

## Environmental Stewardship

### Restoring the California cactus wren habitat

As a result of wildfires, patches of cactus used by the California cactus wren have dwindled by an estimated 50 to 80 percent. Through the EMP, SANDAG works with land managers, including the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research and the National Wildlife Refuge, to promote mapping of the remaining cactus patches, propagation of new cactus, and strategic planting to aid this species' recovery.



California cactus wren

### Protecting Proctor Valley's vernal pool habitats

For years, it was a struggle in Proctor Valley to keep illegal off-road vehicles from infringing on sensitive vernal pools and other land conserved for habitat and water quality protection. The EMP provided grants to install 4.6 miles of steel vehicle barriers along with warning signs. This simple, cost-effective solution helps to minimize the costs of repeated restoration, trash removal, and enforcement to protect these sensitive lands.



Warning sign and barrier

## Regional Coordination

Through the EMP Working Group, SANDAG coordinates with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as nonprofit groups to manage, monitor, and acquire land. This collaborative approach ensures that best practices are disseminated, gaps in resources are identified, and duplicate efforts are eliminated. Coordination is essential because plants and animals exist across property boundaries.

Due in part to SANDAG efforts, two Land Manager Groups have formed in North and South County. These groups meet regularly to collaborate on land management, joint use of resources, and funding strategies.



Regional coordination workshop

## Accomplishments

- 19 properties, totaling 2,295 acres, acquired
- 28.5 percent under budget for land acquisition
- \$26 million in estimated savings compared to budget
- \$9.4 million in leveraged funding from acquisition partners
- 40 grants, totaling \$7.4 million, distributed to regional land managers
- \$4.4 million in leveraged matching funds resulting from grants
- 22 scientific articles and technical reports published

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# TransNet

## Environmental Mitigation Program

### 2011 Status Report

Conservation. Research. Stewardship.





Vegetation assessment

### Habitat Conservation

Since 2008, 2,295 acres of open space – much of it previously slated for development – have been acquired under the EMP. About \$83.5 million have been spent purchasing sensitive habitats that support threatened wildlife, such as the least Bell's vireo and the arroyo toad.

Land purchases are done strategically according to targets set in regional habitat conservation plans. In the State Route 76 corridor, for example, the EMP's land purchases will combine with acquisitions by other agencies to create a continuous wildlife corridor spanning thousands of acres along the San Luis Rey River and its tributaries.



Rancho Lilac acquisition

### Acquisition Highlights

#### Rancho Lilac in North County

The 902-acre Rancho Lilac property in Valley Center, acquired in 2011, contains more than a dozen different vegetation communities. This rare, intact block of habitat is home to several species targeted for conservation and is a major wildlife corridor to the San Luis Rey River. Rancho Lilac also is rich in cultural history, having played host to such notables as President Dwight Eisenhower and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

#### Lonestar Ranch in South County

The 175.3-acre Lonestar Ranch property in East Otay Mesa consists of remnant vernal pools, grasslands, and habitats for endangered species, such as the Quino checkerspot butterfly and San Diego fairy shrimp. This 2009 acquisition augments the Otay River Valley Regional Park and adds to land already being restored by other agencies.

#### Deer Canyon in Central San Diego County

The 31.4-acre Deer Canyon property in Carmel Valley, acquired in 2011, is fallow agricultural land that will be restored to riparian habitat to attract the endangered least Bell's vireo. An adjacent parcel already has been successfully restored and is now supporting the bird. The new acquisition will expand the bird's habitat.

### Overview

Meeting the region's transportation needs in an environmentally responsible manner is a top priority of the San Diego Association of Governments. SANDAG is the region's primary public planning, transportation, and research agency.

Through its innovative Environmental Mitigation Program (EMP), SANDAG purchases, conserves, and restores native habitats as offsets to disturbances caused by transportation projects. The EMP was established as part of the extension of *TransNet*, a regional half-cent sales tax for transportation approved by

San Diego County voters in 2004. *TransNet* sets aside \$850 million to fund the EMP. The *TransNet* Independent Taxpayer Oversight Committee closely monitors the program's expenditures to ensure public accountability.

The EMP allows SANDAG to comprehensively satisfy mitigation requirements by buying land in advance of projects, in larger parcels, and at lower prices. By focusing on early, large-scale, and cost-effective investments in critical habitats, the EMP has become a model for other agencies.

### TransNet Environmental Mitigation Program Land Acquisitions

As of October 2011

- 1 **Groves**  
268 acres acquired in 2008
- 2 **Morrison**  
136.7 acres acquired in 2008
- 3 **Anderprizes**  
43.5 acres acquired in 2008
- 4 **Dean Family Trust**  
23.1 acres acquired in 2008
- 5 **Zwesteria**  
19.4 acres acquired in 2009
- 6 **Sage Hill**  
170.8 acres acquired in 2009
- 7 **Hallmark**  
19.3 acres acquired in 2009
- 8 **Leung/Lowe**  
21.8 acres acquired in 2009
- 9 **Ayoub**  
21.7 acres acquired in 2009
- 10 **San Dieguito Lagoon**  
107 acres acquired in 2009
- 11 **Lonestar Ranch**  
175.3 acres acquired in 2009
- 12 **Tabata**  
23.7 acres acquired in 2010
- 13 **Zamudio**  
32.5 acres acquired in 2010
- 14 **Mendocino**  
19.7 acres acquired in 2010
- 15 **Vessels**  
162 acres acquired in 2010
- 16 **Jeffries Ranch**  
80.3 acres acquired in 2011
- 17 **Rincon**  
37.3 acres acquired in 2011
- 18 **Deer Canyon**  
31.4 acres acquired in 2011
- 19 **Rancho Lilac**  
902 acres acquired in 2011



### Applying science to post-wildfire recovery

The 2003 and 2007 wildfires burned more than 600,000 acres in San Diego County. The EMP has funded efforts both to restore damaged habitats and assess the level of recovery. With support from the EMP, the U.S. Geological Survey finished a five-year evaluation in 2011 that found neither the coastal sage scrub nor the chaparral habitats have fully recovered. The findings have raised awareness of lost biodiversity and the danger of non-native, fire-prone grasses permanently invading burned lands. Additional work is underway to assess the recovery of lands dominated by larger shrubs.



Post-wildfire damage

### Monitoring the recovery of the Thorne's hairstreak butterfly

The Thorne's hairstreak butterfly, found exclusively around Otay Mountain in South County, was once thought to be imperiled due to large wildfires. University of Nevada researchers, funded by the EMP, spent 210 days in the field over two years to determine the status of this rare butterfly. They found adult butterflies in more than half of the Tecate cypress stands, the species' host plant, across a wide area of Otay Mountain. Their findings helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determine in 2011 not to list this butterfly as an endangered species.



Thorne's hairstreak butterfly