

# *nature notes*

VOLUME 9 • SPRING 2021

CENTRAL COAST STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION



Just like the ocean, our lives are in constant motion. The one thing we can rely on is change. I remember some of the first parenting advice I received: "Just when you feel like you are going to break, the situation will change, remain patient." That advice has rung true on more fronts than just parenting, and this past year



Kristin Howland

has made evermore clear that change is inevitable. The ebb and flow of the daily grind fluctuate like tides. Sometimes it feels like our lives are so full we are eroding at the banks, and then just like that it drains back out again and we find ourselves exposed. I am grateful for the currents that push new life and wonder into our paths. I love that the tides of life test our strengths and allow us room to grow. We find resolve in the protections that offer us respite and security.

Our Central Coast State Parks continue to be those special places we go to ground and reconnect. We camp on their earth, hike their trails, bike their mountains, surf their waves, play on their beaches and admire the beauty and wonder they provide us. Not only do our State Parks offer us these "protections," they also protect our cultural and natural resources for our future generations.

As we look to reopening, I can't help but be excited about welcoming docents, volunteers, the community and our visitors back to our refreshed indoor spaces to explore and engage with the dedicated State Park staff and docents. I am eager to hear the awe and wonder in children's voices as they make connections with our natural world. I look forward to the new opportunities for partnership with in-person events and programming. Yet, I remain patient and flow with the currents of change, knowing that nothing lasts forever and this too shall pass.

Here's to the change of seasons, change of tides and to future changes that allow us to go with the flow.

*Kristin Howland*

Executive Director  
Central Coast State Parks Association

CCSPA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit. We are one of 85 similar cooperating associations across the state who work in partnership with State Parks. Tax ID #: 51-0198869.

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Newsletter design: Brady Teufel

## STAFF DIRECTORY

Kristin Howland  
Executive Director  
ed@centralcoastparks.org  
(805) 548-0391

Alissa Maddren  
Membership and Events Coordinator  
membership@centralcoastparks.org  
(805) 548-0384

Sheri Robesky  
Retail Operations Coordinator  
store@centralcoastparks.org  
(805) 548-0392

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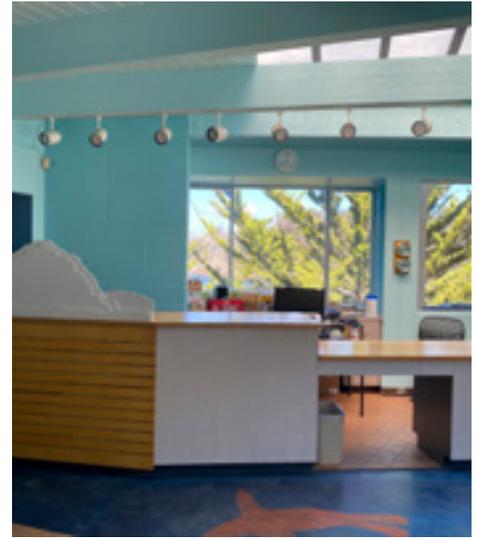
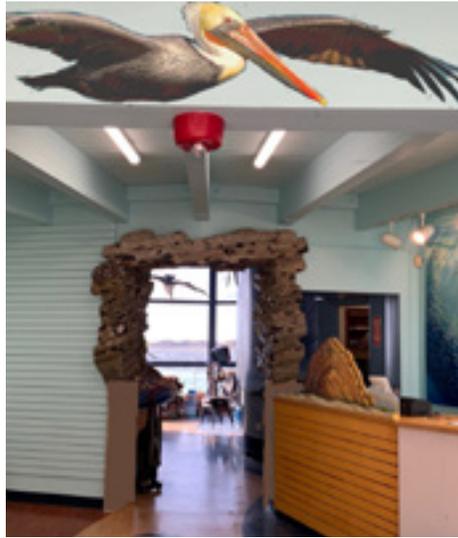
## MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Are you ready to make a difference? CCSPA is looking for new board members and volunteers! Contact us:  
ed@centralcoastparks.org

