



County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services
VEGETATION CLEARING FAQ SHEET (1)

	QUESTION	ANSWER	APPLICABLE CODE SECTION
A	What is “clearing”?	"CLEARING," as defined in the County Grading Ordinance, is “the removal or destruction of natural vegetation by any means, including brushing and grubbing.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 87.803(5), County Grading Ordinance
B	How much can I clear on my property without a permit?	<p>If your property has an existing dwelling and is located outside the boundaries of the County's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan, you may clear a total of 5 acres on your property without a permit. This 5-acre allowance includes any existing improved areas such as building pads, driveways, landscaping, or existing agricultural uses.</p> <p>If your property has an existing dwelling and is within the MSCP, your clearing allowance depends on if your property is also located within the Pre-Approved Mitigation Area (PAMA). You may clear up to 5 acres outside the PAMA and up to 2 acres inside the PAMA without a permit. These acreage allowances include any existing improved areas such as building pads, driveways, landscaping, or existing agricultural uses.</p> <p>Clearing of vacant land or clearing in excess of the above limits may be allowed with an approved Administrative Brushing and Clearing Permit from Planning & Development Services (PDS).</p> <p>Please contact the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 694-8985 to determine whether your property is within MSCP and/or the PAMA designation and to obtain information on the Administrative Brushing and Clearing Permit. ⁽²⁾ ⁽³⁾</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 4.3.4, County MSCP Section 86.503, County Biological Mitigation Ordinance Section 87.503, County Grading Ordinance
C	Regardless to “B” above, can I clear brush around structures on my property for fire protection without a permit?	You may clear up to 100 feet without a permit from any improvement on your property or up to your property line, whichever distance is smaller, as defined under Section 68.402 of the County Defensible Space for Fire Protection Ordinance. Depending upon fuel loads and topography, the local fire district may require additional clearing. This additional clearing does not require a permit so long as you obtain a letter from the local fire district specifying the amount of additional clearing required. ⁽²⁾ ⁽³⁾	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOU Fire & Wildlife Agencies Section 86.503(12), County Biological Mitigation Ordinance Section 68.402, County Defensible Space for Fire Protection Ordinance



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D	Can I clear for fire protection within an existing open space easement?	Depending upon fuel loads and topography, the Local Fire District may require clearing within an open space easement. This clearing does not require a permit so long as you obtain a letter from the Local Fire District specifying the amount of additional clearing required and comply with any clearing provisions stated in the recorded open space easement document or recorded subdivision map. ^{(2) (3)}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult your open space easement language for clearing specifications.
E	Can I remove habitat or natural vegetation that was burned in a wildfire and/or reseed/plant within open space areas burned in a wildfire?	You may only clear in conformance with A through D above. Wildfires are a natural part of the eco-system and removal of any ash or debris may also remove important seeds or roots that are needed for the natural area to restore itself. Natural vegetation is best for erosion control. As such, burnt vegetation not specified in A through C should remain untouched. However, if there is an immediate health-safety risk, removal of the threatening ash or debris or reseeded dangerous slope areas for soil stabilization is permitted. ^{(2) (3)}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 86.503, County Biological Mitigation Ordinance • Please contact the San Diego County Recovery for more information on slope stabilization
F	Can I clear natural habitat for new agricultural land without a permit?	You may only clear natural habitat in conformance with A through E above. Clearing in excess of these limits for agricultural uses may be allowed with an approved Administrative Agricultural Clearing Permit from PDS. ^{(2) (3)} Please contact the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 694-8985 to obtain information regarding Agricultural Clearing Permit requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 4.3.4, County MSCP • Section 86.503, County Biological Mitigation Ordinance • Section 87.502 - 87.506, County Grading Ordinance
G	Can I grade my site as part of my clearing efforts without a permit?	Only certain grading quantities and activities are allowed without a grading permit. Please review Section 87.206 of the County Grading Ordinance for grading limitations. Grading in excess of these limits may be allowed with an approved grading permit. ^{(2) (3)}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 87.206, County Grading Ordinance

Footnotes:

- (1) This document is an informational guidance resource only and does not replace County regulations. Any conflicts or questions relating to the document or County Code should be directed to the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 694-8985 .
- (2) Activity including, but not limited to, clearing, grading, grubbing, or excavation resulting in land disturbance of one acre or more may require the property owner to obtain [Construction General Permit](#) coverage from the [State Water Resources Control Board](#) and also may trigger additional requirements for new or redevelopment Priority Development Projects as defined in the [County Watershed Protection Ordinance](#).
- (3) Vegetation clearing in excess of fire district requirements may require permits from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife – (858) 467-4201 -- and the US Fish and Wildlife Service – (760) 431-9440.