

17. San Andreas SEA

Location

General

The San Andreas Significant Ecological Area (SEA) is located in the western portion of the Antelope Valley in an unincorporated area of the County. The SEA is the second largest SEA and includes many diverse habitats. This is in large part due to the northwestern area being a meeting place for several diverse biomes and wildlife corridors. There are five ecoregions that meet in this area and have biological species that extend along the SEA and San Andreas Fault in the County. These ecoregions include: California Coastal Mountains; California Central Valley; Tehachapi Mountains, which extend to the southern Sierra Nevada; San Gabriel Mountains, which extend to other ranges in the Transverse Ranges; and the Antelope Valley, which is the northwestern end of the Mojave Desert. Wildlife corridors extend along the courses of the mountain ranges, as well as along the San Andreas Fault and Garlock Fault, which provide a great variety of habitats and frequent emergent water that is important for wildlife and plant movement and connectivity. The location and orientation of the SEA coincides with a segment of the San Andreas Fault Zone. The SEA includes a small portion of the western south-facing Tehachapi foothills, which are known for wildflower field displays in years of good rainfall. The SEA goes east and south across grasslands at the western tip of the Antelope Valley, includes Quail Lake, a former sag pond enhanced to receive water from the West Branch of the California Aqueduct. From Quail Lake, the SEA extends up the northern foothills of Liebre Mountain and Sawmill Mountain, and includes: Portal Ridge; large portions of Leona Valley; Ritter Ridge, Fairmont and Antelope buttes; and portions of Anaverde Valley. It also includes a disjunct area that encompasses water bodies along the fault, Lake Palmdale, and Una Lake, with a terminus at Barrel Springs.

The Antelope Valley and adjacent desert slopes of the SEA are recognized by California Audubon as the Antelope Valley (Lancaster) Globally Important Bird Area (IBA). Near Lake Palmdale in the disjunct eastern section of the SEA is part of the Antelope Valley (Lancaster) IBA and near Barrel Springs is part of the Santa Clara River IBA.

The SEA is located at least partially in each of the following United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' California Quadrangles: Lebec, La Liebre Ranch, Neenach School, Fairmont Butte, Little Buttes, Liebre Mountain, Burnt Peak, Lake Hughes, Del Sur, Lancaster West, Sleepy Valley, Ritter Ridge, and Palmdale.

General Boundary and Resources Description

The northwestern tip of the SEA encompasses south-facing foothills at the western end of the Tehachapi Mountains, in the northwest corner of the County, on the eastern side of Tejon Pass. The largest extent of native perennial grassland and diverse wildflower fields occurs in this area of the County.

From the Tehachapi Foothills, the southern boundary goes south-southeast along Interstate-5, including much of Peace Valley in the Gorman area, which is the broad faulted area that includes Gorman Creek. The SEA boundary crosses the Western Branch of the California Aqueduct, which is south of the junction of Interstate-5 and State Route-138. The boundary continues south along Interstate-5 until the point where the Liebre Mountain ridgeline dips to the highway, and the SEA boundary turns eastward and follows the ridgeline along the northern side of Liebre Mountain.

Along this section of Interstate-5 are several large underpasses for stream courses that are extremely important for wildlife connectivity across Interstate-5. The Angeles National Forest boundary is just east of the highway, and south of the aqueduct. Just north of the Liebre Mountain ridgeline, the San Andreas borders the north, east, and south sides of the eight unit of the Joshua Tree Woodlands SEA. This woodland is an unnamed arroyo, and it has the clumped growth form that Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) exhibit in hilly areas. The woodland is near the westernmost Joshua tree of the species. The woodland is a range extreme end. The SEA includes the northern slope are of the Angeles National Forest with its diversity of chaparral, grasslands, and oak and conifer forests.

After turning east from Interstate-5 and climbing uphill on the northern slope of Liebre Mountain, the SEA boundary crosses the ridgeline to the south to incorporate natural pristine areas of headwaters for all the branches of Liebre Gulch, which are part of the headwaters for Piru Creek, which is the largest tributary of the Santa Clara River in Ventura County. The SEA boundary returns to the north face of Liebre Gulch at about the location of Sandberg. The boundary tracks the Sawmill Mountain-Maxwell Road, which is generally on the broad ridgeline of the mountains and generally trends in a southeasterly direction. This ridgeline is the headwaters of Castaic Creek, which is the largest tributary of the Santa Clara River in the County. Castaic Creek is above the Castaic Reservoir, which extends into Cienega Canyon and Fish Creek, which is federally-designated critical habitat for the endangered arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*). In addition, maintenance of pure water in the source areas is critical for the species.

The boundary turns northeast where it meets Lake Hughes Road. This is an extremely important area of connectivity as the canyon along the Lake Hughes Road (Elizabeth Lake Canyon) drains to Castaic Creek and the Santa Clara River, whereas the Amargosa Creek that goes east and west from the Lake Hughes Road in the Fault valley drains to the Antelope Valley in both directions. The junction is topographically broad and well-vegetated though residential, which is excellent for wildlife connectivity in spite of a few houses. This is one of the major connective areas for the Pacific Ocean, the mountains, and the Mojave Desert. Castaic Creek is a principle tributary of the Santa Clara River, which runs to the seacoast in Ventura County. The San Gabriel Mountains are the home of Castaic Creek. The Antelope Valley receives most of the drainages from the San Andreas Fault valley.