## QUICK FACT

# 29

The number of Marine Protected Areas between Pigeon Point and Point Conception



# MORRO BAY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY UPGRADE

One of the most exciting changes we can't wait to show off is the upgrades to the Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay State Park. The closures due to COVID allowed the time and space to give the museum some much needed love. We are so excited to breathe some new life into the entrance and gift shop, starting with a fresh coat of paint on the entrance exterior and the gift shop interior. We worked with local artist Marcie Hawthorne and State Park staff to pick out colors that provided

the space with light and character. In addition, Marcie created a beautiful plan to bring the gift shop to life with realistic murals of our local flora and fauna. We were fortunate enough to be introduced to Mikka Olsson, a very talented woodworker who updated our counters and display area. The incredible State Park Interpretive staff have addressed outdated exhibits and displays. We are thrilled to soon welcome visitors, volunteers, and docents to enjoy the new features of the Museum of Natural History.

## take your mind for a walk!



### Virtual Mind Walks Lecture Series

California State Parks, in collaboration with the Central Coast State Parks Association, brings a new type of learning right to your living room: **Virtual Mind Walks**. These free, online presentations focus on recreational, natural, and cultural history topics as they relate to the Central Coast.

For a schedule of upcoming lectures, an archive of past lectures and to pre-register for the live Zoom program, visit the Mind Walks page on CCSPA's website:

[centralcoastparks.org/mind-walks](https://centralcoastparks.org/mind-walks)

The Mind Walks Program is underwritten by the Thomas E. and Mary Kathryn Eltzroth fund and supported by the Central Coast State Parks Association.



# EELGRASS LOSS AND RESTORATION IN MORRO BAY

**L**ongtime residents and regular visitors remember when the Morro Bay estuary was full of eelgrass. The receding tide revealed broad green meadows, the long thin blades of this unassuming seagrass forming thick mats on the muddy bay floor. Those meadows were full of life. During low tide, you might spot a California sea hare nestled amongst bright green shoots, or a tiny nudibranch moving slowly along a single blade.

When the tide rose and submerged the meadows, the eelgrass blades stood upright, forming a refuge where juvenile fish could hide from predators. Crabs and other invertebrates would scavenge among the eelgrass rhizomes (root-like structures), for bits of decaying matter that had fallen to the bay floor.

## Some eelgrass beds have shown exponential growth

Because eelgrass is essential to life in the estuary, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program began mapping eelgrass and monitoring its health in the early 2000s. In 2007, more than 350 acres of eelgrass graced the bay. In 2012, only five years later, more than 95% of that eelgrass had disappeared, leaving only fifteen acres of eelgrass meadows where wildlife could thrive as it had before.

Since then, the Estuary Program has worked with partners, including Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, to understand the causes of this drastic decline and to restore eelgrass to Morro Bay. Research has ruled out some potential causes, including eelgrass wasting disease and drought, and studies are still underway.

Restoration work is ongoing as well. During the summers of 2012–2014, the Estuary Program and Cal Poly undertook



