

4. ORIGINS OF THE NATURAL RESERVE SYSTEM

The Natural Reserve System (NRS), formerly known as the Natural Land and Water Reserves System, is a program authorized by The Regents which supports the faculty and students as they carry out the University's teaching and research roles. It also contributes to the University's public service role by making its reserves and their facilities available to other universities and appropriate institutions.

The NRS was founded in 1965 by the following Regental action:

“...that a University of California Natural Land and Water Reserves System, under the administration of the President of the University, be established, the purpose of the system to provide a series of land parcels throughout the State of California, either owned by the University or made available to the University, in the use of which a primary consideration is the preservation of a natural environment in as undisturbed a condition as possible so that present and future faculty members and students may do research and make observations on a variety of natural environments...”

At the time, the Regents also designated seven properties as the initial reserves in the system. This action was based upon a recommendation from a faculty committee headed by Professor Kenneth S. Norris, which recognized the increasing loss of the state's natural habitats due to population growth and land development.¹ The Norris committee successfully argued that the conversion of land to development-oriented uses was making it increasingly difficult to find suitable study sites within easy reach of the campuses. What was critically needed was a system of reserves with significant natural history qualities to be managed by scientists and educators for scientists and educators where the habitats and their biota could be studied under conditions controlled by the University. Today, the NRS maintains a system of 35 reserves — “living laboratories” that reflect the state's extraordinary natural diversity — and makes those sites available for the University's mission of teaching, research, and public service.

¹ Kenneth S. Norris, Naturalist, Cetologist & Conservationist 1924-1998, An Oral History Biography,

Edited by Randall Jarrell, Regional History Project, University Library, UC Santa Cruz, 1999.

The Map in Appendix 4A shows the present composition of the system. Detailed information on the individual reserves is available from the Systemwide office and from the appropriate reserve managers.

Property Ownership

About 47,000 acres of NRS lands are owned by the University. The balance is made available to the University through use agreements with the landowners or conservation easements giving the University certain rights over the property.

This diversity in ownership of NRS lands affords valuable opportunities for the University to work in partnership with a variety of government agencies, public interest groups, and private interests. At the same time, it makes for a complex portfolio of legal arrangements, as varied and distinct as each reserve is unique. The successful management of the NRS must therefore consider the complexity of the various arrangements at each site. The table in Appendix 4B shows the nature of the University's use rights for each reserve — whether through University ownership, miscellaneous agreements, or conservation easement. In some cases, there may be more than one basis for the University's use rights, particularly if a reserve is made up of multiple land components.

Legal Obligation to Donors, Former Owners or Others

Negotiating the terms of reserve acquisitions often results in the imposition of certain requirements upon the University or retained rights by the former owners and their families. These requirements are too reserve-specific to cite fully here, but may include controls on public access, third party use rights, or restrictions placed on certain types of use (e.g., facilities development, commercial use, grazing, agriculture). Each reserve manager must become familiar with and understand the underlying agreements and other documents that affect the reserve. Any important requirements or third-party rights should be addressed in the reserve management plan and included in this handbook because of their potential impact on the reserve's day-to-day operation, as well as long-term planning.