

DESERT SCRUB VEGETATION COMMUNITY



Desert Scrub is one of the *most widespread* vegetation communities in San Diego County. It covers more than half a million acres of land on the leeward side of the Mountains. It is the dominant vegetation within the Anza Borrego Desert State Park as well as vast areas that are owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. It is a somewhat variable community and it covers a wide range of habitats. Desert Scrub ranges from Jacumba at over 2,800 feet in an area that receives snow on occasion and an average of 6 to 8 inches of precipitation to Ocotillo, an area of hot, dry, low desert with an average seasonal rainfall of little more than 2 inches.

Desert Scrub is generally dominated by the Creosote bush. Creosote bush can pass successive years of nearly no rainfall in a nearly, dead appearing state. However, given ample rainfall, they may maintain small, sticky, shiny leaves with yellow flowers. They are called Creosote bush because they have the scent of Creosote. They are also considered some of the oldest living things. In the Mojave Desert, there are plants that have grown into clones from a common original plant that have been estimated to be over 11,000 years old. One other aspect of the home of the Creosote bush is that summer rainfall is a regular occurrence. During some years, summer rainfall may contribute more than half of the total seasonal precipitation. Occasionally, there are torrential summer downpours.

Other dominants in this community include: the Desert agave, a plant whose growing flower stalk served as an important food source to the native people, Ocotillo, Burro bush, and a variety of cacti including the Teddy bear cactus. Teddy bear cactus looks fuzzy but in fact is highly prickly to touch.

The Ocotillo has an unusual appearance of an open bundle of long spiny sticks growing up to a dozen feet tall. Following ample rains, summer or winter, the Ocotillo will grow new green leaves, and as the leaves dry and fall, the plants will produce bright red flowers at the ends of the branches. Desert Scrub Vegetation is also famous for the annual wildflowers that can carpet the ground following winter rains. There are even specific wildflowers that will carpet the ground in this community following the summer rainy period. Cacti are also noteworthy flowering plants within this community.

A diversity of wildlife inhabit Desert Scrub communities including the Kit fox, and a number of rodents including the Antelope ground squirrel and a number of species of Kangaroo rats and Pocket mice. The Desert Scrub community is also home to a variety of reptiles including the Sidewinder rattlesnake.



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Department of Planning and Land Use
Multiple Species Conservation Program
5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B
San Diego, CA 92123
www.msccp-sandiego.org