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.

One hundred years ago, Sinkyone Wilderness State Park was an industrial landscape, logged for its natural resources. Today, efforts are underway to restore its wild beauty for generations to come.

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (707) 986-7711. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact interp@parks.ca.gov.

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SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park
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Sinkyone Wilderness State Park is part of a wild and beautiful stretch of shoreline known as “The Lost Coast.” This rugged area, about 36 miles southwest of Garberville, is one of the few places on California’s long coastline that cannot be reached by a state highway or paved road.

Fortunately for those who seek peace and serenity, the remote location of this rocky place has foiled decades of attempts by developers who had hoped to exploit its stunning scenery.

The thick morning fog that develops as the land meets the sea muffles most sounds. As the fog threads its way over high cliffs and settles in among the park’s tall redwoods, only the thunder of the ocean’s rolling surf and the faint barking of sea lions reaches the ear of a silent hiker.

**PARK HISTORY**

**Native People**

The Sinkyone people lived in the area now known as Sinkyone Wilderness State Park for thousands of years before European contact. At the time the Europeans arrived, the Sinkyone population probably numbered as many as 4,000. The boundaries of Sinkyone lands extended east to the main stem of the Eel River and the river’s South Fork, south beyond what is now Leggett, and west to the ocean.

The name *Sinkyone* was assigned by 20th-century ethnographers to classify separate political groups who spoke the same dialect of the Athabascan language family. Each distinct political group maintained its own geographic area and self-identity, but all groups formed a larger economy that delivered goods as far as the Eastern United States.

This area was probably more densely populated by Sinkyones before the European incursion than it is now. Today, many people of Sinkyone descent live throughout the north coast.

Traditional practices passed down through generations of Sinkyone experience created a highly productive environment. Conservation and restoration projects headed by local...
Dollar resurrected the lumber company for a while by use of skillful marketing and partnerships. Despite good management, Mr. Dollar shut the mill down in 1901. In November 1908, the Nelson Lumber Company of New York State acquired the mill for $10 in gold.

The land continued to change hands frequently, with various attempts to revive logging operations. At the end of World War II, the Georgia-Pacific Plywood and Lumber Co. took over. In 1975, the State of California began acquiring local land to preserve as Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. When concerned environmentalists sued to prevent Georgia-Pacific from clear-cutting the remaining forest in 1986, the lumber company sold the property to the Trust for Public Land. The funds necessary to purchase 3,000 acres of trees came from the Save the Redwoods League, the Trust for Public Land,

tribal groups, using time-tested methods, have been instrumental in bringing restorative healing to the landscape.

Early Settlers
In the 1850s, early European settlers claimed land in the area of today’s Shelter Cove. Beginning in the 1860s, settlers occupied the land around what is now called Bear Harbor, where they grazed cattle. Soon the landscape was devoted to cattle and sheep ranches, in addition to farms and orchards.

Until then, the only routes into and out of the area were those used by the native people. By the mid-1860s, lines of pack mules carried a steady supply of local tanoak bark to San Francisco’s tanneries. Before long, the settlers had to build wharfs and chutes to aid in loading waiting ships with lumber, tanoak bark, and other profitable cargoes. In 1872, Robert Anderson built a wire chute at Little Jackass Gulch to slide lumber products to waiting schooners—the preferred method to load lumber products onto ships. He called the gulch “Anderson’s Landing,” later renamed “Northport.”

Lumberyards shipped wood to markets into the early 1900s. Lumber schooners departed regularly from Usal, Anderson’s Landing, Needle Rock, and other local ports. Eventually, roads and railroad tracks were built. No longer dependent on the sea for transportation, people settled further inland.

The Bear Harbor Railroad was built in the early 1890s to haul tanoak from inland forests to Bear Harbor. Plans to extend the line from Bear Harbor to a mill near Piercy were cancelled after a fatal accident and the 1906 earthquake. Railroad remnants may still be seen in the park.

By 1892, the demand for lumber had destroyed thousands of acres of virgin coast redwoods. John A. Wonderly, who had acquired the Usal Lumber Company in 1888, shut it down because of the lack of timber. In 1894 San Franciscan Robert
the State Coastal Conservancy, and other
dedicated donors. These acres were added
to Sinkyone Wilderness State Park in 1986.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology
Sinkyone Wilderness lies near the junction
of three major tectonic plates—the Pacific,
North American, and Gorda plates. The
“Mendocino triple junction” is one of the
most seismically active places in the state.
The park's dramatic, sheer coastal bluffs
are just one landform resulting from fault
movement. At the north end of the park just
south of Whale Gulch, fault-related landforms
include a narrow, incised linear valley with
several sag ponds, which are clear indicators
of fault activity.

The park’s beaches are mostly black sand,
with tiny rock fragments derived from the
local Franciscan bedrock. The sands are
made up of dark, iron-rich mineral grains,
and small cobbles and gravels. Sometimes,
unusual purple and pink sand beaches
appear within the park and then vanish.
Brought about by the “washing” action
of the surf, this event occurs when waves
winnow the heavier sand grains back into
the sea, leaving behind a “frosting” of pink
or purplish garnet sand grains that cover the
underlying black sands.

Animals and Plants
Red, pinto, and flat abalone inhabit the
rocky intertidal waters. Steelhead, Coho, and
Chinook salmon live in tributaries, coastal
drainages, streams, and rivers. California
brown pelicans, rhinoceros auklets, and their
close relatives—tufted puffins—can often
be seen diving for fish.