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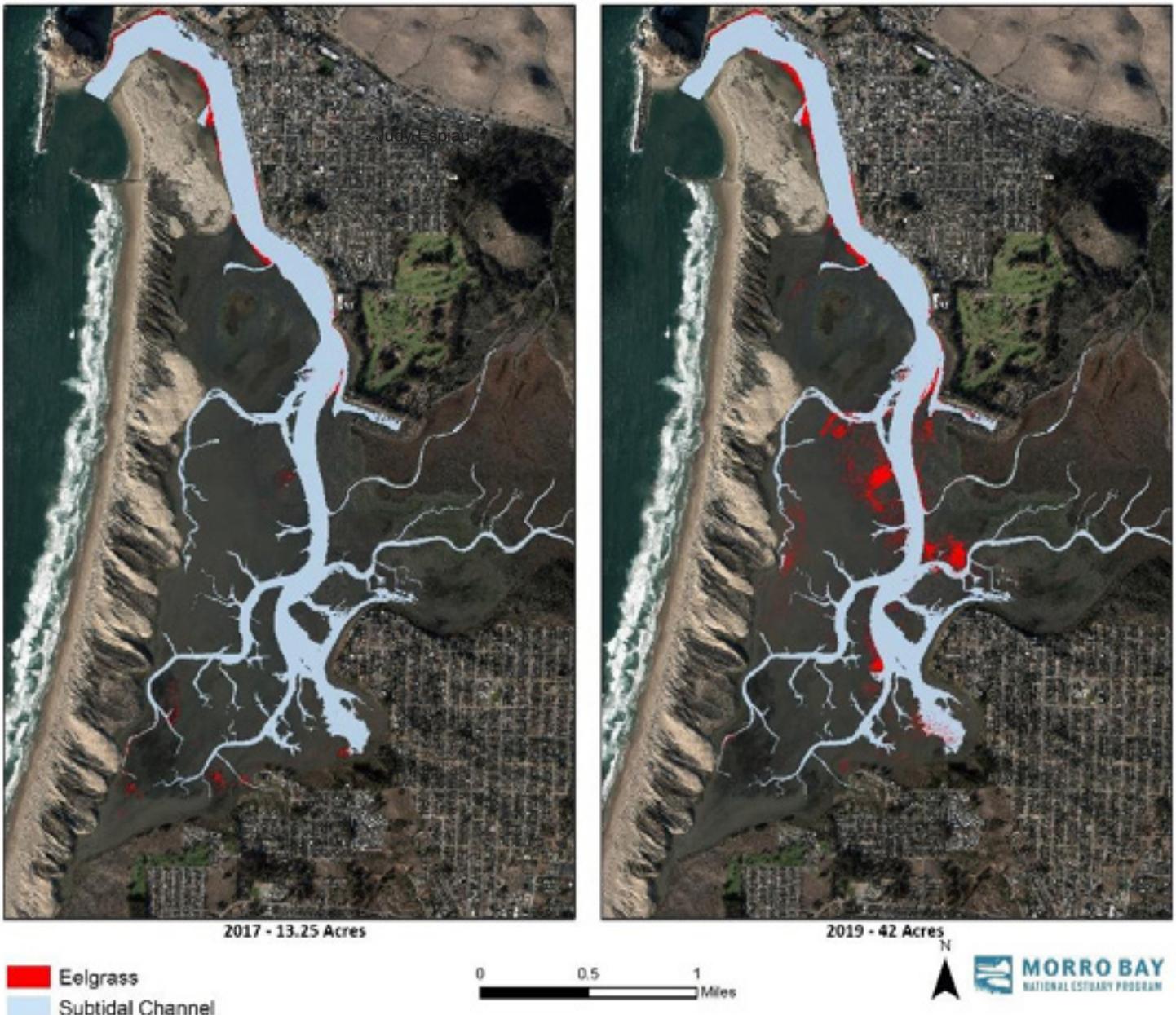
large-scale transplanting efforts. Dozens of volunteers bundled eelgrass shoots together and SCUBA divers transplanted those bundles to places where eelgrass had disappeared. Though few plants at these restoration sites survived, these efforts produced valuable scientific knowledge and brought the community together.

In 2016, small patches of eelgrass began popping up in the mid- and back-bay, indicating that conditions had improved for eelgrass. In March and July of 2017, Estuary Program staff, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and other partner and volunteers completed two small-scale experimental restoration projects. These transplant efforts, funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Duck Stamp Grant and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration showed measurable success.

Regular monitoring revealed that the transplant plots completed in March were denser and had grown larger than those planted in July. Spring, it seemed, might be the best time to plant. Using this finding, the Estuary Program and partners have conducted larger transplant efforts every spring since then. This work has begun to pay off. Some eelgrass beds have shown exponential growth. Others have grown together to create large swaths of eelgrass, reminiscent of the meadows that once filled the bay.

