



County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services
VEGETATION CLEARING FAQ SHEET (1)

QUESTION		ANSWER	APPLICABLE CODE SECTION
A	What is “clearing”?	"CLEARING," as defined in the County Grading Ordinance, is “the removal or destruction of natural vegetation by any means, including brushing and grubbing.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 87.803(5), County Grading Ordinance
B	How much can I clear on my property?	<p>If the land is outside of the existing County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), which covers the southwestern portion of the County, up to 5 acres may be cleared without a permit when associated with an existing dwelling. If the land is within the existing MSCP, residentially zoned land (developed or vacant) up to 5 acres in size that is outside the Pre-Approved Mitigation Area (PAMA) may be cleared without a permit. Residentially zoned land (developed or vacant) up to 2 acres in size that is inside the PAMA may be cleared without a permit. Clearing in excess of these limits is allowed with an approved Administrative Brushing and Clearing Permit from Planning & Development Services (PDS).</p> <p>Please contact the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 565-5981 to determine whether your property is within MSCP and/or the PAMA designation or to obtain information on the Administrative Brushing and Clearing Permit. ^{(2) (3)}</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 87.503, County Grading Ordinance • Section 86.503, County Biological Mitigation Ordinance
C	Regardless to “B” above, can I clear brush around structures on my property for fire protection without a permit?	Yes. You may clear without a permit up to 100 feet from any improvement on your property as defined under Section 68.402 of the County Defensible Space for Fire Protection Ordinance. Depending upon fuel loads and topography, the local fire district may require additional clearing. This additional clearing does not require a permit so long as you have a letter from the local fire district specifying the amount of additional clearing required. ^{(2) (3)}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOU Fire & Wildlife Agencies • Section 86.503(12), County Biological Mitigation Ordinance • Section 68.402, County Defensible Space for Fire Protection Ordinance
D	Can I clear for fire protection within an existing open space easement without a permit?	Yes, in conformance with “C” above. Clearing for anything other than fire is typically prohibited; consult your open space easement language for clearing specifications. ^{(2) (3)}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See response above and consult your open space easement language for clearing specifications.



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E	Can I remove habitat or natural vegetation that was burned in the wildfires and/or reseed/plant within open space areas burned in the wildfires?	Yes, in conformance with A through C above. Wildfires are a natural part of the eco-system and removal of any ash or debris may also remove important seeds or roots that are needed in order for the natural area to restore itself. Natural vegetation is best for erosion control. As such, burnt vegetation not specified in A through C should remain untouched. However, if there is an immediate health-safety risk, removal of the threatening ash or debris or reseeded dangerous slope areas for soil stabilization is permitted. ^{(2) (3)}
F	Can I clear natural habitat for new agricultural land without a permit?	Yes, in conformance with A through E above. Furthermore, clearing in excess of these limits is allowed with an approved Administrative Brushing and Clearing Permit from PDS. ^{(2) (3)} Please contact the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 565-5981 and ask to speak with the Department Agricultural Liaison.
G	Can I grade my site as part of my clearing efforts without a permit?	Only minor grading is allowed without a grading permit. Please review Section 87.206 of the County Grading Ordinance for grading limitations. Grading in excess of these limits is allowed with an approved grading permit. ^{(2) (3)}

Footnotes:

- (1) This document is an informational guidance resource only and does not replace County regulations. Any conflicts or questions relating to the document or County Code should be directed to the PDS Zoning Information Counter at (858) 565-5981.
- (2) Activity including, but not limited to, clearing, grading, grubbing, or excavation resulting in land disturbance of one acre or more may require the property owner to obtain [Construction General Permit](#) coverage from the [State Water Resources Control Board](#) and also may trigger additional requirements for new or redevelopment Priority Development Projects as defined in the [County Watershed Protection Ordinance](#).
- (3) Vegetation clearing in excess of fire district requirements may require permits from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife – (858) 467-4201 -- and the US Fish and Wildlife Service – (760) 431-9440.