

# *nature notes*

VOLUME 15 • SPRING 2023



CENTRAL COAST STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION

**W**e were hopeful for a great start to 2023, but winter had other ideas. The Central Coast was hit hard this year, and although our parks fared well in comparison to many other State Parks in our neighboring counties, we still had some damage. Unfortunately, we lost many of the critical shelter trees in the Pismo State Beach Monarch Grove resulting in closures for safety and cleanup. The Museum of Natural History and the Spooner Ranch House were closed for an extended time while safety and infrastructure after the storms were evaluated. An unrelated storm event caused an electrical fire at the museum causing smoke damage and another closure. Due to the extended closures of our retail facilities, we will have some work to do to catch up and raise the funds we need to support our parks' programs.



Executive director Kristin Howland

I look forward to what the future holds for CCSPA. We have some exciting opportunities, events and traveling exhibits to share with you! The Mind Walks program returns in person every other month, our next traveling exhibit focusing on wildflowers will be at the museum in March, and the 2023 Butterfly Ball planning is underway for October 14th.

We received a grant from Parks California to bring 4th graders and their families to our parks through the Adventure Pass program. This funding is so meaningful to CCSPA and our park partners. Being able to implement programs that provide those priceless moments in nature that forge connections and promote environmental stewardship is what drives us to do what we do.

I remain grateful for the rain and temporary relief from the drought. We are already receiving reports of spring wildflowers! We expect to see an amazing display of color dotting our hillsides, open fields and bluffs. Do we dare say "Super Bloom?"

We also have some fun new designs coming to our stores! Please keep us in mind when you are shopping for that special gift for friends and loved ones. Your purchases provide valuable funding that helps us do what we do!

Thank you for sharing the love of our Central Coast State Parks and supporting the programs our parks offer.

Bloom on!

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.

Cover: San Luis Obispo Creek flooding near San Luis Bay Drive on 1/10/23. Cover photo and newsletter design by Brady Teufel

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State Park Interpreter III  
Oceano Dunes District

**Robyn Chase**

State Park Interpreter III  
San Luis Obispo Coast District

## QUICK FACT

# 14.69'

The depth of San Simeon Creek on January 9, 2023.



## IN-PERSON MIND WALKS RETURN TO THE CENTRAL COAST

**W**e know you've been looking forward to attending in-person Mind Walks—the wait is now over! In 2023, the Central Coast State Parks Association and our California State Parks partners will be hosting both in-person and virtual Mind Walk Lectures.

The Mind Walks program, founded by Ray Easton, was hosted in person for several years in Morro Bay from January to March. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CCSPA and CA State Parks continued these programs online as Virtual Mind Walks, allowing folks near and far to connect to California's Central Coast. COVID gave us the opportunity to expand our topics, audience and speakers as we offered free, online programming opportunities all year long from 2020 to 2022.

Now that staffing, funding, and health guidelines allow for it, we are alternating monthly between in-person and virtual presentations. In-person presentations will take place at the San Luis Obispo Public Market, and virtual presentations will continue to be hosted via Zoom. Virtual will be the third Friday of the month at 1 PM, and in-person will be the third Wednesday of the month at 4:30 PM.



Mind Walks feature a variety of subjects from experts covering topics aimed at stretching the mind of the avid lifelong learner, highlighting recreational, natural, and cultural history topics as they relate to the Central Coast. We have a large archive of past virtual presentations

on YouTube—use your phone's camera to scan the QR code to check out the playlist!

For in-person lectures, there is a general admission fee of \$5 for anyone 18 and older, and guests ages 17 and under may attend for free. Friends of CCSPA receive free entry to in-person lectures along with a guest, as long as they show their Friend of CCSPA card. If you aren't already, become a Friend of CCSPA today by making a donation of as little as \$35! Free Mind Walk admission is just one of the many perks available.

The first in-person Mind Walk took place on February 15th, and local field biologist Steve Schubert led a presentation about local birds of prey. Thank you to everyone who attended! Upcoming topics will cover oak trees, native Olympia oysters in Morro Bay, bobcats, and more. View the schedule at [www.centralcoastparks.org/mind-walks](http://www.centralcoastparks.org/mind-walks).

We are actively recruiting speakers but are always on the lookout for additional topics! If you are a subject matter expert of a relevant topic and are interested in presenting, or know of one, please contact Community Outreach Manager Monica Rutherford at [programs@centralcoastparks.org](mailto:programs@centralcoastparks.org) or call (805) 548-0385.

The Mind Walks program is underwritten by the Thomas E. and Mary Kathryn Eltzroth fund and supported by CCSPA. If you would like to help support Mind Walks and other educational opportunities, consider making a donation to CCSPA today. We hope to see you in-person, virtually, or both this year! - MONICA RUTHERFORD

# STATE PARKS' STORM RESPONSE

## OCEANO DUNES DISTRICT

State Parks staff at Pismo State Beach have been working to repair areas of the Monarch Butterfly Grove that received damage from the severe storm systems in January. A few eucalyptus trees fell on the Northwest corner of the grove, alongside the creek. Thankfully, these were not the main monarch clustering trees, nor was anyone harmed when the trees fell. Park maintenance staff and environmental scientists coordinated with tree removal companies to safely remove the fallen trees from the grove and repair damaged fencing to restore safe access for our visitors. School group tours resumed, and we hosted a few more before the monarchs left for the season at the end of February.

Even though most of the butterflies are gone now, visit the grove this spring to learn about their incredible migration and life cycle. Along with informative panels, QR codes are scattered throughout the grove for a self-guided tour experience you can follow on your smartphone. You can even walk through the grove and access a trail that leads out to the beach or enjoy a picnic at the grove in the eucalyptus trees. Though it is always hard to say goodbye to the monarchs, the anticipation begins as we await another overwintering season! - MALLORY CLAASSEN, STATE PARK INTERPRETER II

(top right) Fallen Monterey cypress at Hearst San Simeon State Park. The tree will be repurposed as mulch.

(bottom right) Park maintenance assistant Erin Knight helps clear storm debris near Pismo State Beach.



Laurel Rodger



Flooding on South Bay Boulevard in Morro Bay during the storms in early January, 2023.

## SLO COAST DISTRICT

State Parks in the Central Coast were one of the many areas impacted by the atmospheric rivers that dumped over 30 trillion gallons of water across the state of California in early January. Parks staff worked hard before and during the storms to protect park resources, provide for public safety, and continue to provide storm response to assess and mitigate hazards and damages that occurred during the storms. In the San Luis Obispo Coast District (SLOCD), much of the response consisted of removing trees that fell and became hazardous to visitors or facilities in parks including Montaña de Oro State Park, Morro Bay State Park, and Hearst San Simeon State Park.

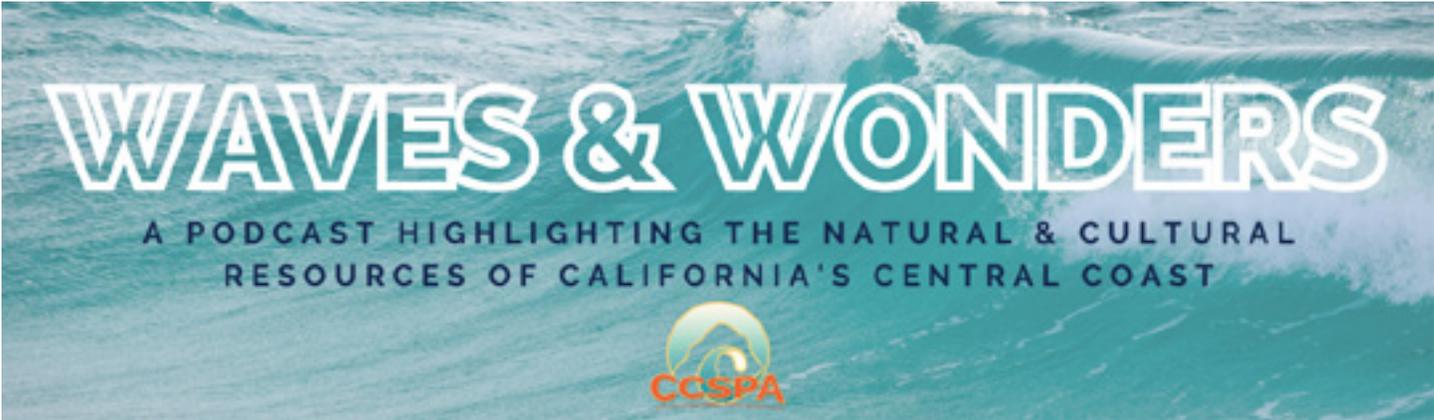
Over 100 trees were identified as compromised due to the storm, and that number continues to grow as trees become weakened even after the heavy rains ended. There are some common factors between tree species and why such a large number of trees were impacted during this type of storm. Many of the trees that fell were planted, exotic species including eucalyptus, Monterey cypress, and Monterey pine. During extreme storm events, the ground can quickly become saturated, making it difficult for tree roots to stay in the ground, especially in the sandy soils found on the Central Coast. This causes trees to uproot and tip over, which was seen during the storms. The SLOCD forestry crew, maintenance staff, and contracted crews have been working together to remove trees and large, broken branches that fell in campgrounds, on park roads and trails, and have also removed hazardous trees before they fell and damaged facilities or risked public safety. The material from the trees

