

Park Overview

A Coastal Treasure

Point Reyes National Seashore is comprised of more than 71,000 acres, including 33,000 acres of wilderness area. The national seashore also manages another 21,000 acres of adjacent Golden Gate National Recreation Area lands. Estuaries, windswept beaches, coastal grasslands, salt marshes, and coniferous forests create a haven of 80 miles of unspoiled and undeveloped coastline. Located just an hour's drive from an urban area populated by seven million people, the park receives more than two million visitors annually. Abundant recreational opportunities include 147 miles of hiking trails, four backcountry campgrounds, and numerous beaches.

Point Reyes National Seashore is an exception to the development that has covered thousands of miles of U.S. coastline. Congress established this park in 1962 “to save and preserve, for the purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration, a portion of the diminishing seashore of the United States that remains undeveloped.”

Geologically, Point Reyes National Seashore is a land in motion. The great San Andreas Fault separates the Point Reyes Peninsula from the rest of the North American continent. Granite bedrock found here matches the bedrock in the Southern Sierra Nevada range. This granite indicates the peninsula has moved more than 300 miles northwest over a period of 100 million years. The park is an important link in a chain of protected areas, sharing boundaries with the Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries, Tomales Bay State Park, Marin Municipal Water District Lands, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Combined, these special places constitute one of the few remaining biologically diverse Mediterranean climate regions on earth.

As wild habitat is developed elsewhere in California, the relevance of the Point Reyes Peninsula as a protected area with notably rich biological diversity is more important than ever. More than 45 percent of North American avian species and nearly 18 percent of California's plant species are found at Point Reyes because of the variety of habitats and unique geology. In all, more than 1,000 plant and animal species inhabit the park, including 27 species that are federally listed as endangered or threatened. Point Reyes is the only unit of the National Park Service that is home to tule elk.

Point Reyes National Seashore contains examples of the world's major ecosystem types. For this reason the park was recognized in 1988 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere program and named as part of the Central California Coast Biosphere Reserve. Tomales Bay, within the national seashore boundary, has been designated a Wetland of International Importance. Known as the “Ramsar Convention,” the Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The cultural history of Point Reyes National Seashore extends more than 2,000 years ago to the Coast Miwok Indians who were the first human inhabitants of the peninsula. More than 100 known village sites exist within the national seashore. According to many experts, Sir Francis Drake landed here in 1579, the first European to do so. In response to the many shipwrecks in the treacherous coastal waters, important lighthouse and lifesaving stations were established by the United States government in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the early 1800s, Mexican land grantees established ranchos. These were followed by a wave of American agricultural operations which continue to this day in the national seashore's cultural heritage zone.

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE
SIGNIFICANT DATES

- **1000 B.C.E.** – Evidence of Coast Miwok Indians
- **1579** – Francis Drake’s California landing
- **1595** – First known shipwreck on California’s coast; *San Agustin*
- **1850s** – Alphabet ranches established
- **1870** – Point Reyes Lighthouse built
- **1889** – Point Reyes Lifesaving Station built on Great Beach
- **1927** – Point Reyes Lifesaving Station built at Chimney Rock
- **1935** – Report recognizes Point Reyes for unsurpassed national values
- **1962** – Legislation signed by President Kennedy establishing Point Reyes National Seashore
- **1976** – Congress authorizes national seashore to be a site for preservation of tule elk
- **1976** – Congress creates Point Reyes Wilderness area of 33,000 acres
- **1978** – Tule elk reintroduced to Tomales Point
- **1988** – Point Reyes National Seashore designated as part of the Central California Coast Biosphere Reserve
- **1995** – Vision Fire burns more than 13,000 acres
- **2001** – Establishment of Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center
- **2002** – National Park Service designates Point Reyes National Seashore a Center for Environmental Innovation
- **2012** – Point Reyes National Seashore celebrates fiftieth year

Tracks in the sand dunes lead to a world of natural discoveries near the end of Abbotts Lagoon Trail. PHOTO BY DAN UNGER



Point Reyes National Seashore

