

# LIVING WITH NATURAL AREAS

## A guide for living next to a natural resource

### Why is this Information Important to You?

You are one of the very fortunate members of the community who lives adjacent to a natural area and you have a special role to help minimize the impacts on the natural area.

### What is a Natural Area?

Natural areas conserve and protect areas to increase wildlife habitat, stabilize stream banks and introduce and maintain native woodlands and vegetation. It's different from a park because instead of having playgrounds, athletic fields, and irrigated turf, the focus is on conservation and preservation. Most natural areas also provide buffers between developed areas and floodplains offering protection to residential areas.

### Avoid the Temptation to 'Clean Up' Natural Areas

It is important for native plant material, including fallen trees or dead branches, to be left alone. Native ground cover plants provide food and shelter for wildlife. Dead leaves and wood return vital nutrients to the soil as they decompose. Pruning and removing anything that has grown in a natural area can cause damage to woodland trees and can slow the regeneration of saplings and understory brush upon which the future growth of the forest depends. The removal of forest undergrowth can be especially destructive. These areas are extremely fragile and not able to survive such influences. Clipping and trimming are necessary for the manicured park settings, but it is harmful in natural areas.

### Four Reasons Not to Feed Wildlife

1. It encourages overcrowding.
2. It increases the probability of spreading diseases.
3. Wildlife becomes dependent on the food, which can affect their habitat.
4. It attracts less than desirable animals, such as raccoons, possums, and rodents.

# Prevent Encroachment

Encroachment is the use of natural areas for inappropriate or personal use. Preventing encroachment is the most significant way to protect our natural areas.

In many cases, residents encroach on natural areas in an attempt to bring their property into the natural area for increased enjoyment.

However, structures, landscaping, unauthorized paths or alterations to the land can contribute to the deterioration of the natural areas. This includes mowing, children's play equipment, tree houses, bird houses, salt blocks, patios, stairs, pool backwash/overflow discharge, flower beds, garden plots, and the dumping of yard waste.

Remember, your lot ends at your property line. Any encroachment issues will be removed immediately by City staff without notification and to

## City's Plans for Natural Areas

The best way to establish a natural area is to let mother nature re-create it. Staff may introduce native plantings, periodically mow, or remove invasive species. Where accessible, staff may create soft trails for the public to enjoy.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What can I do in the natural area?**

Enjoy the area. If there are soft trails, enjoy a hike, but please remember to stay on the trail and leave no trace.

**Can I mow a natural area?**

Routine mowing will disturb the native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Any mowing should be done by City staff only.

**Will it always look messy?**

Natural areas are not managed like a typical park and may have the "messy" appearance. This "messy" look is crucial to regenerate native plantings and create wildlife habitats.

**Can I plant vegetation in the natural area?**

Planting in the natural area may inadvertently introduce invasive species. Planting should only be done by City staff.

**Will weeds spread from the natural area to my lawn and garden?**

There is little that can be done to prevent the migration of weeds from natural areas. City will periodically spray or remove invasive species.

**Will the City spray the natural areas for mosquitoes?**

Mosquito spray is not harmful; however, in a natural area that is designated to increase habitat, spraying for mosquitoes may have an adverse effect on some insects needed to positively impact the natural area.

## Conclusion

With natural areas in almost every neighborhood, Pleasant Hill offers a unique opportunity to enjoy and experience nature in the midst of an urban environment. Your awareness, understanding, and cooperation are necessary for the preservation of these precious areas. We hope that this information has given you some tips on how **you** can contribute to the health and success of our natural areas.