The SEA boundary goes north at the junction with Lake Hughes Road and then skirts the Lake Hughes community's extension into Pine Canyon along the San Andreas Fault. In Pine Canyon, the boundary turns north and returns to its southeasterly direction, skirting the Lake Hughes development along the southern edge of Portal Ridge. Portal Ridge is entirely included in the SEA. A side extension of the southern boundary includes Lake Hughes, which is important for migrating waterfowl, with its sheltered position in the Fault valley. The boundary extends along the southern edge of Lake Hughes, Munz Lake, and Elizabeth Lake, and then trends southeast to go along the Leona Divide, including a large portion of Leona Valley.

The entire area along the San Andreas Fault is rich in wetlands and bogs, but Leona Valley has these in abundance, even in many yards. All of the wetlands in the San Andreas Fault valley and Portal Ridge are home to the greatest concentration of the tricolored blackbird in Southern California, many of which are year-round residents. This bird species has experienced great population declines in recent years and is proposed for listing at both state and federal levels. In the community of Leona Valley, the southern SEA boundary goes along Lost Valley Creek and then along Leona Road to exclude some of the denser residential area in this section. The included area in Leona Valley has many of the bogs that line the Fault and the less populated farm areas along Portal Ridge north of Leona Road.

Around the area of the northward drainage of Bouquet Canyon, the southern SEA boundary dips south around an expansive area of drainages and bogs used by the tricolor blackbird on the old

Ritter Ranch. From Ritter Canyon to the east, the boundary follows the old Ritter Ranch high road along the Sierra Pelona, crosses from 40th Street to the California Aqueduct along vegetation in the Anaverde Valley (where the boundary transitions from the Amargosa Creek drainage to the Anaverde Creek drainage), and then follows the aqueduct to the area where Anaverde Creek exits from the Fault valley. At the Lancaster Landfill boundary, the SEA boundary goes north and becomes the north SEA boundary at Verde Point.

The northern boundary of the SEA begins at Tejon Pass next to Interstate-5 and follows the Kern-Los Angeles County line eastward to the intersection of the western branch of the California Aqueduct in the western Tehachapi Foothills. This area along the Kern-Los Angeles County line is a contact boundary with the designated critical habitat for the federally-endangered California condor (*Gymnogyps californicus*), which is a bird that nearly went extinct and was saved by prodigious efforts in captive breeding. The boundary turns southeast to contour along the toe of slopes of low-lying hills where some of the few remaining examples of native perennial bunchgrass communities in California are found. The boundary crosses State Route-138, just east of where Tentrock Canyon also crosses State Route-138 and turns eastward into the Antelope Valley. Here the northern SEA boundary turns east to contour along the foothill area of the northern slope of Liebre Mountain. The boundary continues southeast following the edge of agricultural fields, which are important for raptor foraging. These fields often go along the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which is a little south of the California Aqueduct in this area, or along the California Aqueduct itself.

The boundary eventually tracks along the northeast edge of Fairmont Reservoir (another breeding site for the tricolored blackbird), and turns northeast to include a patchwork of farmed areas between the Fairmont and Antelope buttes, which are known to have tricolored blackbird feeding grounds. The boundary makes an inclusive path to encompass the Broad Canyon Wash, the Fairmont and Antelope buttes, and the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Park. These desert buttes are concentrated wintering grounds for birds of prey, and provide roosting sites that are surrounded by cultivated fields that support a plentiful food supply of rodents, rabbits, and hares. They are the most westerly buttes in the Mojave Desert, and with their proximity to the San Gabriel Mountains, have unique ecological relationships of scientific interest. Near the southern area of the buttes, the boundary follows agricultural fields along 130th Street West and then 135th Street West south to Munz Ranch Road (Willow Springs Road on some maps). Along 135th Street West, the boundary crosses Myrick Canyon where it spreads out onto the plain of the desert floor. The upstream areas of Myrick Canyon are included in the SEA.

The boundary tracks along the northwest side of Munz Ranch Road and then crosses to include Willow Springs Canyon, where Willow Springs Canyon is most natural. Where Willow Springs Canyon crosses the California Aqueduct, the northern SEA boundary turns east along the California Aqueduct as it passes along the northern base of Portal Ridge. Following the southern edge of the California Aqueduct, the boundary continues in a southeasterly direction to the east side of Ritter Ridge to Leona Siphon. A development along Joshua Tree Ranch Road near the summit of Ritter Ridge is an area exclude from the SEA. The SEA northern boundary turns east for roughly one quarter mile along the southern edge of a tributary to Amargosa Creek. Where the Amargosa Creek terminates Ritter Ridge, the SEA boundary crosses the creek and ascends along the ridgeline of an unnamed ridge to where it meets the southern boundary at Verde Point.

East across the State Route-14 is a disjunct part of the SEA that incorporates Lake Palmdale and Una Lake and extends along the Fault to 37th Street East, including the ridgelines north and south of Barrel Springs Road, which includes the sag ponds or Barrel Springs. The Palmdale Ditch is included in this part of the SEA. Many migrant birds using the desert water features can be observed at these artificial lakes and the natural springs of this area during the spring and fall migration.

The gap between the two portions of the SEA includes the Antelope Valley Landfill, disturbed lots, and State Route-14.

The majority of land within the SEA lies within unincorporated area of the County. Other jurisdictions include the Angeles National Forest, the City of Palmdale, and the City of Lancaster.

