

California's State Parks preserve nature and history. Come join us!

Rediscover California State Parks In the Great Central Valley

It's time to turn the spotlight on California's great Central Valley, home to the richest agricultural area in the world and year-round host to an amazing variety of activities, educational opportunities and just plain fun in California's State Parks, said State Park Director Ruth Coleman.

Oak woodlands, a Gold Rush-era town, giant sequoias, the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans, a herd of tule elk, and a Native American ceremonial house, are just a few of the features found in State Parks in the Central Valley.

But, there's more. Lots more.

The Valley stretches 450 miles from Redding in the north to the Tehachapi Mountains to the south in California's heartland and is home to 32 State Park units totaling nearly 95,000 acres. These parks not only preserve the state's vast natural legacy, but also its significant historical legacy as well.

Because of its importance, Coleman has launched what she described as the Department's Central Valley Vision project to identify current, near-term and future opportunities for State Parks in this important region of the state.

The Central Valley's 32 State Park units, from the north to the south, include:

William B. Ide Adobe State Historic Park, Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area, Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park, Bidwell Mansion SHP, Lake Oroville SRA, Clay Pit State Vehicular Recreation Area, Colusa-Sacramento River SRA, Sutter Buttes, Woodland Opera House SHP, Folsom Lake SRA, Folsom Powerhouse SHP, State Capitol Museum, Sutter's Fort SHP/State Indian Museum, Governor's Mansion SHP.

Old Sacramento SHP/Railroad Museum, Leland Stanford Mansion SHP, Prairie City SVRA, Stone Lake, Delta Meadows River Park, Brannan Island SRA, Franks Tract SRA, Bethany Reservoir SRA, Caswell Memorial SRA, San Luis Reservoir SRA, Pacheco State Park, George J. Hatfield SRA, Great Valley

Grasslands State Park, McConnell SRA, Turlock Lake SRA, Millerton Lake SRA, Colonel Allensworth SHP and Tule Elk State Reserve.

Here's a sample of what some of the State Parks in California's great Central Valley have to offer. Come visit and see for yourself.

Bethany Reservoir State Recreation Area, located in the northernmost part of the San Joaquin Valley, is known for water-oriented recreation, especially fishing and windsurfing. It also features a bike trail along the California Aqueduct Bikeway, and many windmills. It is also the northern terminus of the California Aqueduct and is located beneath the windmills of the Altamont Pass. The recreation area is northeast of Livermore, seven miles off Interstate 580 at the Grant Line Road exit.

The park phone number is (209) 599-3810.

Calaveras Big Trees State Park, northeast of Stockton and four miles northeast of Arnold on Highway 4, preserves two groves of giant sequoias. Over the years, other parcels of mixed conifer forests have been added to the park to bring the total area to approximately 6,500 acres. Calaveras became a State Park in 1931 and has been a major tourist attraction ever since.

In addition to the popular North Grove, the park includes the primitive South Grove, featuring a five mile hiking trip through a spectacular grove of giant sequoias. Other attractions in the park include the Stanislaus River, Beaver Creek, the Lava Bluff Trail and Bradley Trail.

The park houses two main campgrounds with a total of 129 family campsites, two group campsites, six picnic areas and hundreds of miles of established trails. The number for camping reservations is 800-444-PARK. On-line reservations are also available at www.parks.ca.gov.

Calaveras Big Trees is open year-round, sunrise to sunset. Activities include cross-country skiing, evening ranger talks, numerous interpretive programs, environmental educational programs, junior ranger programs, hiking, mountain biking and bird watching.



The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.

The park phone number is (209) 795-2334.

The California State Mining and Mineral Museum, located at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds 1.8 miles south of Mariposa on Highway 49,

houses a collection that was started in 1880 in San Francisco. It is the official California State Mineral Collection, with more than 13,000 minerals, historic artifacts, meteorites, rocks and gems, including the popular crystalline gold Fricot Nugget, weighing 201 ounces - the largest one surviving from the Gold Rush. The museum also contains a working scale model of a stamp mill, demonstrating the process of gold extraction.