The park’s small herd of
Roosevelt elk roams the coastal
prairies. Once almost countless,
the elk were nearly hunted out
of existence. Originally relocated
from Prairie Creek
Redwoods State
Park, the elk were
rescued by the actions
of a group of ranchers who
saved the remaining elk and
their habitat.

Among amphibious
species of special
concern, southern torrent
salamanders like cold, wet
places; tailed frogs find
refuge among stands of
Douglas-fir, redwood,
and Sitka spruce.
Adult coastal giant
salamanders can be found in the forests, and
their larval stages are more conspicuous
in streams. Foothill yellow-legged frogs
prefer streams with rocky shores, such as
Usal Creek.

Overhead, raptors—including red-tailed
hawks, Cooper's hawks, sharp-shinned hawks,
golden eagles, northern harriers, peregrine
dragons, spotted owls, and ospreys—descend
from the skies, seeking their prey.

Sinkyone Wilderness has steep slopes
heavily wooded with Douglas-fir forest closer
to the coast. Tanbark oak woodland grows
on the inland slopes. Coastal terraces are
covered with coastal prairie and coastal scrub
vegetation. Some old-growth redwoods along
the Lost Coast Trail survived the logging era.

Climate
Summer temperatures range from 45
to 75 degrees. Summer fog is usually gone by
mid-morning. Rain is most common between
November and May, when the temperatures
range from 35 to 55 degrees.

Climate change affects all living things
within the redwood forest. Experts
fear that the area’s increase in average
temperature and decrease in thick summer
fog and rain will endanger redwoods and the
other plants and creatures that depend on
the redwood environment.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES
The former ranch house of Calvin Cooper
Stewart and his family, built in the 1920s,
now houses the Needle Rock Visitor Center. Needle Rock was once a small settlement and a shipping point for Stewart’s ranch operations. The center also displays interpretive exhibits.

Camping — Wilderness camping is the only type available. Primitive campsites have tables, fire rings, a nearby pit toilet, but no developed water source. Bring your own drinking water.

Usal Beach Campground — The only drive-in campground in the park, the Usal Beach sites are in a meadow area near the beach. Narrow rural roads are often impassable, and RVs or trailers are not advisable.

Needle Rock and Bear Harbor — To use these environmental campgrounds, check in at the Needle Rock Visitor Center.

Trail camps — These first-come, first-served campsites for backpackers are located between Bear Harbor and Usal Beach on the Lost Coast Trail.

Horse Camping — Equestrian camping is permitted at Usal Beach and Wheeler campgrounds.

Group Camping — Groups of nine or more can be accommodated at the Usal Beach horse campground. Call (707) 986-7711 in advance for a Group Use Permit.

Hiking — The 22-mile Lost Coast Trail parallels the coastline, traversing steep mountains and sloping prairies. Views from the trail depend on the thickness of the fog cover, especially during the summer months. The fog-muffled sounds and fragrances produce an aura of great mystery.

Wildlife Watching — The park’s variety of marine, freshwaters and terrestrial habitats support richly diverse wildlife. The offshore rocks, under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, are managed by California State Parks and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Be extremely careful around the majestic Roosevelt elk — they can be especially dangerous. During mating season, massive bulls battle each other for the right to mate. When calves are born, elk cows become fiercely protective. If you want to take elk photos, stay on trails and use a zoom lens; do not try to get close to the elk. These fast-moving animals may be found throughout the park.

Rarely, bears have been seen in the forested areas; more elusive mountain lions roam at dawn and dusk.

Besides the abundance of birdlife and the Roosevelt elk, you may spot various marine species. Watch migrating whales offshore from mid-January to mid-April. Marine mammals such as northern elephant seals, sea lions, or harbor seals may be seen hauling out along the rocky shoreline.

Do not — under any circumstances — approach a marine mammal. Report a distressed marine mammal by calling the North Coast Marine Mammal Center at (707) 465-6265.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES
At this largely undeveloped wilderness park, there are currently no wheelchair-accessible activities; however, accessibility is continually improving. For details or updates, visit http://access.parks.ca.gov.
PLEASE REMEMBER

- All of the park’s natural and cultural resources are protected by state law, and may not be disturbed in any way.
- Hunting and firearms are prohibited anywhere in the park.
- Dogs must be kept on a leash no more than six feet long, under human control at all times. They must be confined to your tent or vehicle at night. Except for service animals, pets are not allowed on trails.
- Do not collect dead or down wood. Purchase firewood at the visitor center for campfires, or bring your own wood.
- Fires are permitted only in facilities provided. Use portable stoves only in designated areas. Fireworks are never permitted in the park.
- Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Noise that may disturb others is not permitted. Generators may be operated only between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.
- Pay in advance for campsite use. No more than 8 people per site. Checkout time is noon.
- Vehicle speed limit is 15 mph.
- Off-road vehicle usage is not allowed.
- Please clean up after yourself and your pets. Store food in airtight containers.
- Stay on trails to avoid ticks. Wear light-colored clothing in order to see them; tuck pant legs into your socks and use repellent. Check for ticks after hiking.
- Dispose of trash properly. Practice the “Pack it in—pack it out” rule.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Humboldt Redwoods State Park
  17119 Avenue of the Giants
  Weott 95571 (707) 946-2263
- Richardson Grove State Park
  1600 U.S. Hwy. 101, #8, Garberville 95542
  (707) 247-3318
- Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area
  1.5 miles north of Leggett on Hwy. 101
  (707) 925-6482

Alder trees line a creek.