Vegetation

Due to the unique location along a large fault valley that is bordered by pressure ridges, the large variation in elevation and topography, and because it includes a meeting point of large “eco-regions,” vegetation within the SEA is the most diverse of any of the County’s SEAs. The SEA includes arid desert communities, foothill woodland communities; high elevation piñon pine; chaparral communities; sag pond wetlands; native perennial grasslands; desert and montane riparian; and deciduous, oak, and conifer forest communities. In addition, the transition zones between these communities produce unusual species compositions. At its northwest end, the SEA encompasses a portion of the south-facing foothills of the Tehachapi Mountains, which have wildflower displays in years of good rainfall. Characteristic species include buttercup, poppy, owl’s clover, lupines, and many species of sunflowers and daisies. Moving southeast, the SEA contains the north-facing slopes of Liebre and Sawmill mountains. The upper slopes of these mountains are densely vegetated with chaparral and scattered mixed woodlands. The lower slopes are more sparsely vegetated with scrub species, mixed scrub and grassland. The grassland and some ephemeral wildflower fields extend onto the plain of the valley floor. Most of the mountainous portion of the SEA is undisturbed open space, with a few scattered residential developments. The peak of Liebre Mountain represents the highest point in the SEA at 5,701 feet above mean sea level (MSL).

Moving further southeast, Portal Ridge is included in the SEA. This ridge has a series of peaks on the north side of the Fault. Upper slopes are vegetated with dense chaparral, juniper woodland, and Joshua tree woodland, while lower slopes are vegetated with scrub species and grassland. A series of small lakes (originally sag ponds along the Fault) occur along the base of the south-facing slopes including Lake Hughes, Munz Lake, Elizabeth Lake, and other smaller unnamed ponds. Further southeast, the SEA surrounds Amargosa Creek and a large portion of its watershed located in the Leona Valley. All along the north-facing slopes, a number of named and unnamed natural washes, often with flora that is sensitive and prefers watercourses, drain onto the valley floor from the mountains and the Fault. Named canyons are Tentrock; Horse Camp; Cow Spring; Pine; Spencer; Burnside; Adams; Rivera; Baldwin Grade; North Long; South Long; Kings; Bleich; Broad Wash; Price; Myrick; Willow Springs; many unnamed drainages off Portal Ridge and some off Ritter Ridge; Johnson Road Wash; and Railroad. Also included are Godde Pass Wash, Amargosa Creek, and Anaverde Creek. The vegetation transitions to grasslands and wildflower fields, where the SEA stretches north across the valley floor and encircles the Antelope and Fairmont buttes of the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve. Numerous large “bald” areas in the higher elevations have grasslands bordered by shrublands or forests.

The mountainous part of the SEA has an extremely diverse flora, which arises because of its topographic diversity and because of its connectivity to the western end of the SEA. This area is a meeting place for five diverse ecoregions and two or more wildlife corridors. Because of the great vegetation diversity, the area provides an opportunity for educational use, nature study, and scientific research. Foothill woodland extends from the western end of the SEA, all the way to Ritter Ridge, which is an uncommon plant community that contains oak savannahs of blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) and valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), and gray pine woodland (*Pinus sabiniana*). This community is more common in northern and central California, where it occurs along foothill and valley borders in the inner coastal ranges and western foothills of the Sierra Nevada. This is the only place it occurs in the County. Several component species, such as blue oak, gray pine, and California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*) reach their southern limits here. Slopes and ridge-tops are covered with chaparral and yellow-pine forest, which becomes pinyon-juniper woodland under desert influences on the lower northern slopes. Joshua tree woodland and sagebrush scrub cover the lower desert hillsides.

On the lower slopes and in the valleys south of the main ridgeline, one can find southern oak woodland, valley grassland, riparian woodland, sagebrush scrub, and even coastal sage scrub. All of these are relatively common in the County with the exception of sagebrush scrub. This community, which is dominated by Great Basin sage (*Artemisia tridentata*), is not common south of the Owens Valley in California. Populations in Southern California are probably relics from a prehistoric time when the community extended much further south than it does today.

Ritter Ridge comprises the most easterly portion of the San Gabriel Mountains in the SEA. Slopes on the north side of this ridgeline are vegetated with one of the best Joshua tree and California juniper mixed woodlands in the County. The combination of desert chaparral and foothill woodlands creates habitat for a rich faunal list, with 25 mammals, 53 birds and 19 reptiles recorded. South-facing slopes contain a mixture of scrub and chaparral communities. This section of the SEA includes Amargosa Creek and a portion of its watershed, which is located at the base of the south-facing slopes, and a segment of Anaverde Creek and watershed located in Anaverde Valley. All these creeks and washes support a variety of riparian communities.

The disjunct part of the SEA that includes Palmdale Lake, Una Lake, and Barrel Springs has upland portions vegetated with a desert scrub community with scattered Joshua trees. The lower areas consist of open water ponds, cattail ponds, riparian woodlands, and other wetland communities.

Plant species observed or recorded in previous documentation within the SEA are indicated in the *Comprehensive Floral & Faunal Compendium of the Los Angeles County SEAs*. Sensitive plant species occurring or potentially occurring within the SEA are discussed in the Sensitive Biological Resources section.

Descriptions and general locations of the each plant community present within the SEA are presented below. These include desert scrub, chaparral, native grassland, non-native grassland, southern willow scrub, foothill woodland, Joshua tree woodland, juniper woodland, valley oak woodland, bigcone Douglas fir-canyon oak woodland, southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest, freshwater marsh, alkali marsh, alluvial wash, and disturbed.

