The federal government manages 40% of California’s 100,000 million acres for the conservation of natural resources. Western states were settled after the rest of America. Creating federal reserves in the west was easier than in places to the east where cities, farms, and factories were already established.

About half of the federal lands in California are set aside as National Forests. These are mainly mountainous areas where trees thrive. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages other lands in the arid regions east of the Sierra Nevada and the southeastern deserts. The government manages all of these lands for multiple uses that include timber and mineral extraction, water resources, recreation, and protection of plants and animals.

National Parks, National Monuments, National Seashores, National Wildlife Refuges, and the Mojave National Preserve are special places where the scenery, plants, and wildlife are protected from almost all human activities. These natural areas are for the most part unchanged from the time Native Americans first settled them. They are popular locations for camping, hiking, and bird watching. National Recreation Areas are located close to cities and offer people opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities.