

2. NATURAL AREAS DEFINED

Natural areas are remnants of Salt Lake Valley's presettlement landscapes that are scattered throughout the County. They contain rich, diverse plant and animal communities that differ dramatically from one another and range in size from a few acres to hundreds of acres. Natural areas are minimally developed and do not contain manicured lawns, ornamental flower beds, or formal landscape plantings. Natural areas are only slightly disturbed or undisturbed and may be used for passive, low-impact recreational activities. Many of the trails in natural areas are used by both residents and visitors for passive recreation activities.

Natural areas provide several quality of life values for residents and communities throughout Salt Lake Valley, as listed below.

OPEN SPACE: Within Salt Lake County, portions of the landscape that are undeveloped and that have natural vegetation provide open space to residents and communities, and allow for human connections to nature. All natural areas provide open space to County residents.

VIEWSHED: A viewshed is the visible landscape scenery as seen from a specific viewpoint along a travel corridor or at a fixed location. Natural areas help protect important scenic viewsheds of the undeveloped and natural landscape within Salt Lake Valley.

WILDLIFE AND NATIVE PLANT HABITAT: Undisturbed native vegetation in natural areas provides important habitat for a variety of wildlife species including deer, small mammals, and birds. In some cases rare or endangered plant and wildlife species, as defined by State or Federal agencies, may exist in specific natural areas.

WATERSHEDS, RIPARIAN-WETLANDS, AND WATERWAYS: Natural areas help protect water resources by providing for aquifer recharge, erosion control, flood attenuation, water-cleansing functions, and unique vegetation and wildlife habitat in those areas associated with natural watersheds, riparian-wetlands, and waterways.





GEOLOGIC FEATURES: Natural areas help protect important geologic features that may include unique rock formations, aquifer recharge zones, and the prehistoric Lake Bonneville Shoreline.

RECREATION: Passive recreation activities that commonly occur in natural areas include hiking, walking, equestrian trails, biking, picnicking, fishing, wildlife viewing, and education and interpretation. Natural areas provide a critical recreation resource to the residents and visitors of Salt Lake Valley.

Natural areas can be found throughout the County under the jurisdiction of numerous private and governmental organizations including municipalities, Salt Lake County, the State of Utah, and the U.S. Federal Government. Table 2.1 lists the current (2007) amount of natural areas by ownership within the County while Figure 2.1 shows the location of these natural areas and their associated ownership. Of the approximately 515,000 acres in Salt Lake County, approximately 280,000 acres or 55 percent are considered natural areas.

Table 2.1. Amount of natural areas by ownership in Salt Lake County.

OWNERSHIP	NATURAL AREA ACREAGE (2007) ^a
Private	143,588
Municipal	10,667
Salt Lake County	2,242
State of Utah	26,033
U.S. Federal Government	97,543

^a Does not include disturbed, developed, or agricultural lands.

