

9. Harbor Lake Regional Park SEA

Location

General

The Harbor Lake Regional Park Significant Ecological Area (SEA) is located [within Kenneth Malloy Harbor Regional Park] in the Harbor City community of the City of Los Angeles, which is approximately 15 miles south of downtown Los Angeles and just west of the Interstate-110. The Lake is named "Machado Lake." The SEA supports one of three remaining wetlands that once covered the southern and western areas of the Los Angeles Basin. The SEA supports significant areas of aquatic and terrestrial plant communities, which provide habitat to a variety of birds and wildlife.

The site is located in the Torrance Quadrangle of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 Minute Map Series (USGS, 1964).

General Boundary and Resources Description

The SEA boundaries encompass the lake areas that contribute to the biological function of the Harbor Lake ecosystem. It is bordered to the north by the Pacific Coast Highway, but includes a small segment of drainage, the Wilmington Drain ("Bixby Slough") north of Pacific Coast Highway. The slough is a secluded marsh that supports wildlife and waterfowl common to marsh areas. Thirty-five species of native birds have been observed breeding in the Wilmington Drain and a large number of interesting vagrants are recorded from this area. Following the Wilmington Drain segment, the boundary travels east along the south side of Pacific Coast Highway and south along the east boundary of Harbor Regional Park to the Harbor Park Municipal Golf Course. The SEA goes east to a parking area for the golf course. The golf course is included as ETA to emphasize the need to keep this area green. Wildlife from the adjacent woodlands use the golf course to transit between natural areas of the park in a less-populated area. The ETA boundary of the SEA includes the greens and excludes parking areas around the periphery of the golf course. The SEA goes west along the boundary of the natural riparian woodland of the park and golf course and then southwest along the boundary of marsh habitats of the park and the golf course. At the south end of the golf course, the SEA boundary goes generally southeast along the periphery of park and developed environment, much of it along the outer southern boundary of Los Angeles Harbor College. The SEA stops at the college southern frontage paved area, then turns west along Anaheim Street with the park boundary, excludes a graded and cleared area of the park in the southwest corner, and then goes with the park boundary north along Vermont Avenue to the Pacific Coast Highway. At the Pacific Coast Highway, the SEA boundary goes with the park boundary to the Wilmington Drain. Machado Lake is chiefly bordered by native marsh vegetation of cattails, rushes, reeds, and mulefat with some invasive giant cane (*Arundo donax*) and upland native riparian forest, which primarily consists of willows. The exception to the natural vegetation is along Vermont Avenue where lawns are maintained between parking areas and the lake for public recreation and picnicking. The bird species list has over 330 species, and the area is used by migrant birds on the Pacific Flyway during the spring and fall migration periods. The SEA lies generally west of the Interstate-110.

The SEA encompasses regionally unique areas, including one of three remaining wetlands that once covered the South Bay area. The freshwater plants and animals found here are completely surrounded by residential and industrial facilities. This type of habitat has been filled, drained, and lost to development throughout most of the County. In some areas, man-made lakes and ponds have created small freshwater marshes along their edges, but this is minimal in comparison to the large expanses of freshwater marsh that were once found in the Los Angeles Basin.

Freshwater marsh habitat supports a great diversity of wildlife. Most of the bird species found here are dependent in some way on the surface moisture and vegetation, and would not be able to survive without it. It is also a habitat that supports several species of amphibians. Frogs and toads can be found here that are becoming extremely difficult to find throughout Southern California. The marsh is also an important area for migratory birds. Because Harbor Lake Regional Park and Madrona Marsh are the only habitat of this type in the southern portion of the County, they serve as small scale wildlife refuges. Waterfowl, shorebirds, marsh birds, and others can be found on the marsh in numbers during the spring and fall migration.

