

Proposed Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) - Property Owner Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

GENERAL

What are SEAs?

SEAs, or Significant Ecological Areas, are areas that have been determined to contribute to maintaining the biodiversity of Los Angeles County. More information on the SEA Program can be found at: planning.lacounty.gov/sea.

Why is the SEA map being updated now?

Recent State legislation, Senate Bill 1425 (Stern, 2022) and Assembly Bill 1889 (Friedman, 2024), requires local governments to improve access to open spaces, enhance wildlife connectivity, and support biodiversity by mitigating the impacts of human activities on natural habitats. The County will implement these requirements, in part, through the SEA Program.

When will my property become a SEA?

The proposed SEAs and updates to the SEA Ordinance are currently drafts and available for public review and comment. It must then go through public hearings before they can be adopted. Public hearings have not yet been scheduled. Notices for public hearings will be published in local newspapers, and email notifications will be sent to the project's email list. It is strongly recommended that you register on the email list for notifications at: planning.lacounty.gov/cnr.

What resources did you find on my property?

The proposed SEA boundaries were informed by a countywide study that looked at where important biological resources, habitats, and wildlife movement areas are located. The boundaries were then proposed based upon locations meeting one or more of the selection criteria established by the SEA Program.

PROPERTY VALUE AND TAXES

Does the SEA designation affect my property taxes?

The SEA designation does not change how property taxes are calculated. In California, property taxes are governed by Proposition 13, which limits the general property tax rate to 1% of a property's assessed value (plus bonded indebtedness and direct assessment taxes). The SEA designation does not change this process.

Does the SEA designation affect my property value?

The SEA designation does not change how the County Assessor determines assessed value under Proposition 13. Under Proposition 13, a property's assessed value is generally

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based on its value at the time of purchase and may increase by no more than 2% per year, unless there is a change in ownership or new construction.

Property value in the real estate market may be influenced by many factors including location, access, and utilities. However, the SEA designation itself does not change the Proposition 13 valuation process or automatically reassess a property's value.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Do I need a permit to comply with the Fire Department's vegetation removal requirements?

Annual defensible space and weed abatement activities required by the Fire Department or Agricultural Commissioner Weights and Measures are exempt and do not need approval from the Planning department. This is because it is legally required, approved by the Fire Department, and associated with existing permitted structures for fire protection purposes. This exemption does not include tilling or discing.

Will I need approval before removing vegetation not associated with defensible space on my property?

If your property is located within a SEA, vegetation removal that is not associated with required defensible space or weed abatement may require SEA review, specifically if it involves native vegetation, undisturbed areas containing native vegetation, or areas that may provide habitat for species, since this may be considered "development" under the SEA Ordinance.

Property owners are strongly encouraged to contact County staff before removing any vegetation to confirm and determine if any County or State permits may be required.

BUILDING AND PERMITTING

Can I still build on my property?

Yes, you can still build on your property even if it is designated as a SEA. Development is still allowed as long as it is consistent with the property's zoning and in compliance with the SEA Ordinance.

This means during the permitting process the project design is reviewed to avoid or reduce impacts on biological resources. Prior to submitting plans, a pre-application counseling meeting will be required to evaluate the biological resources on the property. During this process, County staff can help guide the project design to avoid or reduce impacts as much as possible, which may also help the project qualify for a simple permitting process.

What are other things to consider if I want to build on my property?

Property owners should first verify the property's zoning and confirm water availability and legal/physical access to the property. These items are important to understand early because they may affect whether the proposed project is possible, regardless of other regulations.

DEVELOPED PROPERTIES

How do SEAs affect properties that already have development?

If your property already has existing permitted development and you do not plan to make changes, the SEA designation generally does not affect your current use of the property. You may continue to use, repair, and maintain the existing permitted structures and infrastructure. Like-for-like replacement of existing permitted structures or improvements is generally exempt, provided the replacement does not expand the existing footprint or result in new impacts to biological resources.

However, new development such as building additions that expand the footprint, grading undisturbed areas containing native vegetation, vegetation removal not associated with defensible space, or other substantial changes to the property that are considered “development” under the SEA Ordinance may require SEA review.

VACANT PROPERTIES

How do SEAs affect vacant properties?

If your property is vacant and you do not plan to develop or make changes to the property, the proposed SEA designation generally would not affect your property.

If you plan to develop a vacant property, SEA review may be required as part of the permitting process. Activities such as new development, grading undisturbed areas containing native vegetation, vegetation removal not associated with defensible space, or other substantial changes to the property that are considered “development” under the SEA Ordinance may require SEA review.

In addition, property owners may also need to comply with other existing County applicable development requirements. These may include hillside development standards, septic requirements, fire access and fuel modification requirements, and other environmental or development regulations that may apply to the property.

Contact Us

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