

How Does Transit Impact Habitat and Farmland?

Habitat loss and fragmentation (dividing large pieces of habitat) are considered to be the main drivers of wildlife endangerment and extinction in the United States. Habitat loss and fragmentation are often products of sprawl development, which generally occurs on undeveloped lands away from urbanized areas. This type of development is largely supported by automobile and highway-based transportation systems, whereas transit is more supportive of dense, infill development.¹

San Diego is at a specific risk for habitat loss due to sprawl development. In 2005 the National Wildlife Federation in conjunction with Smart Growth America and Nature Serve published a report entitled “Endangered by Sprawl.” This publication named San Diego County number 9 on a nationwide list of counties with the largest amount of open space projected to be developed through 2025 under existing sprawl patterns. This study also noted **San Diego as the County in the United States with the largest amount of species at risk for extinction.**²

Farmland loss is also a product of unsustainable sprawl and highway development. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) found that of all counties in California, **San Diego had the second most total acres of land urbanized between 1990 and 2004**, and in this timeframe 50,978 acres of land were urbanized. Urbanization in San Diego often occurs on farmland and open space, which is reflected in the fact that the AFT also found San Diego to rank 8th on a list of counties in California with the greatest amount of farmland conversion.³

Natural habitat, rare and endemic (local) species, and farmland are all very important to San Diego for cultural, biological, and even economic reasons. Please get involved in the Urban Area Transit Strategy to support transit and compact infill development and help curb suburban sprawl that threatens our quality of life!

¹http://www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/habitat_conservation/habitat_conservation_basics/sprawl/threats_to_wildlife/index.php

² Ewing, Reid, Kostyack, John, Chen, Don, Stein, Bruce, and Michelle Ernst. 2005. *Endangered by Sprawl*. Available at: <http://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Wildlife-Conservation/Threats-to-Wildlife/~media/PDFs/Wildlife/EndangeredbySprawl.ashx>

³ 2007 report by The American Farmland Trust entitled “Paving Paradise: A New Perspective on California Farmland Conversion” http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/ca/documents/PavingParadise_AmericanFarmlandTrust_Nov07.pdf