Desert Scrub: A moderately tall, fairly open shrubland with several species that contribute to the canopy. Dominants often include Great Basin sagebrush, antelope bush, saltbush, and/or rabbitbrush with several perennial grasses dispersed between the shrubs. Within the SEA, this community often intergrades with juniper woodlands and Joshua tree woodlands. Desert scrub is also found on lower slopes within the Fault, on north-facing slopes that transition onto the valley floor. They are also found on the buttes and adjacent valley floor, interspersed with grasslands.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Krascheninnikovia lanata* (winterfat scrubland) Shrubland Alliance
- *Suaeda moquinii* ([*Suaeda nigra*] bush seepweed scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex spinifera* (spinescale scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Pluchea sericea* (arrow weed thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Artemisia tridentata* (big sagebrush) Shrubland Alliance
- *Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *vaseyana* (mountain big sagebrush) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex canescens* (fourwing saltbush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex confertifolia* (shadscale scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex hymenelytra* (desert holly scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex lentiformis* (quailbush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Acacia greggii* (catclaw acacia thorn scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ericameria paniculata* (black-stem rabbitbrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ambrosia salsola* (cheesebrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance

- *Baccharis salicifolia* (mulefat thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Larrea tridentata* (creosote bush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Larrea tridentata-Ambrosia dumosa* (creosote bush-white burr sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex polycarpa* (allscale scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex spinifera* (spinescale scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Eriogonum fasciculatum* (California buckwheat scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Eriogonum heermannii* (Heermann's buckwheat patches) Provisional Shrubland Alliance
- *Eriogonum wrightii* (Wright's buckwheat patches) Dwarf Shrubland Alliance
- *Ephedra californica* (California joint fir scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Allenrolfea occidentalis* (iodine bush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Sarcobatus vermiculatus* (greasewood scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Yucca brevifolia* (Joshua tree woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Prosopis glandulosa* (mesquite bosque) Woodland Alliance
- *Ambrosia salsola* (cheesebush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Grayia spinosa* (spiny hop sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Castela emoryi* (crucifixion thorn stands) Shrubland Special Stands
- *Ericameria nauseosa* (rubber rabbitbrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Gutierrezia sarothrae* (broom snake weed scrub) Provisional Shrubland Alliance
- *Ambrosia dumosa* (white bursage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Eriogonum fasciculatum-Salvia apiana* (California buckwheat-white sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Lepidospartum squamatum* (scale broom scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Purshia tridentata* (bitter bush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Artemisia californica-Eriogonum fasciculatum* (California sagebrush-California buckwheat scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Salvia apiana* (white sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance

Chaparral: Consists of broad-leaved or needle-leaved, sclerophyllous (hard-leaved), medium height to tall shrubs. These shrubs form a dense cover on steep slopes below 5,000 feet in Southern California. Dominant species found within this community include chamise, manzanita, California lilac, laurel sumac, toyon, western mountain-mahogany, and desert mountain-mahogany. This plant community occupies most of the higher elevations within the SEA and is frequently interspersed with scrub and woodlands.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Adenostoma fasciculatum* (chamise chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Adenostoma fasciculatum-Salvia apiana* (chamise-white sage chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Arctostaphylos glandulosa* (Eastwood's manzanita chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Arctostaphylos glauca* (bigberry manzanita chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ceanothus spinosus* (greenbark ceanothus chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ceanothus oliganthus* (hairy leaf ceanothus chaparral) Shrubland Alliance
- *Prunus ilicifolia* (holly leaf cherry chaparral) Shrubland Alliance

Grassland: Consist of low, herbaceous vegetation that is dominated by grasses, but also harbors native forbs and bulbs, as well as naturalized annual forbs. Grasslands within the SEA include both non-native and native grasslands.

Native grassland consists of at least 10 percent relative cover of native herbaceous plants (grasses and forb species), with the remaining coverage similar to non-native grasslands. North of Quail Lake

there are areas where native perennial bunchgrasses and wildflowers dominate. In addition, introduced annual grasses are conspicuously limited. Small patches of native grassland can also be found scattered throughout the SEA. This occurs mostly in openings in coastal sage scrub and mixed with non-native grasslands in significant acreage on and surrounding the buttes, as well as throughout the Tehachapi foothills at the western end of the SEA. The Tehachapi foothills are part of an expansive perennial grassland. Many areas of native grassland, such as those surrounding the buttes, support dense displays of wildflowers, which have carpeted the area in some years and are referred to as “wildflower fields.”

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Leymus condensatus* (giant wild rye grassland) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Nassella cernua* ([*Stipa cernua*] nodding needle grass grassland) Provisional Herbaceous Alliance
- *Nassella lepida* ([*Stipa lepida*] foothill needle grass grassland) Provisional Herbaceous Alliance
- *Nassella pulchra* ([*Stipa pulchra*] purple needle grass grassland) Herbaceous Alliance

Non-native grassland consists of dominant invasive annual grasses that are primarily of Mediterranean origin. Dominant species found within this community include slender oats, wild oats, ripgut brome, foxtail chess, wild mustard, red-stemmed filaree, Mediterranean schismus, and golden tops. Non-native grasslands are located in small patches throughout the SEA, within more significant acreage on and adjacent to the buttes, and on south-facing slopes of the Tehachapi Mountains.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Avena (barbata, fatua)* (wild oats grasslands) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands
- *Brassica (nigra)* and other mustards (upland mustards) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands
- *Bromus (diandrus, hordeaceus)-Brachypodium distachyon* (annual brome grasslands) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands
- *Bromus rubens-Schismus (arabicus, barbatus)* ([*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*] Red brome or Mediterranean grass grasslands) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands
- *Lolium perenne* ([*Festuca perennis*] perennial rye grass fields) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands

Wildflower Field: An amorphous mix of herbaceous plants noted for conspicuous annual wildflower displays, although noteworthy displays do not occur every year and appear to depend on rainfall patterns. Dominance varies from site to site and from year to year at any one particular site. Species frequently present include California poppy, tidy tips, dove lupine, valley tassels, purple owl’s clover, and broad-leaved gilia. Within the SEA, prominent wildflower fields occur on the south facing slopes of the Tehachapi Mountains and buttes.