is processed into wood chips, which are used locally around the park where the tree was cut to avoid spreading pests and pathogens. In Morro Bay State Park, larger rounds of wood were cut into firewood size pieces and will be used for the upcoming firewood program at the Morro Bay Campground.

While the heavy rains may have caused damages, it also brought much needed water to several native plant restoration projects and allowed many seasonal creeks to flow at higher capacities than have been observed in past recent years. Some of the planting projects benefiting from the rain include over 100 coast live oaks and over 4,000 Monterey pines in Hearst San Simeon State Park, which have successfully expanded the stand of Cambria's native Monterey pine forest. In Montaña de Oro State Park, native coastal scrub species including sagebrush, coyote brush, lupine, and sticky monkey flower that were planted in a monarch butterfly overwintering site also received much needed water.

When visiting State Parks, it's important to respect any closures that you may encounter. Trail closure signs or areas that are flagged or taped off are put in place when there is a hazard that may not be immediately visible or obvious. There are still many standing trees with compromised root systems that are at risk of falling or trees with broken limbs that are hanging overhead. Parks staff will continue to assess, identify, and remove hazards for the next several months. Be sure to alert any park employee if you notice something that looks unsafe, and thank you for being patient and understanding of changes occurring in our parks.

- KELLY McFADDEN, SLO COAST DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST



# WAVES & WONDERS

A PODCAST HIGHLIGHTING THE NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES OF CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST



Introducing Waves & Wonders, a podcast by the Central Coast State Parks Association! Hosted by two Cal Poly students, Waves & Wonders focuses on natural and cultural topics as they relate to the Central Coast.

Our first episode is titled "A Whale of a Good Time" and features Michele Roest, biologist and educator with Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Dive into whales and whale watching on the Central Coast and hear about the types of whales you can find, the best times to view them, and tips on how to best respect wildlife.



We aim to produce several more in the coming months with topics ranging from monarch butterflies to Pis-mo clams, and highlighting organizations like the Central Coast Aquarium and Cal Poly Surfrider. Stay tuned for more episodes and coverage of the people, places and natural wonders of the Central California coast.

We hope to bring this podcast to Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeart Radio and other audio apps soon but for now, please give it a listen on our website:

[www.centralcoastparks.org/podcast](http://www.centralcoastparks.org/podcast)

## ADVENTURES WITH NATURE

Adventures with Nature Programs are guided walks and talks facilitated by California State Park Staff and Volunteers. All ages are welcome and encouraged to attend. These fun, free programs are exploratory in nature, revolving around cultural and natural resources in the coastal California State Parks in San Luis Obispo County.

