

Urban Effects on Our Wildlands



“We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one of us must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

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What is that green eyeshine glowing in the dark? It's a coyote in *your* backyard! Or are you in *his* home? Residing on the edge of wildlands brings challenges, and a responsibility for preserving the delicate balance between the habitats of wild animals and human residents.

As California's population grows, urban areas often expand into wildlands and encroach upon park boundaries. This urban edge is where two different environments meet and may conflict. One is the natural world, controlled by the cycle of the seasons, with native plants and animals interacting and evolving as parts of long-established ecosystems. The other is the human world, altered to suit our needs and desires. Increased disturbance by humans, direct threats to wildland plants and animals, and loss of wildlife habitat at the urban edge threaten the quality of the natural ecosystems. The beauty of the landscape, the public's recreational experience, and the



Coyote

public investment in preservation of wildlands is also compromised.

It is important for visitors to parklands and people living near wildlands to understand both sides of the urban-wildland edge. This understanding will help to minimize the negative effects of development and to ensure urban uses more comfortably coexist with natural areas and their inhabitants.

DISTURBANCE AND DIRECT THREATS

People, with their modern day activities, are not part of native ecosystems. Humans are perceived by wildlife as dangerous predators that disturb their feeding, mating and parenting behaviors.

As the animals and pets associated with humans were domesticated, they lost their natural place in our wildlands. Dogs and cats are natural predators whose presence can disturb wildlife. If uncontrolled, pets will chase, harass, hunt and kill wildlife. Pets are also prey and attract larger predators toward visitors, residences and businesses. Diseases to which native animals have no resistance can be transmitted from domestic animals and pets.

Although visitors to wildlands and people living adjacent to natural areas enjoy seeing wildlife, attracting

animals either intentionally or inadvertently can cause serious problems. Feeding animals or birds replaces their natural healthy diets, and unnaturally concentrating animals or birds spreads disease. A wild animal attracted to unsecured pet food or garbage may attract unwanted predators or may become a destructive nuisance itself. Providing wildlife habitat such as woodpiles will attract animals that may be unwelcome, and some may be destructive to homes. While *you* may welcome wildlife, your neighbors may feel differently and report them to animal control agencies, possibly resulting in the animals' destruction.



STATE PARKLANDS AFFECTED BY URBAN EDGE

Almost half of California's state parks are adjacent to urban or residential development. Of California's state parks and beaches, many have urban uses on five percent or more of their borders. Species abundance and biological diversity suffer noticeably from these effects, requiring increased management actions.



Urban growth threatens the integrity of wildlands.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A CAT MAKES

In southern California wildlands fragmented by residential development, scientific research found that one-third of the homes had cats and three-quarters of these cats were allowed outdoors and brought back wildlife prey. The study found that on the average each cat brought home 56 small mammals, birds and lizards per year. In a typical area with 100 dwellings adjacent to wildlands, this equates to about 1,400 wild animals killed annually.



LOSS OF HABITAT

Urban development eliminates natural habitat. Other development (such as rural housing and roads in wildlands) can reduce habitat quality by altering the landforms, soils and vegetation, and by increasing light, noise and human disturbance. Some wildlife can adapt to living near humans, others flee. Even mild disturbance, if continued over time, can drive away all but the most adaptable wildlife. Losing just one species affects the relationship between other animals and plants, and can seriously upset the balance of the natural ecosystem.

DISRUPTION OF NATURAL SYSTEMS

Some urban edge effects can cause widespread disruption of natural systems. Invasive exotic plants can spread widely, crowding out native habitats. Although natural fires may be a needed part of many ecosystems, unnaturally frequent fires can eventually change vegetation types, favoring exotic plants over natives. Human use, control, or movement of water affects California's seasonally dry environment. For example, additional fresh urban runoff water flowing into a coastal wetland may degrade the salt marsh environment, and pollutants carried in runoff can cause problems in wildlands.

We are not alone when we visit or choose to live in or near wildlands; in cases of urban expansion, people are the newcomers. Many people want to experience nature, but we need to take

care that our contact does not harm the very wildness we seek. By being aware of our surroundings, we can be sensitive to the effects we have on the natural world around us. When we care enough to learn about the needs of the plants and animals that share our environment and follow some basic guidelines and precautions, we lessen the impact of urban influences and help to preserve the natural qualities of our wildlands. As we learn to coexist with the other inhabitants of this earth, we earn the privilege of visiting and living near California's rich natural areas.

Bobcat



Photo © California State Parks



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Photo © Alfred Brousseau



Avoid using invasive plants such as these in your landscape: (clockwise from left) vinca, Scotch broom, pampas grass, English ivy and cotoneaster.

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Things You Can Do To Help

When visiting wildlands:

- ❑ Observe wildlife from a distance—do not attempt to attract or feed wild animals.
- ❑ Keep stored food away from wildlife.
- ❑ Do not pick up or approach sick or injured wildlife.
- ❑ Keep dogs off trails, out of sensitive areas, and leashed in areas where dogs are allowed. Please pick up after your dog.
- ❑ Do not abandon unwanted pets (such as cats, ducks and reptiles) in or near wildlands.
- ❑ Do not feed stray or feral cats, and report domestic animals harassing wildlife to park staff.
- ❑ Do not smoke or leave campfires unattended.
- ❑ Fully enjoy the sights and sounds that wild places can provide.



Dispose of pet waste properly.

When considering living next to wildlands:

- ❑ Learn about the wildland, including special plants and animals and general ecology.
 - Is it deer, coyote, bear, or mountain lion habitat?
 - Where are the important natural areas and wildlife corridors?
- ❑ Be aware of potential problems that you, as a homeowner, may encounter.
- ❑ Consider what you are willing to do to help keep the neighboring natural area wild.

To be a good neighbor when you live next to wildlands:

- ❑ Do not feed wildlife.
- ❑ Feed pets indoors, and lock pet doors at night.
- ❑ Keep pets indoors or install protected enclosures to avoid conflicts with wildlife.
- ❑ If you choose to have a birdbath, disinfect it weekly to avoid disease transmission.
- ❑ Do not allow pets to roam, and keep cats inside at night.
- ❑ Secure garbage in shelters, or use garbage cans with locking lids.

- ❑ Do not block or restrict important wildlife corridors in the region.
- ❑ Shield outdoor lights from above and direct outdoor lights toward house and yard, and away from natural areas.
- ❑ Use landscape plants native to the area.
- ❑ If using non-native plants, use noninvasive, drought-tolerant species. Contact your local agricultural commission or other experts for suitable species.
- ❑ Adequately protect, or do not plant, landscape/garden plants that attract and unnaturally feed (and concentrate) wildlife. For example, roses can attract deer, and deer attract mountain lions.
- ❑ Install wildlife-proof fences to enclose and protect garden areas from animals such as deer.
- ❑ Do not use pesticides that could cause secondary poisoning in predators or scavengers such as coyotes, hawks and owls.
- ❑ Use fertilizers sparingly, and dispose of chemicals properly to protect watercourses.
- ❑ Contact your local parks to see how you can help.



Keep food and garbage away from wildlife.