The museum features the Mining Tunnel that allows visitors to see and experience what a miner's job was like during the later part of the Gold Rush.

Educators can call the museum for information on curriculum based educational programs for Grades 1 - 12 and college level.

The park phone number is (209) 742-7625.

Caswell Memorial State Park is located along the Stanislaus River in Ripon. The park protects one of California's finest examples of mature oak riparian (streamside) forest. Long ago, Yokut Native Americans lived along the river and collected acorns among the ancient groves. In the early 1800s, Spanish explorers and American fur trappers were in the area. Riparian forests were once a prominent feature in the Central Valley, now they are one of the rarest habitats in the state.

In 1915, Thomas Caswell purchased the land with the idea that the old oak groves should be preserved. In that spirit, Caswell's children and grandchildren donated 134 acres along the river to California State Parks. More land was purchased for a campground and the park opened to the public in 1958. The park hosts several festivals and educational activities each year. Camping and picnicking are available year-round. Camping reservations are recommended during the spring and summer.

Caswell Memorial State Park is home to several rare animal and plant species, including: the riparian brush rabbit, nesting Swainson's hawks, fall-run Chinook salmon, riparian woodrat, and *Orobanche vallicola*. California Audubon lists Caswell Memorial State Park among the state's 200 most important bird areas. A wide variety of song birds may be viewed while hiking along the nearly four miles of trails that meander through the oak groves.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site. 

The park phone number is (209) 599-3810.

Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park is located on Highway 43 twenty miles north of Wasco. Allensworth is the only town in California to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans.

In 1908 Colonel Allen Allensworth and several others founded this town dedicated to improving the economic and social status of African Americans. Initially the town prospered with abundant water, rich farm land, and rail traffic. Committed to the education of its citizens, the town established the first branch of the Tulare County Free Library. Water became an issue as increased use of water in the area led to a drop in the water table. Much of the rail traffic that originated west of Allensworth dissolved with the completion of a new western rail spur. The Colonel's death in 1914, and regional and world issues such as the outbreak of war in 1918, deeply impacted the town.

Today, Allensworth survives as a California State Historic Park. In addition to the historic 1915 schoolhouse, many of the structures have been reconstructed. The visitor can attend one of the many special events held at the park throughout the year or spend some time roaming about during non-event periods in relative quiet. Access to the interiors of the historic buildings and the visitor center can be assured by contacting the park to arrange for a tour.

Fifteen campsites just outside of the historic core are available through reservation or on a space available basis. Reservations are not accepted during event weekends. The campground accommodates RV's or tents. Each site has a table and nearby flush toilets and showers. Facilities for the disabled are available.

The park phone number is (661) 849-3433.

Columbia State Historic Park, three miles north of Sonora, off Highway 49, preserves the town's old Gold Rush-era business district, with shops, restaurants and two hotels.

Visitors have the chance to go back in time to the 1850s, imagining life when gold miners rubbed shoulders with businessmen and the other residents in Columbia. Visitors can watch proprietors in period clothing conduct business in the style of yesterday, ride a 100 year-old stagecoach, hire a "fine steed" for a horseback ride through the "diggings," pan for gold, or tour an active gold mine.

The park phone number is (209) 588-9128.

Fort Tejon State Historic Park, 70 miles northwest of Los Angeles near the top of Grapevine Canyon off Interstate 5, was established by the U.S. Army in 1854. The post was built to protect and control Native Americans who were living on the Sebastian Indian Reservation, and to protect both the Indians and

white settlers from raids by the Paiutes, Chemeheui, Mojave, and other Indian groups of the desert regions to the southeast. The fort was abandoned on September 11, 1864. It is one of the significant remaining links to the early American occupation period of California history.

The park has restored adobes from the original fort and the park's museum features exhibits on army life and local history. The park also has a number of beautiful 400 year-old valley oak trees.

The park phone number is (661) 248-6692.

George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area, 28 miles west of Merced, is surrounded by the Merced River. Set in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, the park is popular for swimming, fishing, and picnicking.

