

Natural Treasures of Former Fort Ord

Former Fort Ord is comprised of 28,000 acres containing many rare habitats such as coastal dunes, dune scrub, maritime chaparral, coast live oak woodland and savannas, vernal pools, and perennial grasslands. These habitats are home to many rare and endangered plants and animals. For example, maritime chaparral is a rare natural community that is in decline due to urban and agricultural development. In the Monterey Bay area, maritime chaparral is composed of several federal species of concern and the open space surrounded by the chaparral on former Fort Ord support two plant species listed as threatened and endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The worldwide distributions of most of these listed species and species of concern are limited to the Monterey Bay area of California. The lands at former Fort Ord represent a substantial part of their ranges and remaining habitat. The following is a partial list of the 45 special-status species and their respective worldwide distribution on former Fort Ord:

<u>Plant</u>	<u>World-Wide Distribution</u>	<u>Listing Status</u>
Monterey Spineflower	75% – 95%	Fed. Threatened
Toro Manzanita	70% – 90%	Species of Concern
Sandmat Manzanita	70% – 90%	Species of Concern
Eastwood’s Ericameria	70% – 90%	Species of Concern
Sand Gilia	50% – 70%	Fed. End. / State Threatened
Monterey Ceanothus	50% – 70%	Species of Concern
Seaside Bird’s-Beak	30% – 50%	State Endangered

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act the Army prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for disposal and reuse of former Fort Ord in 1993. The EIS identified the need to develop and implement a HMP as a mitigation measure for impacts on vegetation and wildlife resources in accordance with the ESA. The Army published an HMP initially, in February 1994, and again in April 1997, in response to both the biological opinion and mitigation measures identified in the EIS Record of Decision and the Supplemental EIS. The final plan presented in the HMP requires the Army to implement and monitor mitigation measures to minimize the impacts to special-status species during the Army’s predisposal actions. Army predisposal actions include the cleanup of unexploded ordnance.

There is a long history of fires at former Fort Ord that resulted from training activities occurring since 1917. These fires have resulted in a healthy and diverse maritime chaparral plant community because many of the species are adapted to reproduce by seed following burning. The Army is not aware of any other vegetation clearance method that can mimic the natural responses following burns.

In addition to the Army's requirements for predisposal actions, the HMP assumes a reuse development scenario for the base that will result in the removal of up to 6,300 acres of existing vegetation and wildlife habitat including many of these rare and endangered species and their habitats. However, more than 16,000 acres of habitat reserves with about 400 additional acres of connecting habitat corridors have been established in perpetuity to offset the loss of other areas to support the reuse of former Fort Ord. In addition to the establishment of specific reserve areas and corridors, the HMP further conditions development on approximately 1,800 additional acres by requiring reserve areas or specific restrictions on those lands. Along the development/reserve interface lands bordering the BLM reserve area, management requirements such as development of fire breaks, control of invasive species and limitations to vehicle access are required.

The goal as stated in the HMP is "to promote preservation, enhancement and restoration of habitat and populations of special status species while allowing implementation of a community-based reuse plan that promotes economic recovery after the closure of Fort Ord." As stated above, this is being accomplished by transferring the larger contiguous and biologically diverse habitat parcels to natural resource management agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the California State Parks. The rare species found in maritime chaparral are to be managed by BLM using prescribed fire to promote a healthy plant community and prevent their extinction. By ensuring the reserves are managed to promote the continued existence of these rare species and habitats, other areas containing these species can be developed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) stated in a letter to the Army dated April 24, 2000:

"We believe that the conservation and appropriate management of significant preserve lands that support maritime chaparral at Fort Ord may preclude the need to add several species in the Monterey area to the federal list of threatened and endangered species in the future and has substantially reduced the burden of protection that would have fallen on private landowners and local municipalities in the area had a plan for preserving these areas not been developed."

The HMP was completed and signed by the Army and the USFWS in 1997. Of the 14 signatories to the HMP, the California Department of Parks and Recreation is the only agency that has not yet signed the 1997 HMP.

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