Corresponding MCV communities:

None at this time.

Southern Willow Scrub: A riparian community consisting of dense, broad-leafed, winter-deciduous riparian thickets that occur within and adjacent to watercourses. The dominant species of this community within the SEA are arroyo willow, red willow, and black willow. This community occurs in segments along portions of many of the drainages, as well as the periphery of many of the ponds and lakes throughout the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Salix lasiolepis* (arroyo willow thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Salix exigua* (sandbar willow thickets) Shrubland Alliance

- *Salix gooddingii* (black willow thickets) Woodland Alliance

Foothill Woodland: A broad community designation encompassing the tree-dominated plant communities occurring transitionally between grasslands and montane chaparral or bigcone Douglas fir-canyon oak woodland. Dominant tree species include interior live oak, blue oak, valley oak, California buckeye, and foothill pine. Foothill woodland occupies much of the western slopes of the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Pinus jeffreyi* (Jeffrey pine forest) Forest Alliance
- *Pinus ponderosa* (Ponderosa pine forest) Forest Alliance
- *Quercus lobata* (valley oak woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Abies concolor-Pinus lambertiana* (white fir-sugar pine forest) Forest Alliance
- *Abies concolor* (white fir forest) Forest Alliance
- *Pseudotsuga macrocarpa* (bigcone Douglas-fir forest) Forest Alliance
- *Quercus douglasii* (blue oak woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Umbellularia californica* (California bay forest) Forest Alliance
- *Quercus kelloggii* (California black oak forest) Forest Alliance
- *Aesculus californica* (California buckeye groves) Woodland Alliance
- *Quercus chrysolepis* (canyon live oak forest) Forest Alliance
- *Quercus agrifolia* (coast live oak woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Pinus coulteri* (Coulter pine woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Pinus sabiniana* (ghost pine woodland) Woodland Alliance
- *Quercus wislizenii* (interior live oak woodland) Woodland Alliance

Joshua Tree Woodland: An open woodland with Joshua trees, usually as the only arborescent species, and numerous smaller shrub species interspersed between. Shrub species include a great variety with dominants of Great Basin sagebrush, rabbitbrush, creosote bush, and cheese bush. Joshua tree woodland is present on the lower slopes around the Fault in the eastern half of the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Yucca brevifolia* (Joshua tree woodland) Woodland Alliance

Juniper Woodland: An extremely open woodland dominated by California juniper, with understory that is typical of desert scrub. The majority of this community is found on lower slopes in the eastern half of the SEA, and often intermingles with Joshua tree woodland and chaparral communities.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Juniperus californica* (California juniper woodland) Woodland Alliance

Valley Oak Woodland: An open woodland community dominated by valley oak. The understory is a grassy savannah that is composed mostly of non-native grasses. Valley oak woodland occurs on the north-facing slope of Liebre Mountain in the western area of the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Quercus lobata* (valley oak woodland) Woodland Alliance

Bigcone Douglas Fir-Canyon Oak Woodland: A dense woodland with a mix of dominant tree species. Canyon oak forms a broken canopy with scattered bigcone Douglas fir, California black

oak, and foothill pine. Areas not underneath the canopy are usually dominated by chaparral species, such as scrub oak, manzanita, and California lilac. This community occupies most of the higher elevation slopes within the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Pseudotsuga macrocarpa* (bigcone Douglas-fir forest) Forest Alliance
- *Quercus chrysolepis* (canyon live oak forest) Forest Alliance

Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest: An open broad-leafed winter-deciduous riparian forest dominated by Fremont cottonwood, black cottonwood, black willow, and red willow. The southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest within the SEA occupies short segments of Amargosa Creek, as well as the periphery of several lakes and ponds.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Populus fremontii* (Fremont cottonwood forest) Forest Alliance
- *Populus trichocarpa* (black cottonwood forest) Forest Alliance

Freshwater Marsh: Develops in areas of still or slow-moving permanent freshwater. This community is dominated by the perennial, emergent monocot cattails, which reach a height of two to three meters and often form a closed canopy. Bulrushes are dominant below the cattail canopy. Freshwater marsh occurs in small patches along Amargosa Creek and other wetland areas scattered along the Fault.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Phragmites australis* (common reed marshes) Herbaceous Alliance and Semi-Natural Stands
- *Schoenoplectus californicus* (California bulrush marsh) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Typha (angustifolia, domingensis, latifolia)* (cattail marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Sarcocornia [Salicornia] pacifica (Salicornia depressa)* (pickleweed mats) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Lemna (minor) and relatives* (duckweed blooms) Provisional Herbaceous Alliance