The most recent mapping efforts from 2019 revealed 42 acres of eelgrass in the bay, including restoration beds and naturally occurring eelgrass patches. It will likely take years before the estuary regains the 350 acres it once boasted, but it is invigorating to once again glimpse expanses of green as the tide goes out to sea each day. - Rachel Pass

### Eelgrass regeneration along the subtidal channel 2017-2019



# JASON FIELD, OCEANO DUNES DISTRICT'S ARCHEOLOGIST



## Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I am 30 years old and born and raised on the Monterey Peninsula. As the years have passed, I've begun to realize how the Peninsula's beautiful surroundings really shaped my values and priorities. My favorite activities are outdoors and nature-oriented, including camping, hiking/ trail running, and mountain biking. I enjoy a good road trip and seeing new landscapes. I also love traveling and experiencing and appreciating new cultures.

## How long have you been working for the State Parks and with Oceano Dunes District?

I've been with State Parks and Oceano Dunes since October 2019, so about 1 ½ years now.

## Can you share any work or school history?

I received a B.A. from UC Santa Barbara, with a major in Cultural Anthropology, and a minor in American Indian and Indigenous Studies. I then attended Sonoma State for a Master's Degree in Cultural Resources Management. This introduced some solid practical experience to kick start a career. My previous archaeological-related work includes the US Forest Service at the Modoc, Mendocino, and Stanislaus National Forests and for the CA National Guard at Camp Roberts and Camp San Luis Obispo.

## Tell us about your passion and how it brought you to State Parks.

Some of my earliest and best childhood memories trace back to adventures in the State Parks around Carmel and

Big Sur. I recollect my imagination devising stories about what might have previously happened at these locations. As I grew up, that imagination evolved into education and I learned about the actual stories and events of the landscape. Consequently, one of my passions is learning the story of a landscape, who lived where, why, and how. Nature, recreation, and conservation are also important personal principles. It was through a slow and steady process that these passions guided my educational directions. Putting all the elements together, I'm not surprised (but very thankful), that it came full circle to working for State Parks.

## What has been your favorite part of your position as the archeologist thus far?

Overall, I enjoy my role as a steward and advocate for cultural heritage. It has been super fascinating working in the unique dune environment and studying the cultural resources and how things change in the sand, being covered and uncovered. Encountering and documenting artifacts that might have been covered by sand for hundreds of years only to be recently revealed is a unique and special phenomenon that I feel privileged to engage with. Ensuring their protection, through collaboration with Tribal groups, is also a fulfilling component of the position.

## What's the most interesting artifact or story you have come across?

Each artifact or site has its own unique attribute, location, setting, story, etc. that makes it interesting, so it's difficult to pinpoint one. I do really connect with the research that I performed for my Master's thesis. For this, I studied a maritime cultural landscape of "doghole ports" in Big Sur. These were boat landings located in small treacherous coves with chutes and other developments to load and unload cargo from schooners in the late 1800s. Extracted resources, such as timber and limestone, would often set sail for San Francisco, contributing to its development boom. Studying the archaeological features left from this industrial era gave a perspective of Big Sur that's much different than today, one based on resource extraction and temporary gains.

## What is the most important message you want our community and visitors to know about Oceano Dunes District and/or protection of the cultural resources?

I believe we all have a role and responsibility in the protection and appreciation of cultural heritage. We can all be stewards, starting with the most basic action of appreciating archaeological resources from a distance to avoid disturbances. These resources are sensitive and non-renewable, and the location of artifacts are necessary to tell the accurate tale of events. Native American cultural resources are meaningful elements of their communities' identity -- a link that must be recognized through collective acknowledgment and preservation. - Interview by Monica Rutherford

# REMEMBERING MISSY COLLETT “BUTTERFLY DEFENDER”



Missy was a docent for 13 years racking up close to 2,000 hours as a volunteer. The butterfly grove was not the only area where she served as a docent. Every summer, for the past five years, Missy and her best friend Barbara Haggerty would volunteer with the otter project in Morro Bay. She would help children spy the otters in the scope. In fact Missy and Barbara helped begin that program.

