

COASTAL SAGE SCRUB

Plants and Their Adaptations

Coastal Sage Scrub (CSS) is characterized by having low-growing (typically <6 feet tall), aromatic plants with waxy leaves. Plants that are typical of this habitat are California Sagebrush, Bush Sunflower, Lemonade Berry, Coastal Goldenbush, Black Sage, and many more. The plants of CSS are adapted to retain water and reduce sun exposure during drought conditions. Many of them are drought deciduous, meaning that they drop their leaves and go dormant when water is scarce. Another example is the leaves of Laurel Sumac which fold up under intense sun, giving the plant its nickname of the "taco plant". Some plants are also seasonally dimorphic, meaning that the plant takes two different forms depending on the season. For example, Bush Sunflower has smaller leaves during the summer months and larger leaves during the winter months. The plants of CSS have an extensive root system that allows them to take advantage of any moisture in the soil. The root crowns and stems are able to resprout after a fire and some of the plant seeds require fire to break down the exterior in order to germinate.

At Fairview Park

Coastal Sage Scrub and associated plant communities can be found to the west of the Wetlands. This area was restored starting in 2005 and now contains 11 acres of CSS. The canyon, bluffs, and patches of the mesa also contain remnant CSS habitats that have been disturbed over time, but are viable candidates for future restoration. When you smell the characteristic sage aroma, CSS is likely nearby.

Soil and Climate

Coastal Sage Scrub is an ecosystem that occurs on the coast between the San Francisco Bay and northern Baja California. It typically occurs below 3,000 feet in elevation in areas that have hot, dry summers with a rainy season in the winter. The soils that CSS plants grow in can vary widely from sandy soils to clay-like soils. The plants can grow in low-nutrient soils that are prone to erosion, but their root systems help them stay anchored in case of erosion.

Status

Coastal Sage Scrub has been reduced to only 10-30% of its historical range due to it occurring on prime, high value coastal land that is popular for development. This has made it one of the most endangered ecosystems in the U.S. The California Gnatcatcher has been impacted by this loss in habitat as it lives exclusively in CSS. The bird is now federally protected, which has resulted in the preservation of some of the remaining CSS in California.

Animals

Fauna of the Coastal Sage Scrub includes lizards, birds, snakes, mice, and many more species. The plants provide a place to forage as well as cover from the ecosystem's predators, like the Coyote. This habitat is also important for insects as it hosts many species of butterflies, bees, and more.