



Features



Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve

The Riverside County Vision builds heavily on the value of its remarkable environmental setting. That is certainly the case here. The setting and its many functions and features are indeed special. Bold mountains and hills frame the valleys that accommodate most of the development. Their height and shape also influence the climate, leading to some of the unique habitats found in the Southwest planning area. The ring of mountains and hills also contrast with the network of valleys and watercourses that define the natural landmarks for many of the communities. These defining features are shown on Figure 2, Physical Features.

SETTING

The Southwest planning area is framed by the Santa Ana Mountains to the west, the Santa Margarita Mountains and Agua Tibia range to the south, and the Black Hills to the east. Murrieta Creek runs along the floor of the Murrieta Valley, which generally divides the Southwest planning area in a western/eastern configuration. The Cities of Temecula and Murrieta span both sides of Murrieta Creek, further accentuating this pattern. A series of valleys separated by rolling hills connect with the Murrieta Valley. French Valley runs in a north-south manner and includes Warm Springs, Tualota, and Santa Gertrudis Creeks. Temecula Creek forms the Pauba Valley, which runs east-west along the southern boundary of the area. Pechanga Creek forms Wolf Valley, located just south of the City of Temecula. All of these creeks eventually flow to the Santa Margarita River, one of the most diverse environments in southern California. The Santa Rosa Plateau forms a “high valley” along the west side of the Southwest planning area and provides still another unique environment devoted to rural estates, groves, and natural habitat.



The Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve is home to the oldest building still standing in Riverside County, the Machado Adobe, built in the late 1840's.



Located in the Santa Rosa Plateau, vernal pools are ephemeral water bodies, usually formed in shallow depressions during the late fall, winter, or early spring. They contain many wetland plants that flourish during the pool cycle. They may also be home to the endangered fairy shrimp.

UNIQUE FEATURES

The Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve

The 8,200-acre Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve is located on the east side of the Santa Ana Mountains, immediately west of the Cities of Murrieta and Temecula. This unusually rich habitat serves as both a habitat reserve and active regional park. The Reserve is also unique in that it is a cooperative management project of the Nature Conservancy, the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California. The Nature Conservancy purchased the original 3,100-acre portion of the reserve in 1984. In April of 1991, 3,825 additional acres were purchased by the County of Riverside, the California Conservation Board, the Metropolitan Water District (MWD), and the California Nature Conservancy. It is an outstanding example of collaborative methods preserving valuable habitat lands.

The Santa Rosa Plateau's rolling topography ranges over 2,000 feet in elevation and contains a wide variety of flora and fauna, including Engelmann oaks, pinyon pines, and coastal sage scrub. The reserve includes some of southern



California's last vernal pools, wintering water-fowl, spring wildflowers, and several species of endangered plants. It is, without doubt, a special place.

A further indication of uniqueness is found in the creekbeds throughout the reserve. They contain deep holes called tenajas, which hold water throughout the rainless summer months and provide important water sources for wildlife. These riparian zones support such species as sycamore and willow trees, California treefrogs, and Southwestern pond turtles.

Vail Lake



A tenaja found in the Santa Rosa Reserve

Vail Lake nestles in the Black Hills about 15 miles east of Temecula, just north of State Route 79. Vail Lake was formed in 1948 when Walter Vail dammed Temecula Creek. A haven for fishing and water activities as well as camping, hiking, bicycling, and equestrian trails, Vail Lake and the surrounding areas are recognized for significant biological and natural habitat resources. The considerable unspoiled landscape varies in topography and is accented by oak woodlands and riparian corridors.

The Cleveland National Forest

Along the southeastern boundary of the Southwest planning area is a portion of the Cleveland National Forest. The pristine environment contains thousands of species of plants and animals native to southern California. The rolling topography and hillsides lead to unspoiled views of natural habitats and tree stands. The forest is also home to treasured oak woodlands. This wonderful piece of history has ample public access and recreational opportunities, such as hiking, camping, bicycling, and equestrian facilities.

Lake Skinner



An aerial view of Lake Skinner and the water filtration facility

Located in the northeastern corner of the Southwest planning area is Lake Skinner. Surrounding the lake is the Lake Skinner Regional Park and a water filtration facility. This area is characterized by rolling hills and agricultural uses extending westward, with largely vacant lands to the east. This man-made lake is operated by the Metropolitan Water District (MWD), and it affords activities such as fishing, boating, hiking, and other outdoor activities that draw tourists and visitors to the area.

The Temecula Valley Vineyards, Winery, and Citrus Groves

Located east of the City of Temecula and extending westward along Rancho California Road lay the wine producing area of Temecula Valley. This jewel of the Southwest planning area and western Riverside County boasts beautiful vineyards and gracious wineries scattered among rolling hills and spreading oaks. The wineries, which offer tours and wine tasting, are an attraction for tourists as well as an economic powerhouse for western Riverside County. This appealing landscape also offers citrus groves and a scattering of residential and equestrian estates.