California State Parks
Quick Facts

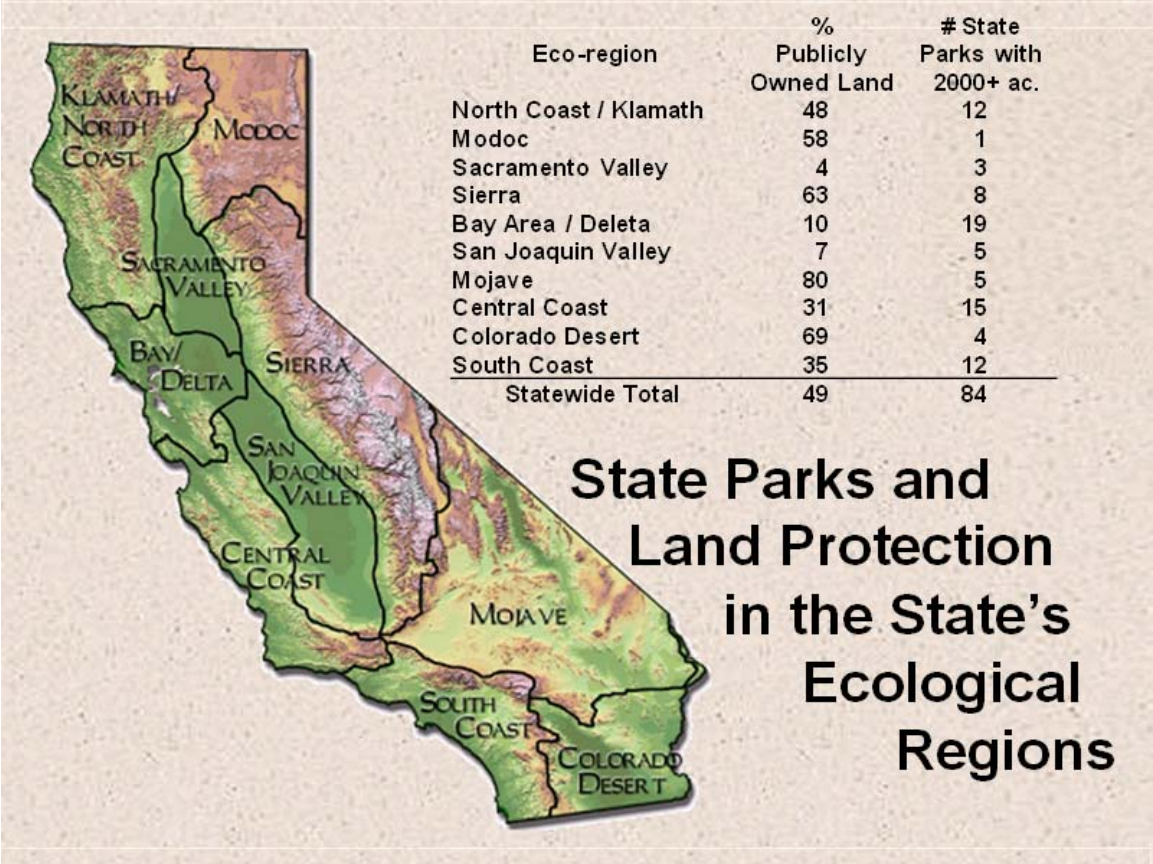
Last updated 10/4/2005

The Natural Resources of California State Parks

The California State Park System supports the most diverse assemblage of natural resource values of any land management agency in California. These values include underwater areas, beaches, dunes, marshes, lakes, streams, rivers, deserts, forests, meadows, and grasslands. Of the 1.5 million acres in the State Park System (SPS), 94% are managed specifically for natural resource values.

Natural Resource Facts

- State Park System Diversity. The State Park System has major units within all of the state's ecoregions and geomorphic provinces. The State Park System is the only land management system in California with large reserves in all 10 ecological regions.



