

Rose Creek Watershed

OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT

at a glance

San Diego, California

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PROJECT TEAM:

San Diego EarthWorks • KTU&A • Merkel & Associates • Susan Hector Consulting • San Diego Natural History Museum • Land Conservation Brokerage, Inc.

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Overview

The California Coastal Conservancy, the County of San Diego, the City of San Diego, San Diego EarthWorks, Land Conservation Brokerage and the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance joined together to create the *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment* (Assessment). The document was completed in 2005 and adopted by the San Diego City Council in 2008. This study analyzed the conditions within the Rose Creek Watershed and created recommendations to enhance the watershed's natural, cultural, public safety, and recreational qualities.

A group of fifteen organizations known as the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance (Alliance) helped guide this study. These organizations are dedicated to planning the watershed's future. San Diego EarthWorks initiated the group to provide feedback during the study. Members of the Alliance are continuing to find funding to enact the report's recommendations.

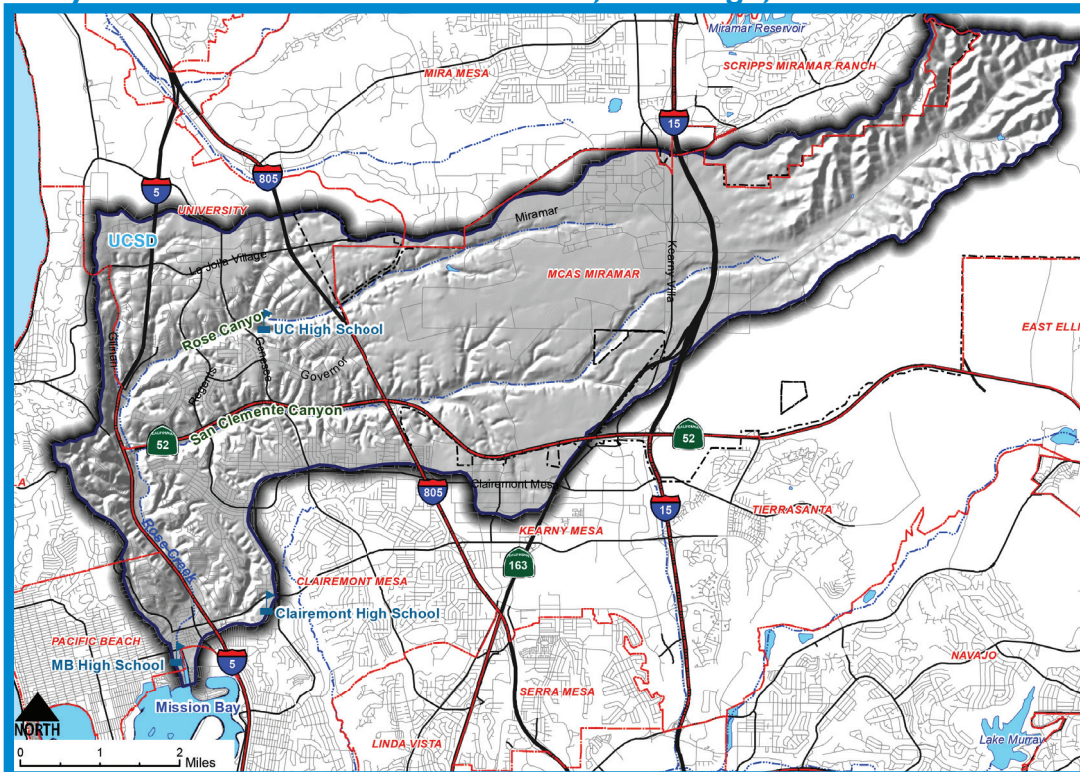
What is a Watershed?

A watershed is the geographic area where all water drains into a common body of water. A watershed carries the water "shed" by rain and urban runoff (created by activities such as people washing their cars in their driveways). Drop by drop, this water is channeled into the canyons, creeks and storm drains as it picks up pollution such as trash, oil and cigarette butts. This water that eventually flows into bays and the ocean serves as a major source of pollution that often closes beaches.

