

# Sonoma Coast 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 **(707) 875-3483**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### **CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**

**P.O. Box 942896**

**Sacramento, CA 94296-0001**

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

### **Sonoma Coast State Park**

**3095 Highway 1**

**Bodega Bay, CA 94923**

**(707) 875-3483 or (707) 865-2391**

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*Sixteen miles of  
awe-inspiring shoreline  
offer myriad opportunities  
to create unforgettable  
memories—stroll the  
beach, fish, sunbathe, or  
unpack a family picnic.*



**I**magine broad, sandy beaches, secluded coves, rugged headlands, natural arches, a craggy coastline with fertile tide pools, and offshore reefs—this is Sonoma Coast State Park, one of California’s most scenic attractions. A series of beaches separated by rocky bluffs, Sonoma Coast has 16 miles of some of the most breathtaking scenery in the world.

The weather here is often a chilly combination of wind and fog. During the summer months, the morning fog usually burns off to create pleasant, sunny afternoons. Even during the summer, however, visitors are wise to prepare for the possibility of wet, cold, and windy North coast weather.

### **NATIVE AMERICANS**

The dominant indigenous groups in this area were the Pomo and Coast Miwok, whose presence dates back about 3,000 years. Pomo territory once encompassed much of today’s Mendocino, Lake, and Sonoma counties. Farther south, the Coast Miwok occupied part of Sonoma County and what

is now Marin County. These groups built seasonal villages of redwood bark houses along rivers and streams and near today’s Bodega Bay. Both groups were accomplished basket makers. The Russian and Aleutian fur trappers who arrived in the area in the early 1800s may have been the Pomo and Miwok people’s first contact with non-native people.

The Pomo and the Miwok were among several Native Californian groups who actively resisted the drastic changes brought by the fur trappers, Spanish missionaries, and hordes of gold seekers. However, within a generation or two, direct conflict and exposure to European diseases nearly decimated the Pomo and Miwok. Today their descendants still occupy parts of their ancestral lands, keeping alive the old ways and passing them on to the next generation.

### **PLANT COMMUNITIES**

The bluffs, slopes, and dunes that frame the many beaches support a hardy ground cover of native shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers. In the spring, these areas display yellow and blue lupine, sea pink, Indian paintbrush,

western wallflower, verbena, and dozens of other species of native wildflowers.

In 1951 a program was begun to stabilize the drifting sand and keep it from filling Bodega Bay. The dunes between the bay and Salmon Creek were planted with specialized grasses, including European beach grass, a species used to protect dikes in the Netherlands. This species is now considered invasive, so California State Parks staff and volunteers are removing the beach grass where possible.

### **WILDLIFE**

Many types of animals make their homes in this lush coastal environment. A lucky visitor might catch a glimpse of raccoons, rabbits, black-tailed deer, skunks, squirrels, or—on rare occasions—elusive gray foxes or badgers. The Sonoma Coast is also rich in bird life, with some 300 identified species. The many shore birds and other waterfowl in the area include willets, godwits, gulls, cormorants, pelicans, coots, and many species of ducks. Among thriving land birds are quails, ravens, wrens, hawks, owls, and swallows.



**Whales**—From December through April, volunteers assist visitors at Bodega Head in viewing the annual gray whale migration from Alaska to Baja California and back up the coast.

**Seals**—The Sonoma Coast, especially the mouth of the Russian River, is home to



*Harbor seals*

hundreds of harbor seals. From March through June, seal pups are born unable to swim and are defenseless against predators when left alone. Solitary pups have neither been abandoned nor are they ill—their mothers are feeding offshore. People who approach the pregnant females and newborn pups are viewed as a serious threat. The seemingly tame seals frighten easily, and—like all wild animals—can inflict severe bites. Please do not touch seals or pups; stay at least 300 feet from harbor seal colonies.

**Tide pool creatures**—Please do not disturb the life in the tide pools. Even the simple act of turning over a rock and exposing the invertebrates to the sun or air can destroy them. These delicate animals usually die after being removed from their habitat.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Fishing**—The ocean, bay, and river frontage of the Sonoma County coast are an angler's paradise. Sport fishing species include

rockfish, perch, salmon, steelhead, and smelt, as well as mussels and cockles. A valid California sport fishing license is required. State law protects all species; consult the latest regulations at [www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov) for information on licensing, species, season, size, and bag limit. Bodega Head and the mouth of the Russian River are Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). See <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs> for details.

**Picnicking**—At Bodega Head, Bodega Dunes, Rock Point, Duncan's Landing, Wright's Beach, and Goat Rock Beach, picnic tables and wide stretches of sandy beach entice visitors to stop and watch the surf pound against the rugged coastline. Most day-use areas have restroom facilities nearby.

**Camping**—Wright's Beach Campground has more than 25 developed sites near the beach. No shower facilities are available. At Bodega Dunes Campground, about 100 developed sites have restrooms, a campfire center, hot pay showers, and an RV sanitation station. For reservations, call (800) 444-7275 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

**Environmental Camping**—Pomo Canyon and Willow Creek environmental campgrounds are subject to seasonal closures. Call (707) 875-3483 for availability of these first-come, first-served sites. Willow Creek Campground is ½ mile east of Highway 1 on Willow Creek Road. Pomo Canyon Campground is two miles farther along Willow Creek Road.

**Riding and Hiking**—Equestrians and hikers can access the park's five-mile trail system through the Bodega Dunes, via Bay Flat Road. Horses are allowed onto Salmon Creek Beach, but they are not allowed north of the Bodega Dunes day-use area. The Kortum Trail begins at Wright's Beach and travels north to Blind Beach. The Pomo Canyon Trail from the Shell Beach parking lot winds over the hill 3½ miles to the Pomo Canyon Campground.

Upper Willow Creek access is limited to current permit holders; no new permits are being issued.

**Jenner Visitor Center**—Learn about the natural and cultural history of the Jenner area while enjoying a spectacular view of the



*Goat Rock*

Russian River. This volunteer-staffed facility is open only on weekends through the summer months.

### **SURF SAFETY**

The beaches along the Sonoma Coast are not recommended for swimming or wading. The very features that make this area such a spectacular place to look at and enjoy can be lethal to those caught unaware along the shoreline.

Large surf, cold water temperatures, backwash, sudden drop-offs, pounding shorebreak, and dangerous rip currents can turn what seem like safe activities—such as playing near the surf line, wading, or climbing on rock outcroppings—deadly.

Lifeguard service is limited along the Sonoma Coast. Check with park staff about the ocean conditions. Please be aware that conditions change quickly along the coast.

**Ocean Waves**—Waves can be unpredictable. Large waves have caused drownings over the years; waves can catch those close to the shoreline by surprise, washing them into the cold, turbulent water. Most victims were climbing on rocks and cliffs, playing in or near the surf, or shore fishing.

**Rip Currents**—These powerful, channeled water currents flow away from shore. They typically extend from the shoreline, through the surf zone, and past the line of breaking waves. Rip currents can occur at any beach with breaking waves.

If you are caught in the seaward rush of a rip current, do not panic or attempt to swim directly to the shore against the strong current. Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the rip current; then, swim to shore at an angle away from the rip current.

The rip current usually dissipates just beyond the surf line. At this point, you may swim around the current and back to shore.

In an emergency, dial 911. Remain calm. Have someone keep an eye on the swimmer in trouble. Give your location and stay on the line with the dispatcher. Do not attempt a water rescue yourself; wait for trained professionals.

### **ACCESSIBLE FEATURES**

- Four campsites at Bodega Dunes are accessible. Willow Creek has two accessible campsites. Pomo Canyon has one accessible campsite on hard-packed dirt with parking 200 feet away.
- Restrooms at the campgrounds and beach areas are accessible.
- Bodega Dunes has accessible coin-operated showers.
- Wind-blown sand may impede access along the beach and dunes.
- Beach wheelchairs are available. To reserve in advance, call (707) 875-3483.
- Wright's Beach, Bodega Dunes day-use area, and the picnic area near Vista Trail have accessible picnic sites.
- The Vista Trail is a .7-mile accessible asphalt trail overlooking coastal bluffs.
- Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

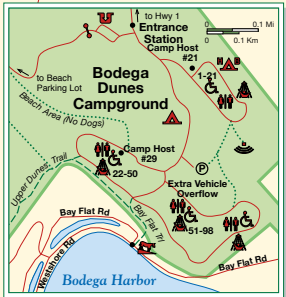
### **PLEASE REMEMBER**

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed nor removed.
- The shale formations of bluffs and rocks are unstable and unsafe for climbing. Stay on trails and heed fences and warning signs.
- For wildlife protection, dogs must always be leashed. Except for service animals, dogs are not allowed on any trails or beaches or in environmental campgrounds. Wildlife will avoid places where domestic animals are kept.
- Ground fires are permitted only in California State Parks fire rings. Beach fires are prohibited.
- Wood gathering is not permitted. Firewood may be purchased at Bodega Dunes or Wright's Beach.
- Drinking water is available only at Bodega Dunes and Wright's Beach campgrounds.
- Vehicles may not be driven into the environmental campsites. Camping in a recreational vehicle in the parking area is not permitted.
- Swimming or wading in the ocean is not recommended.
- Keep your site clean. When you leave, it should look as though no one had ever been there.
- Park Headquarters is located one mile north of Bodega Dunes campground on Highway 1.



*Great egret*

# Sonoma Coast State Park



**TRAIL MILEAGE**

- Goat Rock to Shell Beach ..... 2.5 mi
- Shell Beach to Wright's Beach ..... 1.25 mi
- Shell Beach - Pomo Canyon Trail ... 3.5 mi
- Red Hill Trail Loop..... 1.25 mi

Access to Upper Willow Creek limited to current permit holders only; no new permits are being issued at this time.

- NEARBY STATE PARKS**
- Armstrong Redwoods SNR and Austin Creek SRA  
17000 Armstrong Woods Road  
Guerneville 95466 (707) 869-2015
  - Fort Ross State Historic Park  
19005 Highway 1, Jenner 95450  
(707) 847-3286 / 847-4777 Educ.

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For more information contact:  
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods  
P.O. Box 2 • Duncan's Mills, CA 95430  
(707) 869-9177  
[www.stewardsofthecoastandredwoods.org](http://www.stewardsofthecoastandredwoods.org)

- Legend**
- Major Road
  - Paved Road
  - Unpaved Road
  - Trail: Accessible
  - Trail: Hike
  - Trail: Hike & Horse
  - Access by Permit Only
  - State Marine Conservation Area
  - State Marine Reserve
  - State Marine Recreational Management Area
  - Accessible Feature
  - Boat Launch
  - Campfire Center
  - Campground
  - Campground: Environmental
  - Campground: Hike/Bike
  - Campsites
  - Horse Staging Area
  - Locked Gate
  - Marina
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Ranger Station
  - Restrooms
  - RV Sanitation Station
  - Showers
  - Viewpoint