Vegetation

The SEA encompasses southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest, southern willow scrub, mulefat scrub, Venturan coastal sage chaparral scrub, "modified" coastal freshwater marsh, vernal marsh, and non-native grassland. Immediately bordering Machado Lake are emergent wetland species, such as bulrushes, cattails, and non-native water primroses (*Ludwigia peploides*). Also within the SEA are ornamental grasses, mature non-native trees, exotic invasive plant species. The coastal freshwater marsh and vernal marshes margins support limited densities of native grasses, but these do not form separate communities and are included within the vernal pool floral matrix. 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*, in addition to other studies conducted for the specific area. 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 given below.

Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest: An open broad-leafed winter-deciduous riparian forest dominated by Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), black willow (*Salix gooddingii*), and red willow (*S. laevigata*). This community occurs along moister sections of drainages, ponds, and lakes.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Populus fremontii* (Fremont cottonwood woodlands) Forest Alliance
- *Salix gooddingii* (black willow thickets) Woodland Alliance
- *Salix laevigata* (red willow thickets) Woodland Alliance

Southern Willow Scrub: A riparian community consisting of dense, broad-leafed, winter-deciduous riparian thickets occurring within and adjacent to watercourses. The dominant species of this community within the SEA are arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) with lesser amounts of mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*). This community occurs in along less moist portions of drainages as well as the periphery of ponds and lakes.

Corresponding MCV communities:

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

Mulefat Scrub: A thicket occurring in seasonally and intermittently flooded habitats in riparian corridors or along lake margins.

Corresponding MCV Community:

- *Baccharis salicifolia* (mulefat thicket) Shrubland 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 four to five meters and often form a closed canopy. Bulrushes are dominant below the cattail canopy. Freshwater marsh is relatively uncommon; it occurs in small patches in natural or created sinks with water sources.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Lepidium latifolium* (perennial pepper weed patches) Semi-Natural Herbaceous Stands
- *Eleocharis macrostachya* (pale spike rush marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Schoenoplectus californicus* (California bulrush marsh) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Typha* (*angustifolia*, *domingensis*, *latifolia*) (cattail marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Juncus arcticus* (var. *balticus*, *mexicanus*) (Baltic and Mexican rush marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Juncus effusus* (soft rush marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Lemna* (*minor*) and relatives (duckweed blooms) Provisional Herbaceous Alliance

Vernal Pool Sites: Occur in several different areas within the SEA where unique sub-surface conditions of shallow layers of less permeable horizons allow for seasonal accumulations of freshwater. True vernal pools, which are rare in Southern California and extremely rare in the County, form seasonally in shallow, closed basins, usually where a lens of heavy clay soil holds surface water following rainfall events.

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Eleocharis macrostachya* (pale spike rush marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Juncus arcticus* (var. *balticus*, *mexicanus*) (Baltic and Mexican rush marshes) Herbaceous Alliance
- *Juncus* (*oxymeris*, *xiphioides*) (iris-leaf rush seeps) Provisional Herbaceous Alliance

Non-Native Grassland: Consists of dominant invasive annual grasses that are primarily of Mediterranean origin. Dominant species found within this community include wild oat (*Avena fatua*), slender oat, red brome, ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), and herbs such as black mustard and wild radish.

Corresponding MCV communities:

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

Venturan Coastal Sage Chaparral Scrub: Described as present and is characterized by the summer drought deciduous vegetation found near the Southern California coast south of Ventura County of low, mostly soft-woody shrubs with bare ground underneath and between shrubs. This community is dominated by California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), and California brittle bush (*Encelia californica*).