**Missy was a docent for 13 years, racking up more than 2,000 hours as a volunteer.**

For over 10 years, the dynamic duo of Missy and Barbara would deliver fire wood to Oceano and North Beach Campgrounds. They made lifelong friends with the campground hosts doing this, and still correspond with some of them.

Outside of her docent work Missy volunteered for over 10 years with the food bank, driving her van, delivering food and checking in on seniors. Missy loved being of service. She also loved going to concerts, the movies, playing cards with docent friends and road trips with Barbara. The coronavirus took Missy's life on Sunday, February 14th, 2021. When we can gather safely again, a get together for docents and friends is in the works.

I love November. It is Thanksgiving, a chance to be grateful for the really good people, like Missy, in our lives. It also means the return of the butterflies, a chance to remember the beauty and wonder of nature that brings us all together as docents. - Judy Espiau

I love November. It brings Thanksgiving, my favorite holiday, and the start of butterfly season at the Monarch Grove in Pismo Beach. The past six years, butterfly season for me, has meant working the morning shift, every Friday, in the trailer with my docent friend Missy Collett. Missy was a fierce defender of the butterflies. No-one could ride a bicycle in the grove on Missy's watch. And if a mating pair of monarchs would land on the ground Missy would bound out of the trailer to stand guard until they took flight again. Missy loved answering questions visitors might have about the Monarchs, and if that visitor had a dog with them, they definitely got special attention.

## MONARCH TRAILER UPDATE

We are excited to announce that in April we will be relocating (migrating) the Monarch Trailer to the entrance of the Oceano Dunes off of Grand Avenue. 2020 was a challenging year with many ups and downs, so with open arms we welcome 2021!

After months of planning and discussion, California State Parks approved the relocation of the trailer and, for the first time ever, the Monarch Trailer will be open to guests all year round. Visitors will find the trailer in the parking lot next to Fin's restaurant, where guests can also access the one-mile boardwalk that meanders between the Monarch Grove and the Oceano Dunes. We are especially excited to open up volunteer opportunities at the trailer to help emphasize and teach the public about the importance of beach clean up, endangered species, recycling and overall coastal education.



Some fun offerings will be available for purchase at the trailer. Themes such as respecting our oceans, preservation, and sustainability will be highlighted to continue our educational efforts. We will offer souvenirs, Central Coast State Parks apparel, and coastal maps featured on mugs, cards, glasses, and even blankets. We will also have a lot of fun family and kids' educational items and activities to be discovered. Please contact [store@centralcoastparks.org](mailto:store@centralcoastparks.org) with general or volunteer inquiries.



## SURFING CALIFORNIA'S STATE PARKS: PAST AND PRESENT

For nearly 75 years, surfers have enjoyed the benefits of access to some of the best beaches and surfing locations across the Golden State, thanks to the conservation efforts of countless individuals who have contributed to the creation and management of California State Parks. Providing quality recreation is part of the mission statement of CA State Parks, and surfing is just one of the activities the public enjoys with this carefully crafted freedom – the best one I might add, but yes, I am a bit biased. As a professional surfer and now as the archaeologist and tribal liaison for the SLO Coast District, when not surfing abroad, I have spent the greater portion of my life within our local State Parks.

California residents and visitors alike rely heavily on the State Park system to provide the space for their outdoor recreation; for many of us, our “sanity” depends on our ability to immerse ourselves in the great outdoors. Surfing is no exception, as hundreds of miles of the California coastline belong to State Parks, including some of the most iconic surfing breaks in the state. Growing up in Cayucos in a surfing family with a Native Hawaiian mother, the ocean and surfing are intrinsically a part of my cultural makeup.

