

## Executive Summary

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The Rose Creek Watershed is a 36-square mile area that extends from the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar sixteen miles along San Clemente and Rose creeks through Clairemont Mesa and University City to the east end of Mount Soledad; later draining to the ~4,236-acre Mission Bay Park in Pacific Beach where Rose Creek meets the ocean.

The watershed contains great natural beauty, recreational opportunities and biological diversity. The ecological value of the undeveloped land in the watershed is in its diversity of native vegetation communities, which provide a wide variety of essential animal habitats, including those supporting endangered and threatened species.

Unfortunately, the watershed suffers from many of the same ills as other watersheds at the edge where wild lands meet urban development. Invasive exotic (non-native) species have overrun many areas, and urban problems such as crime and vagrancy are acute in the lower watershed. While the overall health of the Rose Creek Watershed (RCW) is better than many urban-wildland watersheds in Southern California, portions of lower Rose Creek, in particular, are unhealthy, unsafe and a detriment to water quality in Mission Bay and the Pacific Ocean.

Compounding those urban problems, are problems of management and oversight – in particular a lack of a comprehensive vision or management approach that respects the watershed as a natural functioning system. While the watershed is entirely within the City of San Diego, it is under two governmental jurisdictions; the eastern portion under Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar and the western portion under the City of San Diego. Of the 12,201 acres of MCAS Miramar within the Rose Creek Watershed 7,477 acres are comprehensively managed as a natural open space system for as-needed training. However, responsibility for management of the ~2,900 acres of undeveloped lands west of Interstate 805 is split between multiple City of San Diego Departments and private land owners. The result is inconsistent or non-existent management.

For example, the San Diego City-owned park lands in San Clemente and Rose canyons west of Interstate 805 are owned and managed by the City Park and Recreation Department, Open Space Division. The Open Space Division is a new operational division for the Park and Recreation Department. Even with budget constraints, the creation of this new division has stepped-up the focus within the Department on protecting open space areas under Parks' jurisdiction. The city employs three rangers (and one Nature Center Director) who are assigned to the Tri-canyon parks (Tecolote, Rose and Marian Bear/San Clemente). These park rangers provide oversight, public education and protection for both the natural and public resources of the two linear parks totaling 779 acres. In addition, both parks are overseen by official City of San Diego citizens' advisory committees and there is a high level of community oversight and public use.

However, once San Clemente and Rose creeks leave Parks' jurisdiction and join to become Rose Creek (where Interstate 5 and State Route 52 meet), management and public oversight of the remainder of the City of San Diego-owned creek, (designated as a flood control channel), is almost non-existent until it reaches Mission Bay. Further complicating matters, the political, community and public safety oversight of this small ~80-acre, 3-mile largely industrial section of lower Rose Creek is split between two communities (Pacific Beach and Clairemont), three council districts (1,2 and 6), two county supervisorial districts (1 and 4) and two City police beats. The result: no one entity is providing focused oversight to make certain that the public land of lower Rose Creek is comprehensively managed for the public's benefit. This is further complicated by the City's chronic fiscal problems which have stretched the City's staff resources and limited collaboration between departments. The end result has been that lower Rose Creek has been severely neglected.

# Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment

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Fortunately, steps are being taken to make the watershed a healthier and safer place.

The California Coastal Conservancy, the County of San Diego, the City of San Diego, San Diego Earthworks and the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance have joined together to create this Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment (Assessment), a comprehensive analysis of opportunities and recommendations to enhance the natural, cultural, public safety, and recreation attributes of the RCW. San Diego Earthworks is acting as the project manager; the consulting team includes landscape architects KTU+A, biologists Merkel and Associates, and archaeologist Dr. Susan Hector. The San Diego Natural History Museum has provided additional biological review and insight.

The City of San Diego has provided significant in-kind support to this project as described in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) attached as appendix A to this assessment. The City's Park and Recreation Department, Open Space Division, provided critical guidance and leadership during the development of this assessment. The City's Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program also provided important technical support. City staff in other City departments especially the Police Department and the Fire-Rescue Department provided guidance throughout the development of the assessment.

This assessment is intended to engage and inform the public, guide volunteers and professionals, and build policy level support within the appropriate public and private agencies to enhance and preserve the watershed. The City of San Diego will also use the assessment to create a Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) for Rose Canyon, to guide parks activities there. There is already a NRMP for San Clemente canyon.

San Diego Earthworks convened a public steering committee called the "Rose Creek Watershed Alliance (Alliance)" to help guide the development of the Assessment, as well as the implementation of its action recommendations. A number of community, business and environmental organizations joined the Alliance and developed an initial comprehensive vision for the Rose Creek Watershed that was incorporated into this Assessment. More information about the watershed and the Alliance can be found at [www.rosecreekwatershed.org](http://www.rosecreekwatershed.org).

This Assessment is not the sole product of the watershed planning effort, but the culmination of several interim technical studies and overviews that were developed. Five additional work products are available for review at [www.rosecreekwatershed.org](http://www.rosecreekwatershed.org) and include: an Existing Conditions report, and technical memoranda on Cultural Resources; Recreational Trails; Biological Resources; and Hydrologic Modifications.

## **Reading the Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the project and the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance's vision for the watershed. It also summarizes some key elements Alliance members identified while striving to achieve the vision of an integrated approach to watershed preservation and enhancement. These elements were linked to a variety of next steps to move the planning process from issue identification, through development of solutions, and on to implementation. The combination of the vision points, key elements to consider, and next steps provided the foundation on which the action recommendations in Chapter 2 were developed.

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Chapter 2 is the heart and sole of the Assessment as it discusses all of the actions being recommended for implementation. The chapter is organized into six sections: Proactive Conservation; Biological Resources; Cultural Resources; Public Safety; Recreational Resources; and Water Resources. The actions are designed to be used alone or in combination to systematically improve the use and function of the watershed's resources. An "adaptive" approach is recommended that will allow for mid-course corrections, as needed, as recommendations are implemented. A summary of the recommended actions is provided below:

- ☑ *Create a Rose Creek Watershed Conservation Bank*
- ☑ *Enhance the biological connection to Mission Bay*
- ☑ *Control invasive species*
- ☑ *Restore and enhance native habitats*
- ☑ *Protect and enhance wildlife corridors*
- ☑ *Establish consistent land management of the open space lands (private and public)*
- ☑ *Document and protect cultural resources*
- ☑ *Assess potential effects on cultural resources from other action recommendations*
- ☑ *Interpret cultural resources*
- ☑ *Manage fire risk*
- ☑ *Reduce landslides*
- ☑ *Reduce illegal activities on open space lands*
- ☑ *Improve access to the open space system*
- ☑ *Improve access within and between open space areas*
- ☑ *Create regional recreational connections and loops*
- ☑ *Create safe and legal railroad crossings*
- ☑ *Develop data and models to improve understanding of hydrology and hydraulics*
- ☑ *Reduce erosion from multiple sources*
- ☑ *Modify or remove concrete flood control channels*
- ☑ *Monitor and reduce water pollution*

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Existing Conditions report and Technical Memoranda, serving as background information in support of the action recommendations. The information provided is intended to act as a bridge between the brief summaries provided with the action recommendations in Chapter 2 and the full versions of the reports.

Chapter 4 provides supplemental information on several of the actions described in Chapter 2. Information includes more detailed descriptions on recommendations such as potential restoration sites, new trail segments, stream channel restoration techniques, and concrete flood control channel restoration.