

RIPARIAN VEGETATION COMMUNITY: SCRUB, WOODLAND, and FOREST



As a wetland, Riparian Vegetation is one of the most sensitive habitats in California. It has suffered the loss of thousands of acres as the result of clearing in the floodplains for agriculture, sand mining operations, and transportation corridors. Current estimates are that there are roughly 29,000 acres of Riparian Vegetation in the County, but much of that is now in fragmented patches rather than extensive stream courses. Good examples of Riparian Vegetation exist in Mission Valley near the San Diego Stadium, and adjacent to the Fashion Valley shopping center. This type of vegetation may still be seen in the San Pasqual Valley, around Lake Hodges, on the San Dieguito River, San Luis Rey River, Sweetwater River, and Santa Margarita River. Riparian Vegetation exists along stream and valley bottoms as well as deep canyons in areas *where the water table is not far below the soil surface*. At one time, all of the major riverbeds in San Diego county supported extensive areas of Riparian Forest.

When Riparian Vegetation is preserved, a surprising number of plant and animal species are protected. The indicator species for the presence of Riparian Vegetation are: several species of Willows, the broad-leaved Cottonwoods, Sycamore, and Mule fat, a shrub with greasy scented leaves.

The Willow, Cottonwood and Sycamore trees are winter deciduous. Riparian Vegetation is one of the most significant vegetation communities for wildlife. It is vital to many bird species including the endangered Least bell's vireo and Willow flycatcher, as well as the more common American goldfinch, Yellow warbler, and Long eared owl. Small carnivores that inhabit Riparian vegetation include Spotted and Striped skunks, raccoons, and bobcats. Riparian Vegetation and associated stream courses are critical for a variety of amphibians including the endangered Arroyo southwestern toad, Pacific tree frog, and Western toad.

Riparian Vegetation in the desert region includes an unusually large Mesquite forest in Borrego Valley near the Borrego Sink. Mesquite Woodland, sometimes called Mesquite Bosque, consists of a dense woodland of Honey and Screwbean mesquite trees.



Courtesy of the County of San Diego
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