Here in California, there was no surfing prior to the 1800s, but I always imagine the Chumash people mind-surfing places like Malibu and Rincon (both State Parks) where waves peel perfectly for hundreds of meters and where these intrepid California Native American people regularly

traversed the waves on their plank canoe *tomolo'o*.

No one had ever ridden a wave on a surfboard outside of Polynesia until 1885, when three Hawaiian princes schooling in the Bay Area brought surfing to Santa Cruz. I recently had the honor of reenacting this event in a documentary film, and it really brought the historical significance of it home to my heart. This connection between Hawai'i, California and the art of wave riding continued giving birth to modern surfing - now a globally recognized recreation.

The surfing culture here in SLO County is as colorful and diverse as the Golden State. Professionals, beach bums, students, teenagers and visitors from abroad all convene at classic lineups like Morro Rock. Here in SLO County, almost all of the major surf spots save a few are located on State Park beaches. From Oceano Dunes to Pismo State Beach, from Montaña de Oro to Morro Strand, from Cayucos State Beach, Estero Bluffs, Harmony Headlands and on to Cambria and San Simeon, the SLO Coast District extends for another 20 miles along the Hearst San Simeon State Park coastline to the Monterey County line.

Tipping our salt water encrusted hats to the California State Park system and all the individuals and organizations who have been dedicated to conserving our coastline is part and parcel of what it is to be a part of the Central Coast community. Surfers are just one group making up this great place, but one with a lot to be grateful for. - Chad Jackson

# #GIVINGTUESDAY FUNDRAISER SUCCESS STORY



Photo courtesy Highway 1 Discovery Route

## \$7,500 Raised for the Spooner Ranch House

Thanks to the generosity of CCSPA members and our local community, we raised \$7,500 for cleaning and maintenance at the Spooner Ranch House in Montaña de Oro State Park in our "Help Us Clean House" Giving Tuesday fundraiser. Because of your support, the Ranch House will undergo a thorough cleaning and detailing by professional cleaners in preparation for its reopening once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. We are all eager to see the Ranch House looking refreshed and ready to welcome the

public once again. Stay tuned for updates! In the meantime, why not consider becoming a living history docent? You can put your dramatic talents to work playing the part of a member of the Spooner family at the turn of the 20th century. For more information, contact State Park Interpreter Robyn Chase at (805) 286-0856 or via email at [Robyn.Chase@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Robyn.Chase@parks.ca.gov). We'll also be looking for CCSPA volunteers to work alongside our staff in the Spooner Ranch House Nature Store once the Ranch House reopens. Contact CCSPA Retail Manager Sheri Robesky at (805) 548-0390 or via email at [store@centralcoastparks.org](mailto:store@centralcoastparks.org).

## Proud Supporters of CCSPA



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# OCEANO DUNES DISTRICT JUNIOR LIFEGUARD PROGRAM



The ocean is such a powerful force of motion. The power of the waves, the currents and the tides all shape and impact life within that salty, cold water. The impact of these forces is also felt on humans. We have such deep connections with the ocean. These connections can be made stronger and more meaningful through recreation. Coastal California State Parks have programming to foster connections between youth and the ocean environment. The Junior Lifeguard program is a statewide program that provides water safety education and is designed to improve the participants' physical condition, their respect for the ocean environment and respect for themselves and their peers.

The Oceano Dunes District Junior Lifeguard Program began in 2013, and through the hard work of a few dedicated staff, the program content and attendance has hugely increased over the years. The passion that staff have for this program is truly incredible. They give their heart and soul to these summer sessions in hopes of creating meaningful

connections between youth and the wonders of the marine environment while educating them on ocean safety.

Program content includes instruction and practice in open water swimming, paddle boarding, body surfing, body boarding, surfboard riding, skin diving and self-rescue. Understanding and respect of the ocean environment is gained through discussion of relevant marine and environmental topics. Students are immersed in a team-building environment with other youths and passionate instructors. Youth ages 9-17 are encouraged to register for a summer filled with aquatic fun!

