

Santa Barbara County Communities

Wildfire Protection Plan

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION



Oak Trails, Engine 324, Water Tender 32, Refugio Canyon, and Copter 308 with helitorch attached.

Governance

Santa Barbara County was established by an act of the State Legislature on February 18, 1850. The County is a general law county and political subdivision of the State of California. The constitution and laws of the State establish the County's rights, powers, privileges, authority, functions, and duties. The powers granted California counties by State statute include the power to: sue and be sued, purchase, receive by gift or bequest and hold land within its limits, or elsewhere when permitted by law; make contracts and purchase and hold personal property necessary to the exercise of its powers; manage, sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of its property as the interest of its inhabitants require; levy and collect taxes authorized by law; and exercise such other and further powers as may be especially conferred by law, or as may be necessarily implied from those expressed.

The County is divided into five supervisory districts based on population, as required by State statute. Supervisors are elected from each district by the voters of the district to serve staggered four-year terms. The Chair is elected by and from, members of the Board. The Board exercises the powers of the County. By County ordinance, the Board is required to hold meetings on the first four Tuesdays of every calendar month and at such other times as, in the opinion of the Board, the public interest may require.

The Board exercises the legislative powers of the County and other County officials oversee the County's daily operations. County administration includes officials appointed by the Board of Supervisors and officials elected by countywide vote, including the Auditor-Controller, the Treasurer-Tax Collector, the County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor, the District Attorney, and the Sheriff. Many boards, commissions, and committees assist the Board of Supervisors and County officials.

Counties perform a dual role in providing comprehensive government services to their residents. First - as a local government entity responsive to the residents in the unincorporated areas of the county, second - as a regional government and agent of the State. As a local government entity, the County of Santa Barbara provides services such as sheriff's patrol and fire protection, road construction and maintenance, planning, zoning, and building permits, solid waste collection, and an affordable housing program. Through special districts and County Service Areas the County also provides sewer, street lighting, and redevelopment services to unincorporated areas of the County. Other entities within the County provide services to the County's unincorporated area population even though the County may not exercise oversight responsibility or fiscal control over such entities. These entities include school districts, water, sanitary and other special districts. Services provided county-wide include district attorney and public defender, flood control, parks and libraries, and the assessment, collection, and distribution of property taxes to all local governments including cities and schools. As an agent of the State, the counties, including the County of Santa Barbara, are required to administer many of the State's health, welfare and criminal justice programs of greater statewide concern.

Government Services

Countywide Services provided to all residents: Court Services, District Attorney and Public Defender, Public Health, Mental Health, Social Services, Parks and Beaches, Veteran Services, Probation, Flood Control, Library Services, Agriculture Commissioner.

Services to the Unincorporated Area: Sheriff's Patrol, Planning & Zoning, Building Permits, Roads, Street Lights, Fire Protection, Trash Collection and Recycling.

Contract Services to Incorporated Cities: Sheriff's Patrol to Cities of Carpinteria, Buellton, and Solvang, Building Permit Processing to Cities of Buellton, and Solvang, Animal Control (Field and Shelter Services) to all Cities, except Carpinteria (Shelter Services only) Library Services for the Cities of Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Lompoc.

Population

On January 1, 2001, the California Department of Finance estimated the County population to be 408,900, with eight incorporated cities: Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, Lompoc, Carpinteria, Guadalupe, Solvang, Buellton and Goleta. The largest cities in the County and their respective populations are: Santa Barbara, the County Seat, at 94,200; Santa Maria at 80,000; Lompoc at 42,150; and Goleta at 29,595. The unincorporated area on January 1, 2001, with a population of 162,500, is comprised of several communities: Orcutt, Los Alamos, Isla Vista, Los Olivos, Ballard, Santa Ynez, Sisquoc, Garey, Tepusquet Canyon, Hope Ranch, Hollister Ranch, Vandenberg Village, Mission Hills, Cuyama, Summerland, Montecito, Casmalia, Refugio Canyon and Gaviota.

Demographics

According to the 2000 Census, the population in Santa Barbara County was almost equal in ratio of male to female. The median age was 33.4 and 75.1% of the population was 18 years and over.

Employment

The largest employment categories in the County include services, healthcare, education, manufacturing, retail trade, public administration, and agriculture. The mild climate, picturesque coastline, scenic mountains, and numerous parks and beaches make the County a popular tourist and recreational area.

Socioeconomic Trends

Santa Barbara County's economy is expected to continue to grow at a very slow rate. The rate of real economic growth in both 2001 and 2002 was considerably below that of the late 1990's. The September 11th terrorist attacks and current uncertainty regarding the California budget, the economy, and geopolitical affairs discourage investment and growth.

Geography

Santa Barbara County is located on the Central Coast of California, approximately 100 miles northwest of Los Angeles and 300 miles south of San Francisco. The County occupies 2,774 square miles, one-third of which is located in the Los Padres National Forest. Bordered on the West and South by the Pacific Ocean, the County has 110 miles of coastline. The Counties of Ventura, San Luis Obispo and Kern border the County.

