



SAVE OUR FOREST AND RANCLANDS

Peninsular Range Wilderness Eco-System

The Cleveland and San Bernardino National Forests were established in 1906 to protect the natural resources of the northern one-hundred miles of the Peninsular Range. Since that time civilization has risen around all sides of this forested province, and one-by-one the unique wildlife and plants have begun to disappear.

First lost were the California Grizzly Bear (1908), Long Eared Kit Fox (1931), and California Condor (1933). The last Pronghorn were recorded at Campo in 1922, though some ranchers remember barbecuing antelope just before the 1940's from the San Felipe Valley near Lake Henshaw.

Now a new wave of extirpations has begun to push out the Puma, Mule Deer, Badger, Mastiff Bat, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Southern Spotted Owl, Red and Yellow-Legged Frogs, Pond Turtle, Trapdoor Spider, and many more mammals, reptiles, butterflies, and whole plant communities.

The forest is the fabric woven together by a remarkable system of grasslands and meadowlands. Like the vital organs of a body, these are the productive base of the forest which, if urbanized, would strip our mountain environment and leave only a non-functional vestige of this vital wilderness ecosystem. A visit to Lake Arrowhead or Big Bear Lake will illustrate the traffic jammed shopping center suburbia that is being planned for the Laguna and Cuyamaca Mountains. Only if we vigorously maintain the wilderness of the Peninsular Range will there be any use in spending the effort to connect together the "nature" that persists in our coastal areas. We are the last generation that will have the chance to save this wilderness.

The mountains of San Diego County are part of the Peninsular Range Province. Geologically, the Peninsular Ranges include the Santa Ana and San Jacinto Mountains and extend the entire length of Baja California. However, biogeographically, the Peninsular Range Province extends into Baja California only as far as the southern end of the Sierra de San Pedro Martir. South of those mountains, the vegetation becomes part of the Sonoran Desert. San Diego County Mountains, while not the tallest, are the central portion, or core of this Province.

There are several unique features within the San Diego Mountains that distinguish them from the others in the Peninsular Range Province. The Cuyamaca and the Palomar Ranges receive over 40 inches of rainfall per season in their upper regions, with part of Palomar vying for the wettest spot in Southern California. The Cuyamaca Mountains and some of the major foothill peaks, including Viejas, Poser, and Los Pinos Mountains, are composed of *gabbro*, a rock-type that weathers into a unique soil that may partially inhibit the growth of some plants, but serves as a refuge for other plants.

In a similar manner, Otay, San Miguel, and the Jamul Mountains are composed of plant inhibiting rocks from the Jurassic age. The southern and eastern mountains, such as Hot Springs Mountain, and Mount Laguna, receive a significant amount of their rainfall during summer thunderstorms, on the average, a greater level than anywhere else in Southern California. The geographic landforms in the San Diego County Mountains have created a series of valleys with large meadows, including the Doane, French, Mendenhall, Dyche, and Will Valleys on Palomar, the upland grasslands on Volcan Mountain, the area around Cuyamaca lake, Corte Madera meadow, south of Pine Valley, Laguna Meadow and Will Valley on Mount Laguna. Such a series of meadows is unique in all of Southern California.

All of these facts have produced a great diversity of habitats in the central portion of the Peninsular Range Province. The result of the diversity of habitats is a similar diversity of plant species. The unusual soil types resulting from the *gabbro* and volcanic rocks have served as refuges for a number of plants that were forced there by competition with normal chaparral species. These soil types, as well as the many micro-habitats, also served to allow for differentiation and specialization of species from the surroundings. The Laguna Mountain nurture Gander's butterflower, Cismontane beargrass, Hall's gum-plant, and Cuyamaca dowingia. These are just a few of the sensitive species that are found either completely confined or nearly confined to the central portion of the Peninsular Ranges. The forest diversity, ranging from dense, majestic stands of Incense cedar, White fir, Big-cone Douglas fir, and Black and Canyon live oaks on Palomar Mountain, to 450-year old Sugar pines on the Cuyamaca Mountains the open forest of Jeffrey pines and Black oaks on Mount Laguna demonstrate the variation in climatic conditions, as well as paleogeography in the area.

These favorable conditions were also reflected in the wildlife that used to and still occurs here. San Diego County was known for many years to support one of the densest populations of Golden Eagle in North America. The presence of the Large blotched salamander, which is found nowhere else, and a variety of the familiar Banana slug on Palomar Mountain, attest to the moisture in the mountains. The Grizzly bear that used to occur here were some of the largest anywhere, ranging up to 1500 to 2000 pounds in size. The fact that the area is still home to a relatively large population of mountain lions, while development is encroaching on all sides, is a further indication of the vigor and productivity of the area.

This is not to say that the other portions of the Peninsular ranges, south in the Sierra de Juarez and Sierra de San Pedro Martir where dry forests grow on open plateaus, and the San Jacinto Mountains, where red fir grows on the top of the peak, are of any lesser values. However, the mountains within the San Diego County and the Cleveland National Forest are particularly unique due to the relatively moist conditions and biogeographic location. They are also of extreme importance due to the spread of the burgeoning human population. As population grows, these shady island retreats, replete with green meadows, summer showers, and trees that are green in summer, and change color in Fall, are invaluable and irreplaceable.