

California Prairie

Description: Many open areas in our valleys and foothills are California prairie. Prairie, often called “grasslands”, is actually covered with a mixture of forbs (wildflowers) and grasses. Prairie is a much better name since most of its grasses are exotic weeds, while many of its forbs are native wildflowers.



Interesting facts

- Prairie soils do not support trees and shrubs because their hardpans and clay horizons keep most water too close the soil surface.
- California prairie was once grazed by herds of tule elk and pronghorn antelope. Now much of it is grazed by cattle.
- Some believe California prairie was once covered by bunchgrasses (which are now uncommon), but there is little documentation or evidence for this belief.

Why is this community important?

- Numerous native plants, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals are found only in California prairie.
- It is important raptor hunting grounds. Some birds-of-prey use it year round, while others hunt there only in summer or in winter.
- It is beautiful! If you’ve found a field of wildflowers, you’ve found California prairie.

Conservation Status and Threats: Many of our prairie areas have been lost to farming and urban development. Remaining California prairie is often denied attention and protection because of the myth that “it’s only weeds”, while its native forbs, wildflowers, and wildlife habitat are overlooked and undervalued.