Alkali Marsh: Similar to the freshwater marsh, but with more salt-tolerant hydrophytes present. Species associated with this community include cattails, *Carex* spp., *Juncus cooperi*, saltgrass, *Nitrophila occidentalis*, *Scirpus nevadensis*, and common reed. Alkali marsh occurs in small segments along Amargosa Creek and other wetland areas scattered along the Fault.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Sarcobatus vermiculatus* (greasewood scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Schoenoplectus americanus* (American bulrush marsh) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Sporobolus airoides* (alkali sacaton grassland) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Allenrolfea occidentalis* (iodine bush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Atriplex lentiformis* (quailbush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Suaeda moquinii* ([*Suaeda nigra*] bush seepweed scrub) Shrubland Alliance

Alluvial Wash: Also known as floodplain sage scrub, alluvial wash comprises phreatophytic (a plant type that obtains water from the watertable via a long taproot) and upland shrubs that occur in infrequently flooded and scoured habitats such as flood plains, or seasonal streams. The dominant shrub is scalebroom with Great Basin sagebrush, rabbitbrush, sweetbush, and chaparral yucca. Alluvial wash is distributed in larger drainages such as upper Amargosa Creek, Myrick Canyon Wash, Willow Springs Wash and others located throughout the SEA.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Baccharis salicifolia* (mulefat thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Forestiera pubescens* (desert olive patches) Shrubland Alliance
- *Rosa californica* (California rose briar patches) Shrubland Alliance
- *Salix exigua* (sandbar willow thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Salix lasiolepis* (arroyo willow thickets) Shrubland Alliance
- *Acacia greggii* (catclaw acacia thorn scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ephedra californica* (California joint fir scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ericameria paniculata* (black-stem rabbitbrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Lepidospartum squamatum* (scale broom scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ericameria nauseosa* (rubber rabbitbrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Ericameria nauseosa-Ericameria teretifolia* (needleleaf rabbitbrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Gutierrezia sarothrae* (broom snake weed scrub) Provisional Shrubland Alliance

Disturbed or Barren Areas: Areas that either completely lack vegetation or are dominated by ruderal species. Ruderal vegetation typically found within the SEA includes non-native grasses and “weedy” herbaceous species, native and non-native, including mustards, telegraph weed, Russian thistle, dock, yellow star thistle, Australian saltbush, and cocklebur. Several disturbed areas occur scattered throughout the SEA and take the form of residential developments, paved roads, fire breaks, dirt access roads, trails, and other similarly disturbed areas.

Wildlife

Wildlife within the SEA is diverse and abundant due to the large acreage of natural open space and the diversity of habitat types. While a few wildlife species are entirely dependent on a single vegetative community, the entire mosaic of all the vegetation communities within the SEA and adjoining areas constitutes a functional ecosystem. This ecosystem contains a variety of wildlife species, both within the SEA and as part of the regional ecosystem.

Analysis of invertebrates on any given site is generally limited by a lack of specific data; however, the size of the SEA and diversity of habitats present is considered sufficient to encompass healthy populations of a large number of invertebrate species. The wetlands and aquatic habitats within the SEA support diverse faunas of freshwater and alkaline pool arthropods, including native fairy shrimp, brine flies, and tiger beetles. Vernal pools, which are a sensitive habitat, are being discovered and would be expected in a heavily faulted area with many depressions created by faulting. These would not have typical through-flow of erosional features. Vernal pools often have sensitive fauna and flora. Insect orders are particularly well-represented taxonomically, with moderate levels of species endemism including coleoptera, diptera, hymenoptera and diurnal and nocturnal lepidoptera.

Amphibian populations are generally scarce in desert habitats, but may be particularly abundant where desert riparian areas occur or in the mountains. The SEA is likely to support a variety of amphibians within wetland areas along the Fault and the moister woodland areas and canyon bottoms of the mountains. Many essential reptilian habitat characteristics are present within the SEA. These include open habitats that allow free movement and high visibility, and small mammal burrows for cover and escape from predators and extreme weather. These characteristics, as well as a diversity of habitat types are likely to support a wide variety of reptilian species.

The scrubland, woodland, riparian, and grassland habitats in the SEA provide foraging and cover habitat for year-round residents, seasonal residents, and migrating song birds. In addition, the SEA encompasses many year-round water sources, abundant raptor foraging, perching, and nesting habitat. The combination of these resources, as well as the confluence of many community types support an unusually high diversity of bird species. Small and large mammal populations within the

SEA are diverse and reflective of the unique convergence of several habitat types.

All wildlife species previously recorded, as well as those expected to occur, within the SEA are indicated in the *Comprehensive Floral & Faunal Compendium* of the *Los Angeles County SEAs*. Sensitive wildlife species occurring or potentially occurring within the SEA are discussed in the Sensitive Biological Resources.

Wildlife Movement

The SEA includes several important linkages for wildlife movement. The foothills in the western-most part of the SEA are an important linkage between the San Gabriel Mountains, the Tehachapi Mountains, and the Coastal Ranges. This linkage to the Tehachapi Mountains is important because they connect to the southern-most extent of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The Tehachapi Mountains represent the only mountain linkage from the Transverse Ranges and the Coast Ranges to the Sierra Nevada Range. This feature may be an important topographic reference for migrating birds, as well as providing high elevation foraging grounds along the migratory route. The several ranges that meet at the western end of the SEA, and provide a valuable link for gene flow between divergent populations of many species. The SEA includes numerous drainages that extend onto the Antelope Valley floor towards resources, such as the Fairmont and Antelope buttes. These washes provide an important linkage for animals traveling between the Valley floor, the buttes and the western part of the San Gabriel Mountains. In addition, Anaverde Creek, Amargosa Creek, and Pine Canyon facilitate east-west wildlife movement through the mountains, Portal Ridge, and Ritter Ridge. Tributary drainages from the Santa Clara River, such as Elizabeth Lake Canyon and San Francisquito Canyon connect the ocean and coastal zones to the Fault. The frequency of valuable riparian communities along this travel route, which are located within an otherwise arid climate, further contributes to the SEA's importance for wildlife and habitat linkages in the region.

