

NATURAL COMMUNITIES

GRASSLANDS (ANNUAL GRASSLAND)



Description

Originally, California Valley Grasslands blanketed much of the Central Valley and surrounding foothills. These grasslands were seasonally grazed by pronghorn (antelope), deer, and tule elk. The native grassland of tall bunch grasses, short annual grasses, and flowering plants no longer exists. The introduction of non-native grasses, intense livestock grazing, cultivation, and development have destroyed the major native grassland areas. However, in areas where soil disturbance and cattle and sheep grazing have not been too intense, many plants and animals associated with the native grasslands still survive. These less-disturbed areas are often found within areas restricted from public use. For this reason, native plants and animals may be found within irrigation districts.

The remaining non-native grasslands still function as an important habitat type for many species. Grasslands are commonly found around and mixed with other San Joaquin Valley habitat types such as vernal pools, scrub lands, wetlands, and wooded areas.

Disturbed, degraded or ruderal areas can also be important to species that depend on grasslands. Examples of these are retired or abandoned farmland and linear right of ways. These land can provide refuge and linkages between larger habitats areas.

Distribution: Large non-native grassland areas remain along foothill areas around the valley floor. On the valley floor, development has replaced large grassland areas. Grasslands areas remaining on the valley floor often found on small, isolated patches land between developed areas.

Photo: © Rosalie Faubion and CSUS/ESRP

References

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. Region 1, Portland, Oregon. 319 pp.



**SALTBUSH SCRUB AND ALKALI SINKS
(ALKALI DESERT SCRUB)**



Description

Also known as saltbush or San Joaquin shrublands, these are areas similar to grasslands, but also include shrubs. These lands are referred to as scrub lands because dominant shrubs are less than 2 meters (6 feet) tall. The amount of shrubs can vary from dense to sparse with grasses in between. These lands often occupy a transition zone between marsh lands and grasslands.

Scrub lands also include alkali sinks, which are shallow depressions with fine soils having high salt content. They are characterized by bare areas of often dusty, whitish soil and groups of saltbushes (*Atriplex* species) or other very hardy, salt-tolerant plants. They may become shallow, temporary lakes during heavy rainfall. Only specially-adapted plants can survive the heat, small amount of rainfall, and salty soil.

Various birds, lizards, insects, and small mammals (e.g., kangaroo rats) are also adapted for living in and around scrub lands.

Distribution: Historically, these lands occupied large areas of Kern, southwest Tulare and southern Kings Counties near the edges of historical lake beds and marsh lands. They could also be found along marsh areas near the central drainage of the San Joaquin valley in Fresno, Madera, and Merced Counties.

Most scrub lands have been converted for agricultural use. Remaining lands have been impacted by grazing, oil extraction, and other uses.

Photo: © Rosalie Faubion and CSUS/ESRP

References

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. Region 1, Portland, Oregon. 319 pp.



VERNAL POOLS



Description

For most of the year, vernal pools appear to be dry depressions in the Valley Grassland habitat. For one or two months each year, they are shallow, rain-filled basins. As these pools become dry, "bright spots" of yellow, blue, and white flowers become obvious in the otherwise plain landscape and are a special feature found in California grasslands. Plants which grow in these wet, temporary pools are especially adapted for these conditions and are called "vernal pool species". Fairy shrimp and the larval stage of the California tiger salamander are found in vernal pools.

Distribution: Vernal pools can be found throughout the Central Valley and are associated with grassland and wetland areas. Large vernal pool and large vernal pool complexes can be found along footills on the east side of the Central Valley.

Photo: © Rosalie Faubion and Daniel Williams

References

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. Region 1, Portland, Oregon. 319 pp.

Photos



**WETLANDS
(FRESHWATER EMERGENT WETLANDS)**



Description

This type includes swamps, marshes, bogs, ponds and other seasonally wet lands. Originally, great lakes formed in the Tulare Basin in the southern San Joaquin Valley. These were fed by runoff from the Kings, Kaweah, Kern, and other streams and rivers south of the San Joaquin. The name Tulare is Spanish for tule, named for the expanses of tule marshes that formed around these lakes. Marsh areas extended north along the valley drainage from the Tulare Basin to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to the north.

Water diversions for irrigation and flood control have reduced or eliminated the lake system and associated wetlands. Most of the former wetland areas have been drained and converted to farmland. Many streams that supported wetlands have been channelized with development up to the channel edges. Remaining wetlands are often found with other habitat types such as scrub and grasslands.

Distribution: Remaining wetlands can be found throughout the Tulare Basin in Kern, Kings, and Tulare Counties. Some former wetland areas have been preserved or restored as wildlife refuges. North of the Tulare Basin, protected or restored wetland areas can be found in Fresno, Merced, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties.

Photo: CSUS/ESRP

References

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. Region 1, Portland, Oregon. 319 pp.

Photos



**RIPARIAN WOODLAND
(VALLEY FOOTHILL RIPARIAN) AND
VALLEY OAK(VALLEY OAK WOODLAND)**



Description

Originally, large expanses of riparian forests and oak woodlands followed river channels from the Sierra foothills to the marshlands of the central drainage of the valley. Most of the former trees have been cleared to make way for farmland or other uses.

Many streams and rivers that supported riparian woodland have been channelized with development up to the channel edges. Remaining woodlands are found on small preserves or along linear stretches of the stream channel.

Distribution: Remaining woodlands can be found in parks, preserves, and private lands along river and stream channels. Individual and stands of Valley oaks also remain along riparian and foothill areas of the eastern Central Valley.

Photo: © Charles Webber from Calphotos: seq_num=17373&one=T and CSUS/ESRP

References

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. Region 1, Portland, Oregon. 319 pp.

Photos