*To view upcoming outings, please visit [www.centralcoastparks.org/awn](http://www.centralcoastparks.org/awn)*

# SPOTLIGHT ON PARK STAFF: LAUREL RODGER, STATE PARK INTERPRETER I



## Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

My family relocated from the San Francisco Bay area to the Central Coast when I was four. I grew up in Baywood Park in Los Osos. I am a proud Baywood Elementary alum, and in my heart, I will always be a Baywood Bear. Growing up in a small town surrounded by so much natural beauty has been one of the great blessings of my life. After graduating high school, I did several stints at community colleges in San Luis Obispo and northern California. Eventually, I gained admittance to Humboldt State University and majored in history. After graduation, I returned to the Central Coast and applied to work at Hearst Castle. Now, eight years later, I have found a home with California State Parks. I couldn't be more over the moon about it!

## What brought you to California State Parks and how long have you been working for Parks?

I fulfilled both of those dreams when I was hired at Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument in 2015. In January 2022, I was lucky enough to be offered an Interpreter I position with the Oceano Dunes District. In the last year, I've had the opportunity to expand my interpretive tool kit, focusing more on natural resources than I ever had in the past. Mighty monarchs and mollusks, dynamic dunes, lakes and lagoons, shore birds, and sea stars are just some of the well-spring of topics into which I now have the opportunity to delve.

## What are some of your main roles as a State Park Interpreter?

My primary role is to act as a conduit between park visitors and experts. To take the incredible work done by scholars, scientists, archaeologists, and historians and present it to park visitors in an engaging, relatable, and memorable way. Sometimes my role is a facilitator, creating safe, open, and respectful spaces for people to discuss issues and explore ideas. I help organize, promote, and present the summer junior ranger and campfire programs, school group programs, and distance learning through the PORTS program (Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students). I have also had the opportunity to connect with our incredible volunteers by coordinating the Adventures with Nature Program for the Oceano Dunes District.

## What is your favorite aspect of the job?

My favorite part of my job is that I get to be a perennial student and that learning is encouraged. I get to learn the stories of a place and share those stories with others. I learn new things every day from park visitors who are generous enough to share their knowledge and memories with me. I love that in parks, curiosity is a culture that is fostered.

## What is your favorite State Park of all time and why?

My all-time favorite State Park is Montaña de Oro. Montaña de Oro was the park of my childhood and continues to be my go-to park for hiking and fishing adventures. From the tide pools to the top of Oats Peak, I feel like I know that park better than any other. When I was training to hike the Tahoe Rim Trail, I had a blast loading up my pack and trying to connect up trails in Montaña de Oro to get to the roughly 15 miles I would be hiking daily for that thru-hike. I recently hosted a Virtual Mind Walk with the Historian for the SLO Coast District, Dr. Amy Hart, and learned about the amazing histories of the families that made a go of it farming and ranching on the land that would become Montaña de Oro State Park. Learning about these people and their ingenuity and perseverance only deepened my appreciation for this special place.

## If you had one message for visitors to our Central Coast State Parks, what would it be?

It would be a message of appreciation. Every day in the parks, I see people pitching in and doing their part to help the parks and help one another. There is something about being in these special places that can bring out the best in people! - INTERVIEW BY MONICA RUTHERFORD

# 'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: CALIFORNIA WILDFLOWERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE' HEADED TO MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY



**A**nother traveling exhibit by Exhibit Envoy is coming to the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History! From late March to September 23, *Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change* will showcase several photographs of California's wildflowers and how climate change affects these natural beauties.

The exhibition features seven different sections: Mountains, Coastal, Desert, and Central Valley regions, the power of fire and renewal, a behind-the-scenes look at capturing these images, and an overview of California's

geographic regions. Most importantly, these images, photographed by Rob Badger and Nina Winter, address how climate change and other human impacts affect California's wildflowers.

Included in this exhibition are 52 framed color photographs of wildflowers, natural history panels featuring maps and essays focused on the state's botanical landscape and climate change, equipment used by the photographers in the field, and more interactive components.

