

Estero Bluffs

State Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (805) 772-6101. This publication can be made available in alternate formats. Contact interp@parks.ca.gov or call (916) 654-2249.

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Estero Bluffs State Park

1 Mile North of Cayucos on Hwy. 1

Cayucos, CA 93430

Latitude: 35.4608 Longitude: -120.965

(805) 772-6101

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*The rocky shores
and windswept bluffs
of this former dairy
farm offer unsurpassed
ocean views.*



At Estero Bluffs State Park, onshore breezes carry salt spray over secluded beaches. From December through March, visitors stand on the bluffs—a designated whale-watching site—to glimpse gray whales migrating south. Cool fog rules the mornings, especially in summer. About midday, the sun entices visitors to walk the trails, observe the sea- and shorebirds, and study tide pool life. Visitors may hike, kayak, study nature, and enjoy the seaside.

PARK HISTORY

Native California Indians

The ancestors of today's Chumash and Salinan people lived here for at least 10,000 years. They adapted as needed to environmental changes and used the marine and terrestrial resources available to them.

In 1769 Don Gaspar de Portolá led the first California overland expedition between San Diego and today's San Francisco Bay. One of his campsites was near the northern boundary of today's park. Portolá's explorations paved the way for the founding of three nearby missions: San Antonio de Padua (1771), San Luis Obispo de Tolosa (1772), and San Miguel Arcangel (1797).

With the missions came unfamiliar European diseases that decimated the indigenous population. Today, the Chumash and Salinan people are working to revive their native languages and cultural traditions.

The Mission Period and Beyond

Between 1771 and 1833, what is now the park was mission land, used for cattle grazing. In 1833, 12 years after Mexico's independence from Spain, the missions were secularized. Mexico granted 8,893 acres (Rancho San Gerónimo) to Rafael José Serapio Villavicencio (later shortened to Villa) in 1842. Much of the park lies within the grant's boundaries.

Villa's heirs later sold the property to dairyman Abram Muscio. The restored Aermotor windmill near San Gerónimo Creek is a relic of Muscio's dairy days. In 1965 Muscio's beneficiaries sold the land to developers planning to build a resort and multiple residences.

By the 1980s, residents of Cayucos and the surrounding communities had joined



Beach at San Gerónimo Creek

forces to stop this coastal development and preserve the open space. The Trust for Public Lands purchased the property in 2000 and deeded it to the State in March 2002. In order to protect the park's bluffs and its magnificent viewshed, the Trust gave the Cayucos Land Conservancy a perpetual conservation easement that limited activities and facilities (no restrooms or drinking water) in the day-use-only park.

GEOLOGY

The complex geology of the park—part of the “Franciscan Formation”—makes up most of the coast range. Perhaps as old as 140 million years, the Formation dates from the Cretaceous or even the later Jurassic period. This former sea floor initially slid





Coastal scrub on a terrace trail

needlegrass crowd non-native grasses on the terraces. California barley and fescue edge the bluffs.

Coastal Scrub—Coyote bush and California sagebrush join a layer of native plantain, dudleya and California fuschia.

Coastal Sea-bluff Scrub—Along bluff faces and terraces, large stands of scrub seem dwarfed. Steep areas are home to

coastal golden yarrow and saw-toothed goldenbush.

Rocky Outcrops—Outcrops are surrounded by grasses and seasonal wildflowers such as California poppies.

Wetlands—Several seasonal creeks, salt- and freshwater marshes, and emergent wetland areas—prolific with cattails, rushes and sedges—comprise this park's wetlands habitats.

WILDLIFE

Cottontail rabbits, mule deer, coyotes, ground squirrels and striped skunks live in grasslands and coastal scrub. Harbor seals and threatened sea otters use intertidal areas to rest or forage. Migrating whales pass beyond the bluffs December through March.

Grasslands along the bluffs shelter black-bellied slender salamanders, California king snakes, Pacific tree frogs, rattlesnakes, insects and rodents.

Shorebirds, sea birds, song birds, raptors and waterfowl live here, including bushtits, red-tailed hawks, sanderlings, cormorants, pelicans and black oystercatchers.

Sandy habitat shelters threatened western snowy plovers.

Wetlands are home to the threatened California red-legged frog. It dines on various invertebrates, including grasshoppers and water insects such as backswimmers, water-diving beetles, water striders and water fleas.

Above the bluffs at least seven butterfly species and four damselfly and dragonfly species float along on the breeze.



Western snowy plover



California red-legged frog



Red-tailed hawk



Sea otter

beneath the North American Plate; it was later uplifted to the surface. Chert and blueschist appear where the tectonic plates scraped together under heat and pressure as the ocean plate sank beneath the continental plate. The formations visible today were part of this ancient sea floor.

PLANTS

Dunes—The dunes are mostly covered in saltbush and beach bur-sage. In some areas, vegetation from nearby wetland and saltgrass areas overlaps onto the dunes.

Grasslands—Blufftop non-native wild rye and wild oats are the result of past agricultural practices. California sagebrush and sticky monkeyflower grow along bluff edges, south-facing slopes and rocky outcrops.

Native Grasslands—San Luis Obispo Indian paintbrush and native purple

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

This undeveloped park currently has no wheelchair access. However, accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Hours are from 6 a.m. to sunset.
- The park has no restrooms or water.
- Dogs are allowed on leash down coast, south of San Gerónimo Creek.
- Horses and bicycles are not permitted in the park.
- Camping and ground fires are prohibited.
- All natural and cultural park features are protected by law and must not be disturbed in any way.
- Stay on trails to avoid poison oak and ticks that may carry Lyme disease.



Brown pelicans; view of Morro Rock

