

Underwater California State Parks

There's a little-known part of the California State Park System that's completely under water.

It's the underwater parks program.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation's underwater parks program was established in 1968 to preserve the best and most unique representative examples of California's natural underwater ecosystems found in coastal and inland waters. The program also aims to provide a variety of underwater recreational opportunities, especially in areas near metropolitan centers.

Working with the State Lands Commission and the Department of Fish and Game, the department and its Advisory Board on Underwater Parks and Reserves identify potential areas for underwater parks and determine how they should be managed for both preservation and recreation. Twenty units are currently in operation and many more are in the planning stages.

The underwater parks offer scenic diving and related activities, such as underwater photography and spear fishing.

The parks are designed for divers and non-divers, with interpretation for both in visitor centers, kiosks and exhibit boards.

In California, divers can dive anyplace you have legal access to the water. California State Underwater Parks provide safe, convenient access for divers, often with many facilities, including fresh water washdown showers and restrooms.

State Park underwater dive areas are well studied and detailed. Divers are often able to enter a quiet cove with no large, breaking waves. The areas are clearly marked with information

about the unit's scenic resources and any necessary precautions that might be needed. Also, in some areas, such as Point Lobos and Salt Point, there are department dive teams available to assist with any problems that might be encountered.

The parks can provide a threshold experience to divers. For new divers, the parks can provide information on what they can expect out there when they dive, making the experience less formidable

As for the future of the underwater park program, a Ranger said, "Watch us grow." The department has more than 60 proposals in the marine and estuarine environments.

California State Underwater Parks include:

* **Cardiff State Beach** is located north of San Diego, one mile south of Cardiff on Old Highway 101. Phone: (760) 753-5091.

* **Crystal Cove State Park** is located between Corona del Mar and Laguna Beach on Highway One. Phone: (949) 494-3539 or (949) 492-0802. Visitors can watch State Park divers interpreting marine ecosystems with live two-way communication and view divers by live video feed.

* **D.L. Bliss State Park** is located 17 miles south of Tahoe City on Highway 89. Phone: (530) 525-7277 or (530) 525-7232.

* **Doheny State Beach** is near the intersection of I-5 and Highway One at the entrance of Dana Point Harbor. Phone: (949) 496-6171 or (949) 492-0802.

* **Emerald Bay State Park** is located 22 miles south of Tahoe City on Highway 89. Phone: (530) 541-3030 or (530) 525-7277.

* **Fort Ross State Historic Park** is located 12 miles north of Jenner on Highway One. Phone: (707) 847-3286 or (707) 865-2391.

* **Julia Pfeiffer Burns SP** (1,680-acre underwater reserve) is located 37 miles south of Carmel on Highway One. Phone: (831) 667-2315. Diving is restricted due to dangerous conditions

* **Lake Perris State Recreation Area** is located 11 miles southeast of Riverside. (From Highway 60, take Moreno Beach Drive offramp; from I-215 take Ramona Expressway offramp.)

Phone: (909) 940-5608.

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* **MacKerricher State Park** is located three miles north of Fort Bragg on Highway One.

Phone: (707) 964-9112 or (707) 937-5804.

* **Manchester State Park** (Arena Rock Marine National Preserve) is located seven miles north of Point Arena on Highway One. Phone: (707) 937-5804.

* **Point Lobos State Reserve** (the first underwater reserve in the nation) is located three miles south of Carmel on Highway One. Phone: (831) 624-4909.

* **Russian Gulch State Park** is located two miles north of Mendocino on Highway One. Phone: (707) 937-4296 or (707) 937-5804.

* **Salt Point State Park** is located 25 miles north of Jenner on Highway One. Volunteers have built - and rebuilt - an access stairway for divers at this park. Phone: (707) 847-3221 or (707) 865-2391.

* **San Elijo State Beach** is located on old Highway 101 in Cardiff. Phone: (760) 753-5355 or (760) 753-5091.

* **Van Damme State Park** is located three miles south of Mendocino. Phone: (707) 937-5804.

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