Additional program information can be found by visiting <https://bit.ly/2OdFRcR>, or on Facebook by searching Oceano Dunes Junior Lifeguard. Planning is still in progress for the 2021 summer Junior Lifeguard program. Their webpage will be updated with information on registration, tryouts and session dates. Please feel free to call our District Office at 805-773-7170 for more information.

## NEW PARTNERSHIP: 'THERE DOES NOT EXIST BREWERY!'

The Central Coast State Parks Association is thrilled to announce a new collaboration with There Does Not Exist Brewery! Who doesn't love a refreshing beverage after a day of hiking, biking, fishing, or surfing in our local parks? Soon, you will be able to sip on a frosty ale that gives back to your local State Parks. Coming in June, TDNE will launch a new brew in honor of our Central Coast State Parks. Stay tuned for more information and for the "Launch Party!" In the meantime, we look forward to hosting our Get Outside! Film Series, "Shifting Tides: A Night of Surf Inspired Film" on March 27th at There Does Not Exist Brewery in San Luis Obispo. Sample the fine brews, enjoy local cuisine, and sit back under the stars for amazing cinematography!

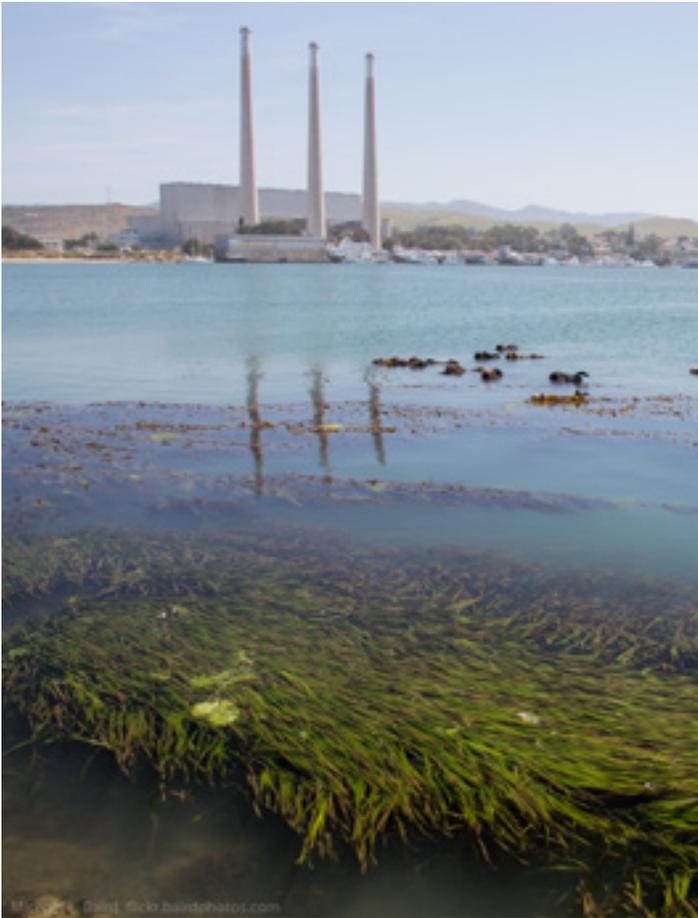
TDNE was founded by Max Montgomery, a Central Coast native who is "constantly driven to make the best beer we can with the materials and equipment available to us." He



and his team aim to push boundaries and experiment with "classic" beer styles and hope that "one day they can look back feeling they made a difference on Central Coast beer culture and had a fun time doing it."

TDNE practices sustainability and supports the community. Their equipment allows them to use less chemicals in cleaning and in turn, reduce output to the waste water treatment facility. Aside from process-driven sustainability, they "enjoy partnering with local businesses to bring attention to other people or places that continue to make the Central Coast a great place to live.

# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS



Similar to how state parks protect habitats and wildlife on land, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) preserve our underwater landscapes and all that lives there. MPAs are crucial in maintaining healthy and abundant marine ecosystems as well as promoting biodiversity and responsible recreation. Along the California coast there are 124 MPAs, making this the largest network of MPAs in the world! Creating and maintaining the California MPAs requires a statewide effort, including the collaboration of California State Parks, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and many other partnering organizations. Along the San Luis Obispo coast, we have MPAs adjacent to Point Buchon, Morro Bay, Cambria, and Piedras Blancas.

MPAs are sanctuaries for all kinds of wildlife. They serve as homes for hundreds of marine life, birds, plants, and multiple endangered species. Marine mammals like the harbor seal, southern sea otter, and California sea lion forage through the kelp forests for food. Invertebrates like crabs and clams live underneath the mud and silt. Hundreds of seabirds and shorebirds migrate to these areas to rest and eat. MPAs restore biodiversity and protect whole ecosystems and their resources so that each species can thrive.

As well as being a home for several marine species, MPAs are also places for people to enjoy and recreate in, whether it be by swimming, fishing, tide pooling, boating, or diving.

Each MPA has a unique set of regulations to ensure responsible recreation while still protecting the surrounding ecosystem. There are several different classifications of MPAs with varying regulations depending on the needs of the area. Some MPAs regulate fishing or the take of any marine or cultural resources, while others may completely prohibit it. Either way, recreation is still very much encouraged in and around these beautifully wild ocean environments. Marine Protected Areas greatly contribute to a healthy and diverse ocean. They serve as places where marine life can thrive and as spaces where people can explore and enjoy the beauty of the coast. - Monica Rutherford

For more information and to find the regulations for your local MPAs, visit the California Department of Fish and Wildlife website at [www.wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs).

**VOLUNTEER**

**OPPORTUNITIES**

**CCSPA Needs Your Help**

We're looking for volunteers to work alongside CCSPA staff in our Natural History Museum, Mercantile Trailer and Spooner Ranch House nature stores. We also need volunteers to help tag and organize merchandise in our warehouse.

**Sound Interesting?**  
Email [store@centralcoastparks.org](mailto:store@centralcoastparks.org)  
or call (805) 548-0390



Central Coast State Parks Association  
 202 Tank Farm Road, Suite H2  
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
 (805) 548-0390  
[www.centralcoastparks.org](http://www.centralcoastparks.org)

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All members receive a copy of **Nature Notes** quarterly newsletter, discounts to CCSPA events and discounts at participating **Public Lands Alliance** stores. Additional benefits include:

### \$25 Hummingbird

- ★ Two vouchers for admission to the **Morro Bay Museum of Natural History**
- ★ 10% discount at all **CCSPA** nature stores

### \$50 Otter

- ★ Free admissions for two adults to the **Mind Walks Lecture Series**
- ★ Four vouchers for admission to the **Morro Bay Museum of Natural History**
- ★ 10% discount at all **CCSPA** nature stores

### \$75 Raft of Otters

- Family Membership that includes two adults and unlimited kids 17 and under.
- All benefits of Otter membership, plus:
- ★ 15% discount at all **CCSPA** nature stores
  - ★ **Explore Parks Passport** discount coupon book

### \$100 Coyote

- All benefits of Raft of Otters membership, plus:
- ★ Invitation to the **Ice Cream Social** at Montaña de Oro

### \$250 Monarch

- All benefits of Coyote membership, plus:
- ★ Invitation to **Afternoon with the Monarchs** at Pismo Monarch Butterfly Grove
  - ★ An exclusive holiday shopping night at the **Morro Bay Museum of Natural History**

### \$500 Gray Whale

- All benefits of Monarch membership, plus:
- ★ Invitation to **Martini de Morro**

### \$1,000 Oak Grove

- All benefits of Gray Whale membership, plus:
- ★ Invitation to a behind-the-scenes tour of Hearst Castle

### \$1,500 Keystone

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