Ranges of hills generally bisect the County west to east, dividing it into its northern, central and southern portions. The South Coast area is a narrow coastal terrace between the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Ynez Range, extending from Rincon Point on the east to Point Conception on the west. The Santa Ynez Range rises from 1,500 to 4,000 feet and is characterized by sharp transverse ridges separated by steep-walled canyons.

The Central area of the County is characterized by lower rolling hills and broad, flat valleys. The east-west trending Santa Ynez River forms the Lompoc and Santa Ynez Valleys. These valleys, together with the Santa Rita Valley and Santa Rita Hills comprise the southern portion of the central coast lowlands. The Santa Ynez River lies between the Santa Ynez Range on the south and the

Purisima Hills on the north. The northern portion of the central coast lowlands is defined by the Purisima Hills on the south and the Casmalia and Solomon hills on the north. These hills range from 1,340 to 1,840 feet and define the San Antonio Valley and the Los Alamos lowland. The Santa Maria Valley lies just north of the Casmalia and Solomon hills and extends northward into San Luis Obispo County, eastward toward the town of Sisquoc, and westward to the Pacific Ocean.

The northeastern area of the County is a diverse region lying almost entirely within the Los Padres National Forest. The Sierra Madre Range binds the Cuyama Valley in the extreme northeast corner on the south with elevations up to 5,485 feet. South of the Sierra Madre Range lies the Sisquoc River Valley and south of this lies the San Rafael Mountains. Big Pine Mountain (6,828 feet), the highest point in the County, is in the San Rafael Range.

The County of Santa Barbara has land use regulatory jurisdiction in all unincorporated lands not within the jurisdiction of the Federal or State governments. Major Federal land holdings within the County include 153.75 square miles (98,400 acres) of Vandenberg Air Force base and approximately 1,211 square miles (775,040 acres) of Los Padres National Forest. State lands within the County include a total of 4.76 square miles (3,047 acres) of State beaches and 1.5 square miles (966 acres) at La Purisima Mission in the Lompoc area.

Climate

Santa Barbara County has a semi-arid Mediterranean climate, characterized by warm dry summers and mild winters. Sunny skies are common throughout most of the area, although seasonal low clouds and fog occur with some frequency over the Pacific Ocean and in the immediate coastline. Mild temperatures occur throughout the year, particularly near the coastline. Considerably more temperature variation occurs in the inland valleys and mountainous areas. Maximum readings in summer average about 80°F near the coast to 105°F in the interior. In winter, minimum temperatures can range from the 40's along the

coast to the 30's inland. Precipitation is confined primarily to the winter months. Annual averages range from about 6 inches in some inland areas to over 30 inches in higher mountain areas. Occasionally, tropical air masses bring rainfall in summer months. In general, the mountains of the southeastern part of the County receive 20 to 25 inches of rainfall in the course of the year, with less than 20 inches being characteristic of the immediate southern coastline. Most of the western half of the County receives from 11 to 15 inches of precipitation, up to 20 inches or more falling at some high elevation points in the Santa Ynez Mountains and in parts of the San Rafael Mountains.

Seasonal totals vary considerably from year to year. Low elevations in the western part of the County, for example, receive as little as 5 inches in the driest one year out of 20, while in the wettest year in 20 the total is around 25 inches. In heavy rainfall areas of the mountains of the eastern part, annual totals range from a low of 15 inches to a high of 55 inches within a 20-year period. Western stations receive from 10 to 18 inches of moisture in one half of the years, while in the mountains to the east; these figures are 25 to 40 inches.

Wind speeds are usually light to moderate and tend to be highest in association with winter storms. A diurnal wind pattern (land and sea breeze) characterizes most of the area, with westerly (on-shore) winds common in daytime and light easterly (offshore) winds predominant at night. The many deep canyons running out of the coastal mountains towards the coast therefore tend to catch and concentrate these winds, enhancing the fire threat in warm, dry weather.

Santa Barbara County lies in a transitional area between several characteristic air masses. To the west, marine air over the Pacific Ocean exerts a major influence. This area is dominated by a large high-pressure cell, which is present throughout the year but is strongest and most persistent during spring, summer and autumn. This high-pressure cell tends to block storm systems approaching the area from the west, causing them to move well to the north. In addition, clockwise wind flow patterns around the high pressure cell cause relatively cool marine air to flow eastward toward the California coast, producing the

characteristic “sea breeze” conditions. A persistent inversion layer (warm air above cold air) accompanies the high-pressure cell.

A second major air mass region lies over the desert areas of the southwestern United States. The generally warm conditions over the desert cause the near-surface air to rise due to the intense heating near the ground. This produces low atmospheric pressure, which tends to draw in surrounding air, including eastern-moving marine air (the sea breeze) near the Pacific High. Occasionally, however, strong high pressure over the desert causes a reversal of this flow pattern. During such periods, strong gusty east winds (commonly known as Santa Ana Winds) carry inland air toward the coastline and out over the Pacific, leading to clean, clear atmospheric conditions in many areas.

Ecosystems

Santa Barbara is home to many varied and unique ecosystems.