Once the home of Native Americans, the park has many trees and is home to various wildlife, especially birds.

The park has 21 family campsites and one large group site for tents or RVs up to 32 feet long. Picnic tables, fire grills, and piped water are provided. Flush toilets are available. Supplies can be obtained in Newman, five miles away. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 632-1852.

Great Valley Grasslands State Park, five miles east of Gustine on Highway 140, has 2,826 acres preserving one of few intact examples of native grasslands on the floor of the Central Valley. The park is located on the San Joaquin River.

The park is part of the larger Grasslands Ecological Area (GEA), an 180,000-acre complex of federal, state and private lands all managed for wildlife values. The GEA represents the largest remaining contiguous block of wetlands in California.

Several rare and endangered plant and animal species inhabit the park, including alkali sacaton, a native bunch grass, and the Delta button celery (*Erynum racemosum*) a state listed endangered species found in the flood plain of the San Joaquin River. Biologists have also reported the California Tiger Salamander and endangered vernal pool fairy shrimp and tadpole shrimp. Springtime wildflower displays, fishing and wildlife watching attract visitors to this undeveloped park, which also encompasses the former Fremont Ford State Recreation Area.



The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.

The park phone number is (209) 394-7755 or (209) 826-1197.

Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, eight miles east of Jackson and northeast of Stockton in the lower foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, is the site of the Northern Miwok Indian "grinding rock" where acorns were ground into a fine meal of flour, a staple in the Native American's diet. The limestone rock in the park is covered with 363 petroglyphs, or rock carvings.

A Miwok village has been reconstructed and is used for various celebrations and ceremonies by a number of Native American communities. Also at the site is a round house, a bark conical dwelling and an Indian football field. The park's Chawse Regional Indian Museum has interpretive displays as well as demonstrations of traditional Miwok crafts.

Trails in the park offer visitors a chance to explore the meadows and surrounding forest as well as see the wildlife in the area. The park is a Watchable Wildlife Area.



There are 23 sites for tents or RVs, some up to 27 feet long. Picnic tables, fire grills, and piped water are provided. Flush toilets and coin-operated hot showers are available. The museum and a number of other facilities are wheelchair accessible. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 296-7488.

McConnell State Recreation Area, five miles southeast of Delhi on Highway 99 and south of Turlock, is on the banks of the Merced River. Fishing is popular for catfish, black bass and perch. There are more than 70 acres of picnic, camping and play areas.

Trees in the park attract migrant songbirds during migration and, in the winter, sparrows, thrushes and woodpeckers.

There are 21 sites for tents or RVs up to 24 feet long and two group sites for tents only. Piped water, fire grills, and picnic tables are provided. Flush toilets and hot showers are available. Supplies can be obtained in Delhi, three miles away. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 394-7755 or (209) 826-1197.

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, 20 miles northeast of Fresno via Highway 41 and Highway 145, has more than 40 miles of shore land for water

sports, offering visitors swimming, fishing, and boating. The park contains the original Millerton County Courthouse, built in 1867.

Hills surrounding the lake provide opportunities for hiking and observing wildlife, such as ground squirrels, cottontails, mule deer, badgers and bald and golden eagles. (During winter, the park has special boat tours to view the bald eagles.)

The lake was created by construction of the Friant Dam across the San Joaquin River in 1944.

The park's camping facilities include boat camping.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



The park phone number is (559) 822-2332.

Pacheco State Park is located along the scenic and historic Pacheco Pass, on the west side of the San Luis Reservoir, east of Hollister. The park was the dream of Paula Fatjo, a direct descendant of Francisco Pacheco, for whom the Pacheco Pass is named. Paula Fatjo wanted her ranch, El Rancho San Luis Gonzaga, to be kept intact for the enjoyment of people who shared her love of horses and the beauty of the unspoiled land itself, so she donated the parklands to the state.

The park has beautiful displays of spring wildflowers, scenic vistas, and excellent hiking, mountain biking, and horse trails. The 28 miles of designated trails offers several loop options to give visitors the choice of a hike or ride from one to 20 miles or more.

