Common Plant Communities of the Sacramento Region

Valley Grassland

Although once occupying most of the floor of the Central Valley, 99 percent of Valley Grasslands are gone as the result of agricultural development, invasive weeds, and urbanization. They were originally made up of perennial bunch grasses and annual wildflowers. In years with abundant rainfall, wildflowers can still be seen in the spring, sometimes stretching for miles. However, the native grasses are mostly gone, having been replaced by weedy annual grasses.

Foothill Woodland

Foothill Woodland is characterized by scattered trees (predominantly oak) with an undergrowth of herbaceous plants and low shrubs. While it still covers the slopes east of Sacramento, it has been nearly eliminated from the valley floor as the result of agricultural and urban development.

Riparian Woodland

Riparian Woodlands are the lush, tree-lined corridors on each side of streams and rivers. They stand in strong contrast to the surrounding summer-dry grasslands and support a diversity of plant and wildlife species. Roughly 90 percent of riparian woodlands have been lost due to farming, urban development, gravel mining, dams, and levees.

Chaparral

Chaparral is one of the most characteristic plant communities of California. It is common to the surrounding foothills. Evergreen shrubs particularly adapted to California’s long dry summers are typical of Chaparral communities. Grasses, herbaceous plants, and trees are sparse or rare. Chaparral is fire-prone and typically burns every 10 to 40 years.

Freshwater Marsh

Freshwater Marshes occur along the rivers, creeks, and sloughs of the Central Valley wherever there are large expanses of standing or very sluggish water. They are dominated by emergent perennial and floating plants that provide important habitat for waterfowl and fish. They protect levees from erosion and improve water quality by trapping sediments. Freshwater Marsh has been reduced to less than six percent of its original extent in California.

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