The UC Natural Reserve System provides a library of ecosystems throughout California. Reserves offer outdoor laboratories to field scientists, classrooms without walls for students, and nature’s inspiration to all.

Founded in 1965 to provide a network of wildland sites available for scientific study, the NRS has grown to include more than 40 locations encompassing more than 756,000 acres across the state.

The NRS is the world’s largest university-operated system of natural reserves; no other network of field sites can match its size, scope, and ecological diversity.
UC San Diego Reserves

Dawson Los Monos Canyon Reserve

Agua Hedionda Creek winds through Dawson Los Monos Canyon Reserve in the western foothills of San Diego County. Banks shaded by sycamores and oaks resolve into meadows. Canyon slopes are blanketed by stands of chaparral, coast live oak, and inland sage scrub. For wildlife, the reserve serves as a conduit to the coast and a refuge in a rapidly urbanizing region.

Scripps Coastal Reserve

A mesa topped by a grassy knoll towers above a broad open beach. Rolling waves hide the mouth of a submarine canyon and a rocky intertidal zone crowded with marine invertebrates and fishes. Burials and artifacts from some of California’s earliest cultures document human habitation beginning as long as 9,000 years ago. A protected stretch of San Diego shoreline, Scripps Coastal Reserve offers a diverse array of land and sea habitats to students, researchers, and the general public.

Elliott Chaparral Reserve

Elliott Chaparral Reserve occupies the narrow ridge and adjacent slopes of Kearny Mesa east of San Diego. South coastal chaparral and coastal scrub intermix at the reserve with desert elements such as Quixote yucca. Demanding growing conditions and thin soils support an unusually high percentage of native plant species. The reserve became a locus of studies on post-fire vegetation regeneration after a 2003 blaze. Researchers have access to rare claypan vernal pools and other habitats at adjacent Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

Kendall-Frost Mission Bay Marsh Reserve

The last remnant of a major San Diego wetland, Kendall-Frost Mission Bay Marsh Reserve provides vital habitat for declining estuarine species. Channels lined with pickleweed and cordgrass snake toward the bay, opening onto mudflat and subtidal eelgrass beds. The endangered light-footed clapper rail nests here, joined each year by juvenile fishes, marsh invertebrates, and migrating shorebirds by the thousands.