Each visit is unique. The lagoon is renowned for its abundant wildlife, revealed sometimes with a splash, as a Striped Mullet leaps from the tidal waters. Winds carry the fragrance of coastal sage and Western Fence Lizards bask in the sun. Look east for the elusive mule deer often observed at the lagoon.

Coastal wetlands perform natural benefits. These ecosystems filter pollutants, improving coastal water quality. Lagoons provide hatcheries for young fishes and refuge for resident and migrating birds. We rely on this wetland for its natural inspiration and health-promoting benefits in our coastal community.

Ninety percent of California's coastal wetlands have been replaced by urban development. San Elijo Lagoon is a valuable part of what remains. Beginning in the 1800s, the railroad and highway bisected the lagoon, reducing its natural exchange with the ocean. Successful efforts have improved water quality and wildlife habitat by annually dredging the sand-blocked inlet. This restores tidal exchange critical to the health of this estuarine habitat.

Welcome to San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, one of San Diego's largest coastal wetlands, and home to an exceptional diversity of plants and animals. The 979-acre reserve is primarily a shallow-water estuary, formed where Escondido and La Orilla Creeks meet the Pacific Ocean.

Twice daily, incoming tides cover much of the landscape with salt water. As the tide ebbs, mudflats are exposed that are rich with invertebrates, providing food for shorebirds and ducks. Fresh water from rain-fed creeks and storm drains mixes with the salt water. The plants and animals in this estuarine environment have evolved to survive at the intersection of land and ocean.
San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve

ESCONDIDO CREEK WATERSHED
Beginning at the upper headwaters in Bear Valley above Lake Wohlford, Escondido Creek flows more than 26 miles to meet the ocean at San Elijo Lagoon.

TRAIL USAGE
Walk, jog, and hike on established trails only. Trails are open daily from sunrise to sunset.

WILDLIFE
All wildlife and resources are protected. Feeding wildlife and releasing any animal or plant is prohibited.

PETS
Pets are permitted if they are licensed, restrained on a leash no longer than 6 feet, and attended to at all times. Pets are not recommended on the strenuous loop of Annie's Canyon Trail.

EQUESTRIAN ACCESS
Equestrians are permitted on trails east of I-5.

VEHICLES
Bicycles, motorcycles, and all vehicles are prohibited.

RECREATIONAL WATER ACCESS
Recreational use, including use of SUPs, kayaks, and swimming, is prohibited.

VEGETATION AND NATURAL FEATURES
All plants, animals, natural features, and archaeological resources are fully protected and may not be damaged, injured, or removed.

REMOTE CONTROL AIRCRAFT
Remotely piloted aircraft and drones are prohibited.

FIREWORKS AND WEAPONS
Fireworks and weapons are not permitted.

FISHING AND HUNTING
Fishing and hunting are prohibited in the Reserve.

LITTER
Litter and dog waste can harm wildlife. Please dispose of it properly in the provided receptacles.

SMOKING
Smoking, including the use of vaporizing products, is not permitted.

Native Plants and Animals

California Horn Snail
Coyote
Fiddler Crab
Great Blue Heron
Mule Deer
Osprey
Pygmy Blue Butterfly
Ridgway's Rail
Great Egret
Southern Pacific Rattlesnake
Striped Mullet
Western Fence Lizard

Arroyo Willow
Black Sage
Bush Monkeyflower
Bush Sunflower
California Dodder
Mule Fat
Pickleweed
Prickly Pear Cactus
Southwestern Spiny Rush
Torrey Pine
Tayson
Wild Cucumber