Sensitive Biological Resources

Sensitive biological resources are habitats or individual species that have special recognition by federal, state, or local conservation agencies and organizations as endangered, threatened, and/or rare. This is due to the species' declining or limited population sizes, which usually results from habitat loss. Watch lists of such resources are maintained by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and special groups, such as the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). The following sections indicate the habitats as well as plant and animal species present, or potentially present within the SEA, which have been accorded special recognition. When species are federally-listed as endangered or threatened, they often have federally-designated, geographically-specific "critical habitat areas." Critical habitat areas, after extensive study by experts, are judged to be essential to conservation and maintenance of the species.

Sensitive Plant Communities and Habitats

The SEA supports several habitat types considered sensitive by resource agencies. These are inventoried by California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) in the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) [2011]. The CNDDDB includes state and federally-listed endangered, threatened, and rare vascular plants, as well as several sensitive vertebrate species. The communities include Joshua tree woodland, valley oak woodland, native grassland, wildflower field, southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest, fresh-water swamp, alkali meadow, and southern willow scrub, and all these occur throughout the SEA. These communities, or closely related designations, are considered high priority communities by the CDFG, which indicates that they are experiencing a decline throughout their range. The array and composition of these communities has been discussed in the Vegetation section.

Sensitive Plant Species

The statuses of rare plants are hierarchically categorized by the CNPS using a rank and decimal system. The initial category level of Rare Plant Rank is indicated by the ranks 1A (presumed extinct in California), 1B (rare or endangered in California and elsewhere), 2 (rare or endangered in California but more common elsewhere), 3 (more information needed, a review list), and 4 (limited distribution). In cases where the CNPS has further identified the specific threat to the species, a decimal or Threat Code is added: .1 (seriously endangered in California), .2 (fairly endangered in California), or .3 (not very endangered in California).

The following special-status plant taxa have been reported or have the potential to occur within the SEA, based on known habitat requirements and geographic range information:

- Nevin's barberry (*Berberis nevinii*) FE, SE, RPR 1B.1
- San Fernando Valley spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*) FC, SE, RPR 1B.1

In addition, the following species considered by CNPS to be rare, threatened or endangered have the potential to occur:

- Lancaster milk-vetch (*Astragalus preussii* var. *laxiflorus*) RPR 2.3
- Slender mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *gracilis*) RPR 1B.2
- Alkali mariposa lily (*Calochortus striatus*) RPR 1B.2
- Pierson's morning glory (*Calystegia peirsonii*) RPR 4.2
- Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *parryi*) RPR 1B.1
- San Gabriel bedstraw (*Galium grande*) RPR 1B.2
- Plummer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus plummerae*) RPR 1B.2
- Robbins' nemacladus (*Nemacladus secundiflorus* var. *robbinsii*) RPR 1B.2
- Short-joint beavertail (*Opuntia basilaris* var. *brachyclada*) RPR 1B.2
- San Bernardino aster (*Symphyotrichum defoliatum*) RPR 1B.2

Sensitive Animal Species

The following special-status animal species are reported or are likely to be present within the SEA based on habitat requirements and known range attributes:

- Arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*) FE, SSC
- California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) FT, SSC
- Western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*) BLMS, SSC, FSS
- San Diego coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*) BLMS, SSC, FSS
- Coast patch-nosed snake (*Salvadora hexalepis virgulata*) SSC
- Western yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus* ssp. *occidentalis*) FC, FSS, BCC
- Willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) SE
- Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) FE, SE, ABC
- California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) FE, SE, ABC, CDF
- American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) FD, SD CDF, CDFG Fully Protected, BCC
- Least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) FE, SE, ABC
- Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*) ST

In addition, other state-listed species of concern have the potential to occur:

- Western spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*) BLMS, SSC

- Tehachapi slender salamander (*Batrachoseps stebbinsi*) ST, BLMS, FSS
- Silvery legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra pulchra*) SSC, FSS
- Two-striped garter snake (*Thamnophis hammondi*)
- Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) CDFG Watch List
- Sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) CDFG Watch List
- Tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) ABC, BLMS, SSC, BCC
- Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*) CDFG Watch List
- Long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) SSC
- Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) BLMS, SSC, BCC
- California spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*),
- Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) CDFG Watch List, BCC
- Mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*) FPT, ABC, BLMS, SSC, BCC
- Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) SSC
- Yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia* ssp. *brewsteri*) SSC, BCC
- White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*) CDFG Fully Protected
- Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) CDFG Watch List
- Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) CDFG Watch List, BCC
- Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) FD, SE, CDF, CDFG Fully Protected, FSS, BCC
- Yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*) SSC
- Western least bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis hesperis*) SSC, BCC
- Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) SSC, BCC
- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) CDF, CDFG Fully Protected, CDFG Watch List, BCC
- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) CDF, CDFG Watch List
- Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) ABC, SSC, BCC
- Gray vireo (*Vireo vicinior*) ABC, BLMS, SSC, BCC
- Virginia's warbler (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) ABC, CDFG Watch List, BCC
- Pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) BLMS, SSC, FSS, WBWG High Priority
- Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus Plecotus* t. *townsendii*) BLMS, SSC, FSS, WBWG High Priority
- Pale big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus Plecotus* t. *townsendii pallescens*) BLMS, SSC, FSS, WBWG High Priority
- Spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*) BLMS, SSC, WBWG High Priority
- Western mastiff bat (*Eumops perotis californicus*) BLMS, SSC, WBWG High Priority
- California leaf-nosed bat (*Macrotus californicus*) BLMS, SSC, FSS, WBWG High Priority
- Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*) BLMS, WBWG Low-Medium Priority
- Southern grasshopper mouse (*Onychomys torridus ramona*) SSC
- Tehachapi pocket mouse, (*Perognathus alticolus inexpectatus*) SSC, FSS
- American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) SSC

Ecological Transition Areas (ETAs)

ETAs in the SEA include small areas of residential development, orchards, agricultural fields, and "ranchettes."