Home to tule elk, the park also has deer, bobcat, coyote, fox, hawks, eagles and a variety of smaller animals. Among the historic features of the park is an old line shack used by Henry Miller's cattle company in the late 1800s, and part of the old Butterfield stage line route.

The park phone number is (209) 826-6283 or (209) 826-1197.

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, in the hills of the western San Joaquin Valley near historic Pacheco Pass, features boating, board sailing, camping, picnicking and, especially, fishing in the park's three lakes.

The reservoir was constructed as a storage reservoir for the federal Central Valley Project and the California State Water Project to store runoff water from the Delta that would otherwise flow into the ocean. The water arrives through the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal, and is pumped from the O'Neil Forebay into the main reservoir during the winter and spring. The

Los Banos Creek Reservoir was built to prevent storm runoff from flooding the canals.

The visitor center at the Romero Overlook has audio-visual and printed information on the reservoirs and water projects. Telescopes are also available.

Before the dams and canals were built, the land was the home of the Northern Valley Yokuts, Native Americans who harvested seeds, acorns, and the roots of the tules that grew in the marshes of the sluggish San Joaquin River. There were also fish, geese, and ducks for food, as well as huge herds of pronghorn antelope and tule elk on the plains. With the coming of the Spanish, this way of life disappeared. Many of the valley people were taken to missions around 1805, and an epidemic, possibly of malaria, decimated the human population of this area in 1833. In the 1850s, the survivors were killed or driven off by Euroamerican settlers.

Pacheco Pass was named for Francisco Pacheco, who settled here in the 1840s. The pass was used by Native Americans, Spanish soldiers and missionaries, Mexican ranchers, and gold miners, as well as more recent travelers. In 1856, Andrew Firebaugh improved the pass and made it a toll road, with a toll house two miles west of the summit. He had hardly finished when the Butterfield-Overland stages began using the road as part of their route from San Francisco to Missouri.

The first water works in the area were constructed in 1871, when farmers built a canal from Mendota Dam to Los Banos Creek to irrigate their wheat crops. Many canals were added over the years, until they totaled 180 miles in length. Ground was broken in 1962 for the San Luis Project, which created the current reservoirs.

The park phone number is (209) 826-1196.

Tule Elk State Reserve, north of Gorman, south of Buttonwillow, west of Interstate 5 via Stockdale Highway, protects a herd of tule elk, once in danger of extinction. Elk from the reserve have been successfully transplanted to other areas in California where free-roaming herds of tule elk can be found today.

In the 1880s, vast herds of tule elk were greatly reduced in number by hunting and the loss of habitat. Cattleman Henry Miller began a 50-year effort to save them in 1874. At that time, few elk remained. In 1932, the herd was given permanent protection in a 950-acre property, now known as Tule Elk State Reserve.

The elk are most active from late summer through early autumn. Visitors are encouraged to bring binoculars for better viewing.

The park has picnic areas and interpretive exhibits.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



The park phone number is (661) 764-6881.

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area, 25 miles east of Modesto on the south side of the Tuolumne River, is in the rolling foothills of eastern Stanislaus County.

Open all year, the park offers camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming, boating, and water skiing. Visitors can also see the variety of native plant life in the park.

The park has 66 sites for tents or RVs up to 27 feet long. Piped water, fire grills, and picnic tables are provided. Flush toilets, showers, and a boat ramp are available. The boat dock is accessible, depending on water levels, for those who can self-transfer to boats. Leashed pets are permitted.

For more information, call (209) 874-2008 or (209) 874-2056.

Wassama Round House State Historic Park, five miles northwest of Oakhurst and 55 miles north of Fresno, is used by local Native Americans as a ceremonial meeting place.

The park features special events and tours. Gathering Day, held the second Saturday in July, includes demonstrations of dancing, crafts and basket weaving.

The park phone number is (209) 742-7625.

For California State Parks camping information, call ReserveAmerica at (800) 444-7275 or go online to www.parks.ca.gov to visit California State Parks.