

# PLANT COMMUNITY KEY

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

FIRE FRENZY WILDLAND FIRE EDUCATION PROGRAM - WILDFIRE WALKABOUT



## CHAPARRAL

Characterized by deep-rooted, drought and fire-adapted woody evergreen shrubs growing on coarse-textured soils with limited water holding capacity.

Unlike other plant communities, in chaparral, a nearly impenetrable vegetative wall of stiff stems and leathery leaves is formed by the four- to 12-foot high plants.

Underneath, the ground is devoid of herbaceous vegetation, except for an occasional clip of foothill needlegrass (*Nassella lepida*) or a cluster of wildflowers.

## COASTAL SAGE SCRUB

Occurs on drier sites and lower elevations than chaparral, especially on coastal south-facing slopes. Many species in this community, particularly the sages, are summer or drought deciduous.

The coastal sage scrub community has been referred to as “soft chaparral” since soft-leaved, grayish green, aromatic shrubs characterize the widely spaced vegetation.

Characteristic plants include purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), coast goldenbush (*Haplopappus venetus*), coastal buckwheat (*Eriogonum cinereum*), laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), and lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*).



## VALLEY GRASSLAND

There are two types of grassland that occur in the Santa Monica Mountains: native perennial and non-native annual grasslands.

Perennial bunch grasses are considered to be the original native grassland of California, while annual grasses were those introduced by the European and Spanish settlers for their livestock.

The golden rolling hills of California are largely a result of the introduction of these annual grasses, since bunch grasses often remain green even during summer drought.

# PLANT COMMUNITY KEY

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

FIRE FRENZY WILDLAND FIRE EDUCATION PROGRAM - WILDFIRE WALKABOUT



## OAK WOODLAND

Oak woodland communities are found on north slopes and in shaded ravines or canyon bottoms and is characterized by coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), hollyleaf cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*), California bay laurel (*Umbellularia californica*), coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica*), and poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*).

## RIPARIAN

Riparian woodlands occur along canyon and valley bottoms with perennial or intermittent streams in nutrient rich soils, or within the drainage of steep slopes.

Of all the plant communities in the Santa Monica Mountains, the riparian community contains the greatest species diversity.

Also unlike other communities, riparian woodlands have multi-layered vegetation, with both an under and overstory.



## VALLEY OAK SAVANNA

Valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*) reach the southernmost extension of their range in Malibu Creek State Park.



Endemic to California, valley oaks were once widely distributed from the Sacramento River delta, 500 miles south to the Santa Monica Mountains. These trees, which reach truly majestic proportions, originally spread over the native grasslands in the wide valleys of central and coastal California. Valley oaks reach ages of 400-600 years and may have trunks six to seven feet in diameter. They present a graceful appearance on the landscape, widely spaced with branches that may drape to the ground.