetlands conservation program, which requires states to include wetlands in their Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans for management and preservation. California has lost over 90 percent of its original wetland areas, and the County has lost 95 percent. The County is dedicated to preserving its remaining wetlands and supports the wetland reclamation and conservation efforts of numerous non-profit organizations. In addition to County policy and regulation, projects that are subject to CEQA and located in a wetland are forwarded to applicable state and federal agencies for further review and permitting requirements.

#### **5. Woodlands Preservation**

Various types of woodlands are found in the County, including riparian woodlands; California walnut woodlands in the San Gabriel Valley and Puente Hills; juniper, and Joshua tree woodlands in the Antelope Valley and oak woodlands countywide. The long-term health of the County's remaining woodlands is threatened by a number of factors, primarily infrastructure and development. Protecting the County's remaining woodlands through policy and regulation will help retain these valuable biological resources.

#### **6. Urban Wildland Interface**

The area where the edge of the forest and other natural open space meets development is called the urban wildland interface. The urban wildland interface is often under development pressure due to its proximity to the scenic and recreational amenities of wild and open space areas. The County discourages development in the urban wildland interface because development requires the removal of vegetation around structures for fire protection, which may require vegetation removal on adjacent forest or parkland; erosion from hillside development may occur; and mountainous terrain subjects structures to severe fire hazards and to potential landslides due to seismic activity.

### **Goals and Policies for Biological Resources**

Goal C/OS 3: Biologically-diverse ecological systems, including riparian resources, wildlife corridors and woodlands, preserved in perpetuity.

- Policy C/OS 3.1: Participate in inter-jurisdictional collaborative strategies that protect biological resources.

- Policy C/OS 3.2: Consider the following in the design of a project that is located within an SEA, to the greatest extent feasible:
  - Preservation of biologically valuable habitats, species, wildlife corridors and linkages;
  - Protection of sensitive resources on the site within open space;
  - Protection of water sources from disturbance to maintain the ecological function of riparian habitats; and
  - Placement of the development in the least biologically sensitive areas on the site.
- Policy C/OS 3.3: Require that development within an SEA be designed to meet the SEATAC recommendations, to the greatest extent feasible.
- Policy C/OS 3.4: Maximize and preserve the ecological function of the County's diverse natural habitats, including coastal sage scrub, annual and perennial grasses, Joshua tree, juniper, California walnut, riparian woodlands, including western sycamore, and oak woodlands.
- Policy C/OS 3.5: Restore degraded streams, rivers, wetlands and other significant riparian resources to maintain ecological function.
- Policy C/OS 3.6: Preserve special status species, their associated habitat and wildlife movement corridors through the administration of the SEAs and other programs.
- Policy C/OS 3.7: Limit development in areas with identified significant ecological resources, such as SEAs.
- Policy C/OS 3.8: Maintain watercourses, riparian habitats, and wetlands including blue line streams, vernal pools and other drainages, in a natural state, unaltered by grading, fill, or diversion activities.
- Policy C/OS 3.9: Preserve and sustainably manage the County's forests and woodlands.
- Policy C/OS 3.10: Discourage new development in the urban-wildland interface.
- Policy C/OS 3.11: Ensure compatibility of development in the national forests in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plan.
- Policy C/OS 3.12: Require that development mitigate 'in-kind' for unavoidable impacts on biologically sensitive areas within the County, and permanently preserve mitigation sites.

air pollution, particularly tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks, contribute to the reduction of visibility and to the deterioration of some vegetation and wildlife.

### **Hillside Regulation**

The geologic instability of the County's mountain ranges is apparent in the numerous earthquake-induced landslide and liquefaction areas in the County. A majority of the mountains and hilly terrain in the County is steeply sloped land of 25 percent slope, with a large portion of this area greater than 50 percent slope. Development of terrain this steep is costly and the public costs associated with years of safety and public services in certain areas can be prohibitive. The highest and best use for some mountainous terrain may be as an airshed, watershed and natural habitat.