Regional Biological Value

The SEA meets several SEA designation criteria and supports many regional biological values. Each criterion and how it is met described below.

CRITERIA ANALYSIS OF THE SAN ANDREAS SEA

	Criterion	Status	Justification
A)	The habitat of core populations of endangered or threatened plant or animal species.	Not met Met in Future?	Although there are several listed species that occur within the SEA, this criterion is not met due to the lack of known core population areas. The far northwestern border with Kern County is the edge of critical habitat for the California condor. The tricolored blackbird may soon be listed and has its largest population in Southern California within the SEA.
B)	On a regional basis, biotic communities, vegetative associations, and habitat of plant or animal species that are either unique or are restricted in distribution.	Met	The SEA encompasses a series of marshes and sinks concentrated along the San Andreas Fault Zone, which are both unique and restricted in distribution. The Fairmont and Antelope buttes represent a unique habitat due to their location, as the most westerly buttes of the Mojave Desert and their close proximity to several geographic regions. As the confluence of a number of major geographical areas, the Mojave Desert, the San Gabriel Mountains of the Transverse Ranges, the Coastal Ranges, and the Tehachapi Mountains produces a unique and regionally rare flora that represents a transition between desert, foothill, and several montane environments.
C)	Within the County, biotic communities, vegetative associations, and habitat of plant or animal species that are either unique or are restricted in distribution.	Met	The confluence of five major geographical areas—the Mojave Desert, the San Gabriel Mountains, the Coastal Ranges, the Tehachapi Mountains, and the Central Valley—has produced the most unique and diverse flora found in the County, and represents a transition between desert, foothill, and montane environments. The SEA also includes the southern limit of the foothill woodland community, blue oak, gray or foothill pine, and California buckeye, rare relic stands of Great Basin sagebrush scrub, and rare wildflower fields.
D)	Habitat that at some point in the life cycle of a species or group of species, serves as concentrated breeding, feeding, resting, or migrating grounds and is limited in availability either regionally or in the County.	Met	The Fairmont and Antelope buttes provide vital habitat to many wide ranging species, which forage in outlying habitat, but use the buttes for nesting, roosting, denning, and refuge. The buttes also serve as concentrated wintering grounds for birds of prey, which are rare in the County, and which forage on grassland and agricultural fields in the vicinity. Lakes and other wetland areas along the Fault and

	Criterion	Status	Justification
			<p>throughout the SEA provide breeding habitat for amphibians and feeding habitat for migrating birds that traverse the slopes adjacent to the Mojave Desert. The Fault is one of the principle wildlife corridors and connective areas for in the County. Major drainages (Santa Clara River, San Francisquito Canyon, and Lake Elizabeth Canyon) run from the coast through the San Gabriel Mountains and end at the Fault, which also has extensive riparian habitat that facilitates migration. The Fault provides the final westernmost linkage to the Mojave Desert (Antelope Valley). The tricolored blackbird is a year-round resident of the SEA.</p>
E)	<p>Biotic resources that are of scientific interest because they are either an extreme in physical/geographical limitations, or represent unusual variation in a population or community.</p>	Met	<p>The transition of several habitat types including: creosote bush scrub, Joshua tree/California juniper mixed woodland, and desert chaparral, makes the SEA valuable for educational and scientific reasons. The close proximity of the Fairmont and Antelope buttes to the San Gabriel Mountains renders them unique in their species composition and ecological relationships and, therefore, of interest to scientists. The concentrated diversity of vegetation types, particularly in the western half of the SEA, creates an outstanding opportunity for educational use. This area also harbors the southern limit of the foothill woodland community, blue oak, gray or foothill pine, and California buckeye, as well as rare relic stands of great basin sagebrush scrub.</p>
F)	<p>Areas that would provide for the preservation of relatively undisturbed examples of the original natural biotic communities in the County.</p>	Met	<p>The slopes of Ritter Ridge support one of the most pristine mixed stands of Joshua tree and California juniper. The location of the SEA at the confluence of five major geographical areas, the Mojave Desert, the Central Valley, the San Gabriel Mountains of the Transverse Ranges, the Coastal Ranges, and the Tehachapi Mountains has produced a community-rich area with desert, foothill, and montane environments. The SEA encompasses large, mostly undisturbed examples of all of these communities.</p>

In conclusion, the area is an SEA because it contains: B-C) biotic communities, vegetative associations, and habitat of plant and animal species that are restricted in distribution in the County and regionally; D) concentrated breeding, feeding, resting, and migrating grounds, which are limited

in availability in the County; E) biotic resources that are of scientific interest because they are either an extreme in physical/geographical limitations, or represent unusual variation in a population or community; and F) areas that provide for the preservation of relatively undisturbed examples of original natural biotic communities in the County.

17. San Andreas SEA Sources

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