

Wilderness.net's San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness in 1984 and it now has a total of 39,413 acres. All of the wilderness is in California and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

Mountains covered with chaparral and coastal sage dominate the landscape of San Mateo Canyon Wilderness. Many deep drainages hide a lush growth of vegetation, with oak woodlands thick in the lower elevations. Annual rainfall averages 15 to 20 inches, most of it falling in winter and early spring; flash floods rip through narrow canyons in heavy downpours. Spring brings a wealth of wildflower blooms. Summers tend to be very hot and dry, though you will probably find small pools in San Mateo Canyon most of the year. Keep an eye open for wildlife: 139 bird species, 37 mammal species, 46 reptile and amphibian species, seven species of fish. Lizards, rattlesnakes, coyotes, skunks, and mice are commonly seen; the elusive mountain lion is rarely seen. The east-west San Mateo Canyon Trail follows the main canyon for 7.5 miles near the center of the Wilderness, and provides access to what is probably the best camping in the area: fields of grass, shady stands of oak and sycamore, the best chances for water. This trail is joined by at least six others, most of them easy to moderate, including the 5.4-mile Tenaja Falls Trail. Tenaja Falls, when spring brings a rush of water, is a dramatic sight. Poison oak grows richly around the falls even when the creek dries up. Campfires are not permitted. This Wilderness receives light human use and can provide a wild and worthy experience, especially in spring.

Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

Area Management

The San Mateo Canyon Wilderness is part of the 110 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

General Wilderness Prohibitions

Motorized equipment and equipment used for mechanical transport is generally prohibited on all federal lands designated as wilderness. This includes the use of motor vehicles, motorboats, motorized equipment, bicycles, hang gliders, wagons, carts, portage wheels, and the landing of aircraft including helicopters, unless provided for in specific legislation.

In a few areas some exceptions allowing the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport are described in the special regulations in effect for a specific area. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed below for more specific information.

These general prohibitions have been implemented for all national forest wildernesses in order to implement the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Wilderness Act requires management of human-caused impacts and protection of the area's wilderness character to insure that it is "unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as wilderness." Use of the equipment listed as prohibited in wilderness is inconsistent with the provision in the Wilderness Act which mandates opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation and that wilderness is a place that is in contrast with areas where people and their works are dominant.

Wilderness-Specific Regulations

Wilderness managers often need to take action to limit the impacts caused by visitor activities in order to protect the natural conditions of wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Managers typically implement 'indirect' types of actions such as information and education measures before selecting more restrictive measures. When regulations are necessary, they are implemented with the specific intent of balancing the need to preserve the character of the wilderness while providing for the use and enjoyment of wilderness.

The following wilderness regulations are in effect for this area. Not all regulations are in effect for every wilderness. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed on the 'Links' tab for more specific information about the regulations listed.

ALL VISITORS

- Group size is limited to no more than 15 people per party.
- Campfire are prohibited.
- Permits are required for overnight use.

- Do not shortcut switchbacks.
- Pack out all debris, garbage, or other waste.

Fees

The following user fee system(s) have been implemented for this wilderness: TRAILHEAD PARKING. Fees are most often used to offset the operating costs of a permit system or to help fund management activities such as trail maintenance. Contact the national forest office or visit the websites listed below for more specific information on this fee system.

Contacts

Trabuco Ranger District
 1147 EAST SIXTH STREET
 CORONA, CA 92879

Phone: 951-736-1811

Links to Other Websites

[Cleveland National Forest, Pine Creek and San Mateo Canyon Wildernesses](#)

Links on Wilderness.net

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

Applicable Wilderness Law(s)

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
Public Law 98-425	September 28, 1984	39,540
California Wilderness Act of 1984 - Public Law 98-425 (9/28/1984) California Wilderness Act of 1984		

 [download 98-425](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 4-5.