In addition, hillside development has the potential to change natural drainage systems and remove the native vegetation that once slowed water runoff. The removal of vegetation eliminates the natural containment of runoff. Water cannot then percolate into the soil, and instead gathers velocity as it flows down the hillside, causing accelerated erosion. Erosion that is accelerated beyond its normal rate can deposit silt into streams and lakes, which can adversely affecting water quality, smother vegetation, and trigger landslides.

To conserve the natural beauty and public benefit of hillsides, land use activities that may result in environmental degradation are subject to regulations and design guidelines that limit hillside development based on slope, soil, natural drainage channels, and seismic and fire hazards. The Hillside Management Conditional Use Permit (CUP) is a regulatory vehicle to consider potential environmental degradation and hillside alteration in areas where the slope is 25 percent or greater.

The Hillside Management CUP allows clustering development at the base of the slope, limiting grading, and ensuring that the drainage configuration remains as natural as possible and will not adversely impact the area below the site. Hillside design guidelines are referenced during the pre-development and permit processing phases to minimize hillside alteration, preserve ridgeline silhouettes, determine traffic circulation and building placement by topography, and incorporate trails where appropriate. By imposing these design conditions, a more sensitive development will occur in the County's hillsides in a manner that respects the natural topography and biological resources of the area.

### **Goals and Policies for Scenic Resources**

Goal C/OS 13: Protected visual and scenic resources.

- Policy C/OS 13.1: Protect the County's scenic resources through land use regulations that mitigate development impacts.
- Policy C/OS 13.2: Manage development in Hillside Management Areas (25 percent slope or greater) to protect their natural and scenic character and minimize risks from natural hazards, such as fire, flood, erosion, and landslides.
- Policy C/OS 13.3: Consider the following in the design of a project that is located within an HMA, to the greatest extent feasible:
  - Public safety and the preservation of hillside resources through the application of safety and conservation design standards;

- Maintenance of large contiguous open areas that limit landslide, liquefaction and fire hazards and protect natural features, such as significant ridgelines, watercourses and SEAs.
- Policy C/OS 13.4: Protect the County's ridgelines from incompatible development that diminishes their scenic value.
- Policy C/OS 13.5: Reduce light trespass, light pollution and other threats to scenic resources.
- Policy C/OS 13.6: Require development to be designed to create a consistent visual relationship with the natural terrain and vegetation.
- Policy C/OS 13.7: Require grading to conform to the existing terrain.
- Policy C/OS 13.8: Prohibit outdoor advertising and billboards along scenic routes, corridors and other scenic areas.
- Policy C/OS 13.9: Incorporate roadside rest stops, vista points, and interpretive displays into projects in scenic areas.

## **VIII. Historical, Cultural, and Paleontological Resources**

Historical and cultural resources are an important part of the County's identity and contribute to the local economy. This section sets forth goals and policies for the management and preservation of historical, cultural, and paleontological resources in the County.

### **Background**

Cultural heritage resources include historic buildings, structures, artifacts, sites, and districts of historic, architectural, archaeological, or paleontological significance. They may be locations of important events that were turning points in the history of the County, or be unique structures or groups of structures possessing distinct architectural features that depict a historical period of the County. Officially-recognized resources are integral parts of the built and natural environments, and must be considered in County land use actions. There may be other sites and structures that have not been identified and that have importance to local communities. In such cases, a community-based plan may designate these sites or structures as locally significant.

The County's cultural heritage resources are non-renewable and irreplaceable. The County aims to promote public awareness of their value, and their public enjoyment should be fostered whenever possible. To this end, the County promotes cooperative efforts between public and private organizations to identify, restore, and preserve these resources.

### **Cultural and Historical Resources**

The County embraces the importance of protecting cultural heritage resources and is guided in development decisions by federal, state, and local programs that officially recognize these resources. The following legislative tools improve the protection and enhancement of historic and cultural structures in the County: