Federal Lands

The federal government manages 40 percent of California’s 100,000 million acres for the conservation of natural resources. Western states were settled after the rest of America. Creating federal reserves in the west was easier than in places to the east where farms, factories, and cities were already established.

About half of the federal conservation lands in California are set aside as National Forests (NF). These are mountainous areas where trees thrive in air that is more cool and moist than in lowlands and deserts. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages other federal lands, which are in the arid regions east of the Sierra Nevada and in the southeastern deserts. The government manages these NF and BLM lands for multiple uses that include timber and mineral extraction, water resources, recreation, and protection of plants and animals.

National Parks (NP), National Monuments (NM), National Seashores (NS), National Wildlife Refuges, and the Mojave National Preserve are special places where the scenery, plants, and wildlife are protected from almost all development. These natural areas are for the most part unchanged since the time Native Americans first settled them. They are very popular locations for camping, hiking, bird watching, and other activities that free people from urban life.

National Recreation Areas are located next to cities. Here people young and old can hike and bike, swim, and simply enjoy being outdoors.