



PROCTOR VALLEY VERNAL POOL RESTORATION PROJECT

New Life for Miniature Wetland Wonders

The Chaparral Lands Conservancy is conducting a project to restore and enhance imperiled vernal pools and species on a City of San Diego preserve in Proctor Valley.



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The Chaparral Lands Conservancy

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INTRODUCTION

Manicured subdivisions in eastern Chula Vista hide a secret natural landscape of miniature wetlands. Just a little east of where Proctor Valley Road narrows from a major thoroughfare to become a winding dirt road, there is a sweeping natural landscape evocative of Old California. Undeveloped Proctor Valley is bordered by scenic San Miguel Mountain and the Jamul Mountains,

and the valley forms a natural separation between City of Chula Vista subdivisions and the rural San Diego County unincorporated community of Jamul.



Original natural vernal pool in proctor valley on property owned by California Department of Fish and Game

Several large properties owned by several agencies forms a crucial conservation core area under the [San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Plan](#) (MSCP) and is a critical element of natural infrastructure in the communities of eastern Chula Vista and Jamul. [The City of San Diego Utilities Department](#) owns and protects its “Cornerstone” watershed lands above the Upper Otay Reservoir. Other large properties are a part of the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s San Diego National Wildlife Refuge](#), the [California Department of Fish and Game’s Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve](#), and the planned [Otay Ranch Preserve](#). The majority of vegetation found in the valley is unique and imperiled – Coastal sage scrub, vernal pools, native grasslands, and chaparral. These unique habitats in turn support numerous rare species, several of which like the California gnatcatcher, Quino checkerspot butterfly, San Diego fairy shrimp, and San Diego coyote thistle are federally listed endangered species.

Over the last several years dedicated agency employees and volunteers have worked diligently to improve resource conditions in Proctor Valley by patrolling the area, installing fencing, cleaning up trash, and installing signs. The City and other agencies have been particularly successful in reducing major past illegal off-road vehicle activity and have recently installed effective vehicle barriers along much of the length of Proctor Valley Road. The Chaparral Lands Conservancy has a related project to extend the agencies’ barriers to close gaps on private property.

Yet there is still an outstanding unfulfilled need in Proctor Valley to improve the condition of several imperiled species and habitats that were impacted by activities that occurred prior to establishment of preserve areas and to fulfill the goals of the MSCP for covered species. In cooperation with the City of San Diego and other agency preserve managers, The Chaparral Lands Conservancy is addressing this need with a project to restore and enhance vernal pools and dependent species and watersheds including nearby degraded coastal sage scrub and native grasslands.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING FOR VERNAL POOL RESTORATION

Starting in 2010, the Conservancy obtained funding and began preparing the comprehensive Proctor Valley Vernal Pool Restoration Plan to identify vernal pool sites and recommend restoration areas on all conserved properties in Proctor Valley. Included in this effort were extensive field surveys that identified many vernal pools that had not been documented previously, and cultural resource surveys to identify any possible conflicts between vernal pool restoration and protection of cultural resources. The Proctor Valley Vernal Pool Restoration Plan ultimately identifies eleven potential intensive vernal pool restoration sites containing concentrations of pools and nearby uplands suitable for restoration. These eleven sites contain a combined total of nearly thirty-eight acres and are recommended for restoration based on the field surveys, suitable soils and ecological conditions. Several other small potential vernal pool restoration areas contain isolated individual pools and nearby uplands for an approximate total of an additional five acres. Cultural resource surveys found no significant cultural resources in recommended vernal pool restoration areas.

THE PROCTOR VALLEY VERNAL POOL RESTORATION PROJECTS

The Proctor Valley ORV Site A Vernal Pool and Uplands Habitat Restoration Project is now underway to improve the status of imperiled habitats and species. This is the first project to implement vernal pool restoration recommendations in the comprehensive Proctor Valley Vernal Pool Restoration Plan.

Vernal pools in Proctor Valley are located in flat areas very close to Proctor Valley Road and, as a result have been degraded by past illegal off-road vehicle activity. One important vernal pool site has been nearly denuded following use as an ORV parking and staging area. Weeds have colonized degraded areas formerly covered with coastal sage scrub, native grasslands, and remarkable living soil crusts. Under the first restoration project, degraded vernal pools have been expanded, recontoured, or otherwise enhanced, new basins created, and surrounding watersheds and vegetation restored, all to improve habitat conditions and enhance populations of at least seven imperiled vernal pool species including the San Diego fairy shrimp, Western spadefoot toad, little mousetail, San Diego coyote thistle, spreading navarretia, and toothed calicoflower. Site plans and fundraising are underway for a second vernal pool restoration project right across Proctor Valley Road from the first project site.

Coastal sage scrub is another imperiled habitat in Proctor Valley that has been harmed by past vehicle activity, grazing, and unnaturally frequent wildfire. The restoration project would enhance degraded coastal sage scrub in vernal pool watersheds through weeding and plantings for the benefit of endangered and MSCP covered species like the Burrowing owl, California gnatcatcher, Orange-throated whiptail lizard, San Diego cactus wren, San Diego horned lizard, Orcutt's brodiaea, Otay tarplant, and others as well as to minimize erosion into vernal pools and the Upper Otay Reservoir.

The Chaparral Lands Conservancy has submitted a grant application to the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVRD) to fund the Proctor Valley Vernal Pool & Uplands Habitat Restoration Project and to complete vehicle barriers along Proctor Valley Road. Please visit the [OHMVRD website](#) for more information on safe and responsible OHV recreation and [our grant application](#). Please report any off-road vehicle activity in Proctor Valley to the San Diego County Sheriff: 858 974-2222.

Proctor Valley vernal pool restoration projects have been made possible through the generous support of the [California Natural Resources Agency](#), the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), the [San Diego Foundation](#), and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

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