CCSPA and CA State Park staff will

host a free community event on March 29 to celebrate the launch of the exhibit. Join us from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM and enjoy refreshments, an informative presentation, and the brand new exhibit! California Native Plant Society member and local nature photographer Marlin Harms will give a presentation on the unique wildflowers of San Luis Obispo County beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Admission is \$3 for adults 18 and over and free for guests 17 and under. It's open daily from 10 a.m - 5 p.m. See you there! PHOTOS COURTESY EXHIBIT ENVOY

## AGENCIES COLLABORATE ON ELEPHANT SEAL CAMPAIGN



**W**inter was the height of elephant seal beach activity! California State Parks, Friends of the Elephant Seal, the National Park Service, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary worked together to organize and share content for an 8-week elephant seal campaign to heighten the visibility of elephant seals on social media channels, increase awareness of these behemoth marine mammals, and share practices that prevent wildlife disturbances as well as promote public safety in the presence of elephant

seals. Northern elephant seals are likely to be resting on public beaches in California during the winter birthing and breeding season, and the goal of this social media campaign was to prepare the public with key principles for safe and responsible wildlife viewing. Lastly this campaign provides educational and engaging content for visitors and those who cannot access elephant seal beaches.

Along the California coast, elephant seals can be found at the Piedras Blancas Rookery at Hearst San Simeon State Park, at Año Nuevo Rookery north of Santa Cruz and the Point Reyes Rookery north of San Francisco.

The social media campaign, **#WinterWildlifeWonders**, ran for eight weeks from January 4 - February 26. The campaign consisted of everything needed to post on social media, both text and imagery. Interested collaborators were invited to share two weekly posts to share on their social media platforms to join the outreach efforts.

By working together, the team raised awareness for elephant seal ecology, research, and conservation through tens of thousands of social media users. The more users that are involved and posting, the higher the chance of a successful campaign.

# STAFF PICKS: WILDFLOWERS OF THE CENTRAL COAST



## Lupine | *Lupinus albilfrons*

Monica | Community Outreach Manager

My favorite local wildflower is a lupine! *Lupinus* includes hundreds of species, but some local ones are arroyo lupines and silver bush lupines. They bloom near the end of winter, so it is a fabulous sign that spring is coming. I've seen these unique purple flowers all across the county, but my favorite place to see them is on Point Buchon Trail, south of Montaña de Oro. In spring, the hills are covered in thousands of wildflowers and it is a beautiful mosaic of colors.



## Coast Ground Rose | *Rosa spithamea*

Beca | Operations & Events Manager

It's hard to choose a favorite since flowers are one of nature's best decor, whether on a hike, park or just throughout neighborhoods. The coast ground rose is one of my favorite wildflowers. I love the simplicity of the little flowers blooming and coming together to create a sea of beautiful pink. They make hiking SLO County more enjoyable than it already is.



## Woolly Indian Paintbrush | *Castilleja foliosa*

Sheri | Development Director

The woolly Indian paintbrush is one of my favorite native wildflowers and thrives in low-elevation, open and arid environments. It is hemi-parasitic, so its roots tap into the roots of other plants and steal nutrients. Spring is when their rich red and yellow flowers and their long dramatic stems bloom. I often see them surrounded by nectar-intoxicated hummingbirds happily flitting from flower to flower!



## SLO Owl's Clover | *Castilleja densiflora*

Kristin | Executive Director

Honestly, it is hard for me to pick a favorite wildflower. There are so many to choose from. I will say that the San Luis Obispo Owl's Clover holds a special place in my heart as it grew in my backyard growing up. This beautiful little flower is endemic to San Luis Obispo County. It blooms from March to May and can be found at Estero Bluffs State Park and on the coastal bluffs of Hearst San Simeon State Park.



## California Poppy | *Eschscholzia californica*

Angelena | Retail Operations Manager

It might seem like a copout and cliché, but I can't help it ... when I see California poppies the feeling they cultivate are special; they're comforting. Not only is it what we've always called my dad's dad, "Poppy", but when I see them, I see my walk to elementary school, I see hikes with my mom and brother, I see exploring with my dad. When I see them ... I know I'm home.



## Indian Pink Wildflower | *Silene laciniata*

Julie | Retail Operations Manager

Any time I see red flowers in nature, I believe it brings good luck. This vibrant color is not especially common in our native wildflowers, yet I believe it is one of the most breathtaking. The Indian pink wildflower, also known as the coastal catchfly, was one of the first wildflowers I was able to accurately identify. You can find this flower all over the Central Coast, but they are particularly stunning on the Reservoir Flats Trail in Montaña de Oro State Park.



CCSPA's mission is to fund educational and interpretive activities in our local State Parks. In order to make these programs as relevant and engaging as possible, State Park interpretive staff and volunteers are constantly enhancing their skill sets through research, training, and professional development. CCSPA is proud to support career development for our State Park partners in order to strengthen the incredible educational programs they offer.

This quarter, we are supporting the enrollment of two State Park interpreters in the UC California Naturalist Program offered at Cuesta College. The program is "designed to introduce Californians to the wonders of our unique ecology, to engage

and instill in them a deep appreciation for natural communities, and to become stewards of their local resources." Each class starts on campus with a classroom presentation followed by a field trip. The last class includes short presentations of capstone projects.

*"The CalNat program promotes stewardship and community science through coursework curated for the most curious learner. Park professionals will return with new knowledge and skills that they will share with the public, staff, and volunteers through high quality training opportunities and program offerings. The best part about this training is that it is perfectly aligned with our interpretive goals to inspire visitors to get involved in their local communities and leave the planet better than they found it."* - Robyn Chase, SLO Coast District Interpretive Manager

*"Opportunities for professional development are so important for the continued growth of employees and supports retention and recruitment of high performing staff. Staying relevant in your profession and lifelong learning increases the engagement and overall performance of employees. CCSPA is happy to support this high level of support to State Parks staff as it increases parks programs, community engagement and support of our local parks."* - Kristin Howland, CCSPA Executive Director

If you'd like to support similar initiatives, consider making a donation today by using the form on the back of this newsletter and selecting "Continuing Education for interpreters and docents" as your program of choice.



# Join the CCSPA Team!

**We're looking for volunteers and board members!**

Use your skills and passions to help make a difference in your local State Parks.

Email your resume and cover letter to Kristin at [ed@centralcoastparks.org](mailto:ed@centralcoastparks.org)

Visit our website for more info



[centralcoastparks.org/volunteering-ccspa](http://centralcoastparks.org/volunteering-ccspa)

Photo by Mike Barr

CENTRAL COAST STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION  
PRESENTS THE 4th ANNUAL

# BUTTERFLY BALL

AN ADVENTURE IN WONDERLAND

SAVE THE DATE

October 14th, 2023

5-9pm

Octagon Barn,  
San Luis Obispo

More info to follow



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[ccspa-store.square.site](https://ccspa-store.square.site)

## Check out our event calendar!

The calendar is regularly updated and features CCSPA and State Park events, activities, fundraisers, and programs around the Central Coast!



Scan the QR code with  
your phone camera

[www.centralcoastparks.org/calendar](https://www.centralcoastparks.org/calendar)



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Become a Friend of the Central Coast State Parks Association when you make a **donation of \$35** or more!  
 When you become a Friend of CCSPA, you support interpretation and education in the California State Parks in San Luis Obispo County.

Starting at \$35, benefits include:

- Personalized **CCSPA Friend card** to present at stores for discounts
- 15 % discount at all **CCSPA nature stores**
- Free admission for two adults to the **Mind Walks Lecture Series**
- Subscription to our quarterly newsletter, **Nature Notes**
- Discounts on tickets to **CCSPA events**
- CCSPA **Friend sticker**
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**Donations are fully tax-deductible** and donations over \$35 will go directly to a specific cause or program in our local State Parks. Donate \$400 or more to a program to join the **Stewardship Society** and receive extra perks. **Donating over \$35? Choose a program to support:**

*Donations \$35 or less will go the area of CCSPA's greatest need by default.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Group Transportation                | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural and Living History                        |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Western Monarch Butterfly Outreach         | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuing education for interpreters & volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation & Restoration Efforts         | <input type="checkbox"/> Area of CCSPA's greatest need (general)            |

*Visit [centralcoastparks.org/support](http://centralcoastparks.org/support) for more details on each program.*

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