The Rose Creek Watershed is a 36-square mile area in the northern portion of San Diego, California. From the eastern boundaries (a.k.a., "headwaters"), it extends from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar for sixteen miles along San Clemente and Rose creeks through the communities of Clairemont and University City to the east end of Mount Soledad. The system ultimately drains into Mission Bay Park in Pacific Beach next to Kendall-Frost Mission Bay Marsh Reserve, the last remaining wetlands on Mission Bay. More than 100,000 people live in this watershed, and our actions on land affect the water downstream.

The watershed contains great natural beauty and many hiking and biking trails. The land within the watershed that has not been developed plays an important role in San Diego's natural environment. Many types of native plant communities here provide homes for local wildlife and support endangered and threatened animals.

Study Location: Rose Creek Watershed, San Diego, California



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Current Threats and Approaches for Protection

While the overall health of the Rose Creek Watershed is better than many others in Southern California, portions of lower Rose Creek are unhealthy and unsafe. Poor water quality in the creek can lead to closed beaches along Mission Bay and the ocean and harms San Diego's economy. Management and oversight of these areas is shared among many different private and public landowners, City Councils, law enforcement districts, and community groups. Without cohesive management, these areas have become overgrown with invasive, non-native plant species and serve as hotbeds for criminal activity and vagrancy. The Assessment serves as a broad vision and presents a method to manage the watershed as a whole system in order to combat these and other issues.

History

The California Coastal Conservancy was the first agency to provide funding to kick off this visionary project. Work began in 2004 by reviewing the conditions that currently existed within the watershed, such as hiking facilities and water quality. The Alliance also developed a list of goals to be addressed in the Assessment. These goals and the findings of the Existing Conditions Report were used to develop the framework of the draft Assessment.

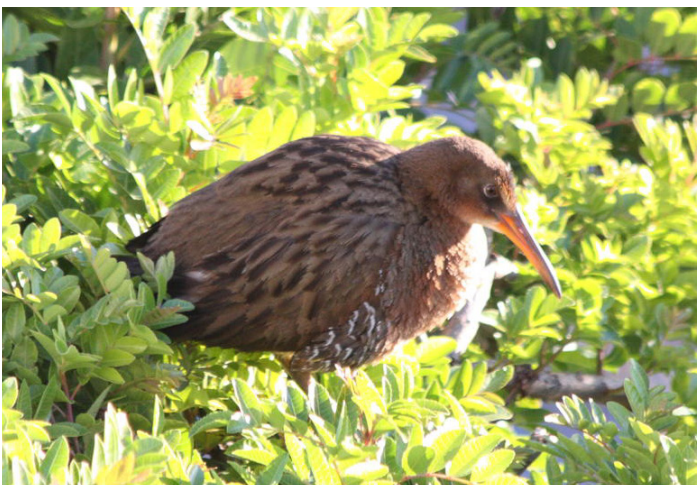
The Report

The Assessment provides a list of recommendations to achieve the Alliance's vision for improving the watershed in a variety of ways. The recommendations can be used alone or in combination to improve the use and function of the watershed's qualities. The steps outlined in the report are designed to adapt over time in response to unforeseen environmental changes.

Goals and Recommendations

The recommendations are mostly focused on the western third of the watershed (west of I-805) and center on these key goals:

1. The issues and solutions within the watershed are linked and should be addressed together.
2. Improving the way water moves on land to minimize the potential for flooding and erosion is critical to restoring the natural functions of the creeks.
3. The creation of a continuous recreational trail and wildlife corridor from I-805 to Mission Bay Park is a viable and necessary regional amenity.
4. Support for the recommendations will need to be developed through public outreach and education.



The Light-footed Ridgway's rail (formerly the Light-footed clapper rail), is an endangered species that relies on sensitive salt marsh habitat at the mouth of Rose Creek for its survival.



Elementary students and their parents explore Rose Canyon Open Space Park with naturalists from Friends of Rose Canyon.

