



San Diego Canyonlands Mission and Programs Protection and Restoration of Important Resource Values

San Diego Canyonlands is a non-profit organization whose mission it is to promote, protect and restore the natural habitats in San Diego County canyons and creeks by fostering education and ongoing community involvement in stewardship and advocacy, and by collaborating with other organizations.

SAN DIEGO CANYONLANDS PROGRAMS

Organize Friends Groups for the Canyons

At the heart of our mission is the development of *sustainable stewardship groups, or friends groups* to take care of and protect our natural open spaces. We conduct outreach to residents, community groups, youth groups businesses and schools and through free guided tours and presentations we raise awareness and appreciation for the open spaces and foster an ethic of ownership and stewardship. **We have organized 35 active friends groups over the years.**

Youth Programs

We have several youth programs that use the canyons as nature classrooms and connect the young San Diegans to nature. These programs include hands-on learning, habitat restoration and other stewardship activities. **Students can earn their required community service credits** by helping in their neighborhood canyon.

Canyon Enhancement Planning

Our newest program is Canyon Enhancement Planning (CEP). We have a CEP Committee made up of professional urban designers and planners. They are creating a CEP Guide for community stakeholders that facilitates planning visual and physical canyon access, connections into communities, restoration, conservation, environment-based education, and ecologically sensitive recreation.

Establishing a San Diego Regional Canyonlands Park

Through the dedication of approximately 10,000 acres of city-owned open space, SDCL is working to establish a Canyonlands Park through City Council action by June 2012.

Resource Values of Our Open Spaces

To inspire appreciation and foster awareness, we must be able to articulate the importance of our canyons and natural eco-systems. They provide:

- 1) **Passive Recreation: hiking, jogging, dog walking, bird/wildlife watching;**
- 2) **Visual, Psychological & Physical Relief, Our canyons provide an escape to nature from an otherwise completely urbanized environment.**
- 3) **Educational Opportunities: Nature Classroom, Wildlife and Watershed studies; Connecting youth to nature is important.**
- 4) **Species/Wildlife Conservation: San Diego county has more biodiversity, and more endangered and threatened species that any other county on the continental USA. Restoring the habitats helps them survive in our region.**
- 5) **Water Quality Benefits: Native, canyon vegetation, with its deep roots, can absorb, filter and breakdown pollutants from urban storm-water runoff cleaning the water before it gets to our beaches.**

Protecting the Resource Values of San Diego Canyons

- 1) **Passive Recreational Values** should be preserved and enhanced where appropriate. Some canyons, that are particularly important for species conservation, should be preserved for wildlife observation/study and human impacts should be minimized/reduced. Access improvements that increase human activity, while desirable in many canyons, should strive to protect the natural resource values.
- 2) **Visual, Psychological and Physical Relief** San Diego's Canyons are an escape to nature from an otherwise completely paved and urbanized environment. Citizens and visitors appreciate viewing San Diego's natural landform, habitats and wildlife. This visual treat helps soothe the mind and relieves the stress of modern living with its fast pace and information overload. Singing birds, buzzing bees and the cry of soaring hawks replaces the noise of traffic. The aroma of sage brush, twittering birds, flowering plants, butterflies, and wildlife welcome the senses and curious eyes of urban dwellers. The natural aesthetics of the canyons should be preserved and enhanced.
- 3) **Educational values** should be preserved and opportunities utilized. >>In his book "***Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder***", (2005) author **Richard Louv** pulls together a host of studies and information that show our children learn better in a natural, outdoor setting than within the walls of the traditional classroom. One national study of environment-based education that Louv points to was conducted by the State Education and Environmental Roundtable. Louv wrote: "***The Roundtable worked with 150 schools in 16 states for ten years, identifying model environment-based programs and examining how the students fared on standardized tests. The findings indicate that environment-based education produces student gains in social studies, science, language arts and math; improves standardized test scores and grade point averages; and develops skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision making.***" (Report entitled "***Closing the Achievement Gap***", (2002). << Like San Diego's schools, the canyons are scattered throughout the city providing nearby opportunities for schools to establish a nature-classroom program. There is so much for our urban youth to learn from the canyons themselves including: human and natural history, biology and the study of our many endangered and threatened species, archeology/paleontology, geology and the emerging science of watershed management. The canyons are a classroom for water quality monitoring and testing and solution-oriented study. Schools could establish native plant gardens to assist with canyon restoration projects.
- 4) **Species/Wildlife Conservation** Our county has more endangered and threatened species that any other county on the continental USA. Many of our endangered habitats, on which many species depend for survival, are found in the canyons such as the riparian woodlands (wetlands) that follow the streams through our canyons. Our adopted Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) calls for protection of wetlands both inside and outside of preserve areas. Some canyons serve as important wildlife corridors for habitat area connectivity, and others are important stop-over locations for mobile and migrating species. The wildlife values of our canyons should be preserved and enhanced.
- 5) **Water Quality Benefits** Our polluted urban runoff is a growing problem with several days of beach closures after every rain. Canyon vegetation can absorb, filter, and breakdown pollutants from urban storm-water runoff. This natural capability should be protected and restored. Urban storm-water runoff that is being funneled into canyons from our streets is increasing the erosion of the streams and canyon slopes and thus increasing sedimentation pollution to our coastal waters. Urban redevelopment should seek innovative ways to reduce the flow of runoff into the canyons.