

One of America's greatest coastlines, Point Reyes National Seashore comprises over 71,000 acres, including 32,000 acres of wilderness are. 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 eight million people, the park receives over two million visitors annually. Abundant recreational opportunities include 147 miles of hiking trails, backcountry campgrounds, and numerous beaches.

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 indicates the peninsula has moved over 300 miles northwest over a period of 30 million years. As wildland habitat is lost elsewhere in California, the relevance of the Point Reyes Peninsula as a protected area with a notably rich biological diversity increases. Over 45% of North American avian species and nearly 18% of California's plant species are found here due to the variety of habitat and uniqueness of the geology. Twenty-seven threatened and endangered species exist within the Seashore.

Point Reyes contains examples of the world's major ecosystem types. For this reason it was internationally recognized in 1988 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere program and named the Central California Coast Biosphere Reserve.

The cultural history of Point Reyes dates back some 5,000 years ago to the Coast Miwok Indians who were the first human inhabitants of the peninsula and are still here. Over 120 known village sites exist within the park. According to many experts, Sir Francis Drake landed here in 1579, the first European to do so. In response to the many shipwrecks on the treacherous coastal waters, key 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 Seashore's pastoral zone.



© Alexandra Kruse



© Bruce Farnsworth