Corresponding MCV communities:

- *Artemisia californica* (California sagebrush scrub) Shrubland Alliance

- *Artemisia californica-Salvia mellifera* (California sagebrush-black sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Artemisia californica-Eriogonum fasciculatum* (California sagebrush-California buckwheat scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Encelia californica* (California brittle bush scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Salvia mellifera* (black sage scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Eriogonum fasciculatum* (California buckwheat scrub) Shrubland Alliance
- *Lotus scoparius* [*Acmispon glaber*] (deer weed scrub) Shrubland Alliance

Wildlife

Wildlife diversity and abundance within the SEA is moderate, commensurate with the relative homogeneity of the natural open space habitat types. Wildlife within much of the SEA is comprised of species typically occurring within freshwater and vernal pools. Birds of prey frequently forage over the pools and open grasslands, which form following the seasonal drying of the surface water. The Harbor Lake Regional Park vernal pools provide rare surface water habitat for wildlife in an otherwise developed region, and the ponds attract moderate numbers and diversity of migratory waterfowl. A number of local wildlife species are strictly limited to seasonal pool habitats. The vernal pool system in the Harbor Lake and also those in nearby Madrona Marsh Preserve SEA constitute the only local functional ecosystems of this unique type for wildlife species.

Freshwater marsh habitat supports a great diversity of wildlife. Most of the bird species found here are dependent in some way on the surface moisture and vegetation, and would not be able to survive without it. It is also a habitat that supports several species of amphibians. Frogs and toads can be found here that are becoming extremely difficult to find throughout Southern California. The marsh is also an important area for migratory birds. Because Harbor Lake Regional Park and Madrona Marsh are the only habitat of this type in the southern portion of the County, they serve as small-scale wildlife refuges. Waterfowl, shorebirds, marsh birds, and others can be found on the marsh in numbers during the spring and fall migration.

Coastal sage chaparral scrub habitats with persistent surface hydrology during the breeding season supports abundant populations of Baja California chorus frog (*Pseudacris hypochondriaca*), California toad (*Anaxyrus halophilus*), and western spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*). At least two species of salamander may also be present within more mesic portions of the surrounding canyons and chaparral.

Bird diversity within the SEA is related to habitat opportunities for year-round residents, seasonal residents, migrating raptors and song birds. Open coastal sage chaparral scrub hosts a suite of birds that are typical of such sites at lower elevations over most of the coastal slopes of Southern California. The most productive sites for resident coastal sage chaparral scrub birds are around riparian and freshwater systems, which attract large numbers of migrants during the spring and fall. The vernal pools attract moderate numbers of migrating waders and waterfowl, and provide important winter foraging areas for resident and migratory birds of prey. Birds of prey typically observed around vernal pools include red-tailed hawk and American kestrel.

Wildlife species previously recorded, as well as those expected to occur, within the study area 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 section.

Wildlife Movement

The vernal pools situated within this SEA serve as isolated, high-quality habitat and linkage resource for migratory waterfowl. The vernal pools teem with arthropod and amphibian activity, and provide

essential feeding grounds for long-distance migrants, as well as for resident species of reptiles, birds and mammals. The SEA does not lie within any identified terrestrial movement routes for wildlife.

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.

The SEA is configured to encompass the regionally significant vernal pools and coastal sage chaparral scrub watershed. Changes to the classification system in some cases divides plant communities into many possible vegetation alliances, not all of which may be considered sensitive. For the purposes here previously listed communities with a least one sensitive alliance in the new format have been listed.

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 SEA is configured to encompass regionally significant communities, which include Fremont cottonwood woodlands, black willow thickets, iris-leaf rush seeps, California brittle bush scrub, and all vernal pool sites. 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:

- *Aphanisma* (*Aphanisma blitoides*) RPR 1B.1
- Ventura marsh milk-vetch (*Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus*) FE, SE, RPR 1B.1
- Coulter's saltbush (*Atriplex coulteri*) RPR 1B.2
- South Coast saltscale (*Atriplex pacifica*) RPR 1B.2
- Parish's brittle scale (*Atriplex parishii*) RPR 1B.1
- Davidson's salt scale (*Atriplex serenana* var. *davidsonii*) RPR 1B.2
- Southern tarplant (*Centromadia parryi* ssp. *australis*) RPR 1B.1
- Salt marsh bird's-beak (*Chloropyron maritimum* ssp. *maritimum*) FE, SE, RPR 1B.2

