Sinkyone Wilderness

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) 986-7711**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.

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Save The Redwoods LEAGUE®

SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park
Briceland Thorn Road
Whitethorn, CA 95589
(707) 986-7711

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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.

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

Bear Harbor

Wharf constructed at Bear Harbor for lumber shipping, 1893

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 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,

Photo courtesy of Julie Martin, Save the Redwoods League

Redwood grove on Lost Coast Trail

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

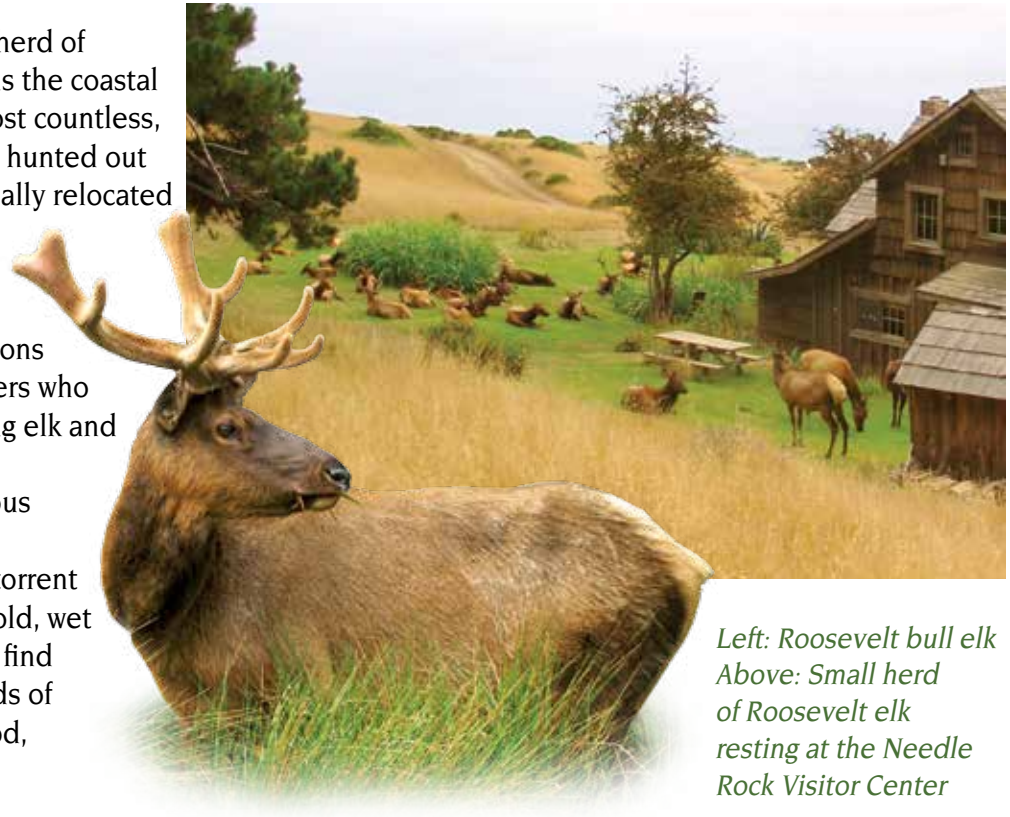
Red, pinto, and flat abalone inhabit the rocky intertidal waters. Steelhead, Coho, and Chinook salmon live in tributaries, coastal drainages, streams, and rivers. California brown pelicans, rhinoceros auklets, and their close relatives—tufted puffins—can often be seen diving for fish.

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 falcons, 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.



Left: Roosevelt bull elk
Above: Small herd of Roosevelt elk resting at the Needle Rock Visitor Center

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,

Needle Rock Visitor Center

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.

Red-tailed hawk

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.

Adult male elephant seal

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.

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park

Legend

- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Trail: Hiking
- Trail: Hike & Horse
- Campground: Environmental
- Campground: Horse
- Campground: Primitive
- Parking
- Trailhead
- Viewpoint

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Whitethorn
to Hwy. 101 (25 miles)
SWSP
KING RANGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
HUMBOLDT COUNTY
MENDOCINO COUNTY
SWSP
SWSP
Usal Road
Road
Thorn
Briceland
Four Corners
Briceland
Usal Road (Closed in Winter)
Indian Creek
Jones Beach Trail
Jones Beach Camp
Streamside Camp
Needle Rock
Needle Rock
Visitor Center
Double Rock
Briceland Thorn Road (Closed in Winter)
Usal Road (Closed in Winter)
SINKYONE WILDERNESS STATE PARK
Orchard Camp
North Rock
Morgan Rock
Railroad Camp
Bear Harbor Camp
Cluster Cone Rocks
Bear Harbor
Pacific Ocean
Duffy's Reef
Seal Rocks
Lost Coast Trail
Jackass Ridge
Jackass Creek
Jackass Pinnacle
Usal Road (Closed in Winter)
Wheeler Camp
Wheeler Trail
Little Jackass Creek
Jackass Cone
Mistake Point
Anderson
Timber Ridge
Big White Rock
Usal Beach
to Hwy. 1

Note: Most roads into the park are seasonal. Due to rough driving conditions, large trailers and RVs are not recommended at any time.

This park receives support in part through a nonprofit group. For more information, contact:
Humboldt Redwoods Interpretive Association
PO Box 276, Weott, CA 95571
(707) 946-2263
humboldtredwoods.org

N

0 1 2 Miles
0 1 2 3 Kilometers

Eureka
Six Rivers National Forest
Shasta-Trinity National Forest
Whiskeytown Shasta-Trinity NRA
Redding
Humboldt Redwoods SP
King Range National Conservation Area
Garberville
Richardson Grove SP
Standish-Hickey SRA
Sinkyone Wilderness SP
Leggett
Red Bluff
Mendocino National Forest
MacKerricher SP
Fort Bragg
Russian Gulch SP
Van Damme SP
Willits
Willows
Ukiah
Hendy Woods SP
Clear Lake SP
Point Arena
0 10 20 Mi
0 30 Km