Eco-region	% Publicly Owned Land	# State Parks with 2000+ ac.
North Coast / Klamath	48	12
Modoc	58	1
Sacramento Valley	4	3
Sierra	63	8
Bay Area / Deleta	10	19
San Joaquin Valley	7	5
Mojave	80	5
Central Coast	31	15
Colorado Desert	69	4
South Coast	35	12
Statewide Total	49	84

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- Ecological Diversity. The State Park System is the most ecologically diverse system in California; of all California's 202 major habitat types (alliance level), 65% exist within the SPS, e.g. sycamore alluvial woodlands, blue oak savanna, and riversidean sage scrub.
- Habitat Preservation. Most of the State Park System is managed for habitat preservation. The State Park System has 278 units and nearly 1.5 million acres. 82% of the acreage is classified State Park (84 units) or State Reserve (17 units) where habitat preservation is the highest objective. For the most part, these are large reserves, averaging 11,200 acres (6,000 acres if Anza Borrego Desert State Park is excluded), with 94% in native habitat, and 6% of habitat converted for facilities.
- Rare Habitat Types. The State Park System protects examples of almost 50% (46 types of 94) of rare habitat types in California. Examples include coastal prairie, valley oak woodland, and Mendocino pygmy cypress forest.
- Watchable Wildlife. The State Park System manages 28% of California's 200 Watchable Wildlife locations, more than any other land/habitat management agency in California.
- Park Research. On the average 77 new natural resource *research* projects, primarily related to wildlife habitat, are initiated each year in the State Park System. The University of California conducts 45% of these projects while another 50% is conducted by the California State University System.
- International Recognition. Seventeen (17) State Park System units have national or inter-national recognition such as World Heritage Site, National Natural Landmark or Biosphere Reserve.
- Marine Parks. The State Park System has 16 marine parks and reserves (15,405 acres), or nearly 28% of the total 95 marine areas managed by the state of California.
- Coastal Dunes. Of all of California's habitat types, coastal dunes are the most impacted. There are an estimated 28,523 acres of remaining coastal sand dunes in this state, and 9,614 acres (33.7%) are in the State Park System.
- Wilderness. There are 464,825 acres of designated State Wilderness within the State Park System, making up 99.7% of the entire California Wilderness System.

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- Coastal Wetlands. The State Park System has 12 of the 41 most significant Southern California Wetlands.
- Ancient Redwood Forests. California State Parks manages 49,200 acres of old growth coast redwood forest, or 58% of what remains anywhere. Rockefeller Forest, in Humboldt Redwoods State Park, is the largest remaining contiguous old-growth coast redwood forest in the world (17,000 acres).
- Listed Species. The State Park System has more rare, threatened and endangered species (162), than any other system in California with the exception of the National Forests. However, the National Forests within California are 14 times larger in area than the State Park System. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of all state and federal listed species are found in the SPS.
- Invasive Non-Native Plants. The ten most invasive non-native plant species requiring eradication in order of most to least effort in the State Park System are, European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*), arundo or giant reed (*Arundo donax*), ice plant (*Carpobrotus sp*.), yellow star thistle (*Centavrea solstitialis*), pampas grass, or jubata grass (*Cordaderia jubata*), Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Cape ivy or German ivy (*Delairea odorata*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus spp.*), French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), and tamarisk or salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*).
- San Andreas Fault. Over 93 miles (14.1%) of the 657 mile-long San Andreas Fault Zone within California passes through 18 units of the State Park System. The Salton Trough, a part of the San Andreas Fault Zone, is the largest continental rift on the North American Continent and includes Salton Sea State Recreation Area.
- Oldest Lake. Mono Lake (Mono Lake Tufa Reserve) is thought to be the oldest Lake on the North American Continent. As it has no outlet, evaporation of freshwater has left the salts and minerals behind so that the lake is now about 2 1/2 times as salty, and 80 times as alkaline, as the ocean.