Hazards

Safety starts by being mindful of these hazards and staying on trail while in our open space.

Rattlesnakes

Rattlesnakes commonly emerge in the spring and are active in the summer months. It is important to stay on trails since they blend in and can deliver a venomous bite if startled.

Rattlesnakes are a native reptile that live in rugged chaparral habitat. These snakes are “pit” vipers which means they have small pores on the front of their heads that sense heat from prey. Once they hole in on where their prey is, they lunge and deliver a venomous bite to incapacitate their victim. Once the poison has had time to work, they will consume their prey.

Rattlesnakes range from 1-7 feet in length, have a diamond shaped head and a rattle on their tail. The rattle is formed when the snake sheds its skin to allow for growth and the number of buttons on the rattle usually indicates the relative age of the snake (one button for each skin shedding).

Being *ectothermic*, or cold blooded, they can usually be found in places sunning themselves to allow for quicker movement. They are *ovoviviparous* meaning that the female carries the eggs of the young inside her until they hatch, and then has live birth. Rattlesnakes are long lived, ranging from 10-25 years.

Ticks

Ticks are commonly found along trails waiting to attach to a host walking by. They are most active during the summer months.

Ticks are small parasitic insects that may attach to your skin and begin feeding on your blood. They will gorge themselves and after approximately 24-hours, can potentially release harmful bacteria from their bodies back into their host’s blood system.

*Deer ticks* and *Brown Dog ticks* are the most common species and both can carry the bacteria known as *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which can cause Lyme disease, an infection that attacks people in the form of rashes, arthritis, numbness, neurological disorders, or worse. If found early, a doctor can easily remove the tick ensuring to get all parts of the arachnid’s body. If a tick has been attached for a while and a red ring is evident, further testing and treatment may be needed to prevent a serious disease.

Poison oak

Careful trekking in open space and staying on the trail will offer enough distance for you and poison oak to live together.

Poison oak is a native riparian plant species with a kick. If the oils of this plant come into contact with your skin a serious rash can develop. Poison oak is a woody vine that is a member of the *sumac family*. This plant can be found in riparian and chaparral habitats. “Leaves of three, let it be” is the common saying to help remember what to look for. *Urushiol* is the irritating oil present on the plant that causes an allergic reaction. Poison oak is deciduous but the woody vines can still cause a reaction. When the plants leaf out in the spring and are in full bloom in the summer, they are likely to pass along their oils to you.