- Mud nama (*Nama stenocarpum*) RPR 2.2
- Moran’s navarretia (*Navarretia fossalis*) FT, RPR 1B.1
- Prostrate vernal pool navarretia (*Navarretia prostrata*) RPR 1B.1
- Estuary seablite (*Suaeda esteroa*) RPR 1B.2
- San Bernardino aster (*Symphyotrichum defoliatum*) RPR 1B.2
- Vernal barley (*Hordeum intercedens*) RPR 3.2
- California Orcutt grass (*Orcuttia californica*) FE, SE, RPR 1B.1

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:

- Vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*) FT
- San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*) FE
- Riverside fairy shrimp (*Streptocephalus woottoni*) FE
- Mimic tryonia (*Tryonia imitator*) CDFG Special Animals List
- Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) CDFG Special Animals List
- Silvery legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra pulchra*) FSS, SSC
- Western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*) BLMS, FSS, SSC
- Tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) BCC, BLMS, SSC, USBC, AWL, ABC
- Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) FE, FSS, SE, USBC, AWL, ABC
- Belding’s savannah sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*) SE
- Bank swallow (*Riparia riparia*) ST
- Western mastiff bat (*Eumops perotis californicus*) BLMS, SSC, WBWG High
- Silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*) WBWG Medium
- South coast marsh vole (*Microtus californicus stephensi*) SSC
- Pocketed free-tailed bat (*Nyctinomops femorosaccus*) SSC, WBWG Medium
- Big free-tailed bat (*Nyctinomops macrotis*) SSC, WBWG Medium-High
- Pacific pocket mouse (*Perognathus longimembris pacificus*) FE, SSC
- Southern California saltmarsh shrew (*Sorex ornatus salicornicus*) SSC

Ecological Transition Areas (ETAs)

The Harbor Park Municipal Golf Course is an ETA within this SEA.

Regional Biological Value

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

CRITERIA ANALYSIS OF THE HARBOR LAKE REGIONAL PARK SEA

	Criterion	Status	Justification
A)	The habitat of core populations of endangered or threatened plant or animal species.	Not Met	This SEA does not contain habitat that supports a core population

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	SEA supports a sizeable lake with a freshwater marsh along its northern, eastern and southern shores and the Bixby Slough, habitats that once covered the South Bay area. This type of habitat has been filled, drained, and lost to development throughout most of Southern California.
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	Harbor Lake Regional Park is one of three remaining wetlands with freshwater marsh in the County. (The others are Madrona Marsh and recreated Ballona Freshwater Marsh, which are also in SEAs.) This type of habitat once covered much of the southern and western Los Angeles Basin area, and supports several species of amphibians including frogs and toads that are becoming rare throughout Southern California.
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 County.	Met	Harbor Lake Regional Park and its marshes is an important area for migratory birds. The list of number of bird species seen has over 330 species. Freshwater marshes are important breeding areas for a number of birds and amphibian species.
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.	Met	The Harbor Lake freshwater marsh has attracted considerable attention from the academic and scientific communities, and the resources of the area are well documented and continue to be studied.
F)	Areas that would provide for the preservation of relatively undisturbed examples of the original natural biotic communities in the County.	Met	The freshwater marsh is a good example of the freshwater marshes that used to occur along the fault lines of the Los Angeles Basin.

In conclusion, the area is an SEA because it contains: B-C) a sizeable lake with a freshwater marsh along its eastern shore and the Bixby Slough, habitats that once covered the South Bay area. This type of habitat has been filled, drained, and lost to development throughout most of Southern California and the County. Three of these habitats remain in the County; D) the Harbor Lake Regional Park is habitat that serves as concentrated breeding, feeding, resting, and migrating grounds and is limited in availability both regionally and in the County; E) the Harbor Lake freshwater marsh has attracted considerable attention from the academic and scientific communities, and the resources of the area are well documented and continue to be studied; and F) the freshwater marsh is a good example of the freshwater marshes that used to occur along the fault lines of the Los Angeles Basin.

9. Harbor Lake Regional Park SEA Sources

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