THEME	NO.	RECOMMENDATION	DESCRIPTION
Recommendations for Proactive Conservation	2.1.1	Conservation banking is proactive.	A conservation bank protects natural resources like a bank protects your money. When someone plans a project that will impact endangered species or valuable habitat, they can buy “credits” in a conservation bank. The owner of the bank uses the money to protect and manage those resources with restoration projects. (Definition courtesy of www.fws.gov .)
	2.1.2	Create a Rose Creek Watershed Conservation Bank.	The City could eliminate lengthy regulatory processes and significant costs by establishing a conservation bank to implement the Assessment’s recommendations within the watershed.
Recommendations for Biological Resources	2.2.1	Enhance the biological connection to Mission Bay.	Kendall-Frost Mission Bay Marsh Reserve, the last remaining salt marsh on Mission Bay, is adjacent to the creekmouth and separated by developed land. Sensitive marsh animals could benefit from improvements to the marsh that would restore its connection to Rose Creek as outlined in the Mission Bay Park Master Plan.
	2.2.2	Control invasive species.	Invasive, non-native plant species crowd out the native plants that provide habitat for wildlife and can also lead to flooding, poor water quality and fires.
	2.2.3	Restore and enhance native habitats.	Native habitats within the watershed such as marshes, stream channels and upland areas within 200 feet of the creeks provide critical homes for local animals, many of which are considered to be sensitive or endangered.
	2.2.4	Protect and enhance wildlife corridors.	Unvegetated concrete flood channels, roads and railroad corridors can impact the ability of wildlife to move between natural areas. This movement is important for animals searching for food and for promoting genetic diversity.
	2.2.5	Establish consistent land management of the open space lands (public and private).	Consistent land management practices throughout the watershed will result in greater likelihood of long-term sustainability. Key parcels recommended for acquisition are listed in the Assessment.
	2.2.6	Protect and enhance native plants and animals.	Protecting currently available habitats from further degradation is the most important conservation strategy within the watershed. Other strategies include restoration and a long-term monitoring program.
	2.2.7	Conduct environmental education.	Promoting environmental education in watershed schools and encouraging youth service projects are two key ways to protect the watershed.
Recommendations for Cultural Resources	2.3.1	Document and promote cultural resources.	Conducting a complete cultural resource survey is critical to protecting the cultural and historic resources.
	2.3.2	Assess potential effects on cultural resources from other Assessment recommendations.	Surveys for archaeological resources should be conducted during the planning phase for habitat restoration projects.
	2.3.3	Interpret cultural resources.	A series of interpretive panels based on research could be placed throughout the watershed.

THEME	NO.	RECOMMENDATION	DESCRIPTION
Recommendations for Public Safety	2.4.1	Manage fire risk.	A Fire Risk Management Study could map and model fire risk to help understand potential ignition sources. Fire Safe Neighborhood Councils could help manage the fire risk of non-native vegetation.
	2.4.2	Reduce landslides.	Canyon topography creates many areas with elevated risk for landslides. Strategies such as redirecting rain water, removing invasive ground cover and re-landscaping with native plants could be used to prevent this risk.
	2.4.3	Reduce illegal activities.	Constructing new avenues for public access and maintaining the non-native vegetation canopy are two solutions that could help prevent illegal activities in lower Rose Creek.
Recommendations for Recreational Resources	2.5.1	Improve access to the open space system.	Highlighting the current trail access points with kiosks and creating new trailheads will offer more access.
	2.5.2	Improve access within and between open space areas.	New trails, connector routes and creek crossings are suggested in the Assessment.
	2.5.3	Create regional recreational connections.	A multi-use trail connection from I-805 through Rose and San Clemente canyons to Mission Bay is an integral component of the watershed vision.
	2.5.4	Create trail linkages and loops.	A regional trail linking both canyons would provide better access and enjoyment of trail systems.
	2.5.5	Create safe and legal railroad crossings.	Upgrading existing private railroad crossings and constructing a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge will remove current barriers to trail linkages.
Recommendations for Water Resources	2.6.1	Develop data and models to improve understanding of how water moves through the watershed.	Defining the intensity of rainfall, the rate of flow in streams, and the impacts of water flowing through the watershed will help plan adaptive restoration projects.
	2.6.2	Reduce erosion.	A long-term, adaptive approach to reduce erosion that can easily be modified to specific situations or environmental changes can help stabilize conditions.
	2.6.3	Modify or remove concrete flood control channels.	The City's approach to flood control channels can be reassessed to determine whether environmentally-focused alternatives are possible.
	2.6.4	Monitor and reduce water pollution.	Focused efforts to identify the sources of pollutants listed in the Assessment will help prevent water pollution.

For further information or to find out how you can get involved, contact:

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