Point Reyes National Seashore is home to many endangered plants and animals, but few people realize that we have ecosystems that are also endangered. One of these disappearing ecosystems, coastal sand dunes, is represented here at Abbotts Lagoon. The large sand dunes near the lagoon are one of the last remaining places to see the plants and animals that once thrived in the shifting sand dunes of the California coast. Many of the dunes that once occurred along the coast are now buried under cities and housing developments. The dunes that remain are threatened by European beachgrass (Ammophila arenaria) and iceplant (Carpobrotus edulis), non-native plants that aggressively displace native dune plants and stabilize the normally moving dunes. Unless stopped, European beachgrass and iceplant form dense lawns over the dunes, destroying scenic views of shifting sands and leading to the death of animals and plants that are found nowhere else in the world.

The dunes around Abbotts Lagoon are home to many rare plants and animals. Tidestrom’s lupine (Lupinus tidestromii) above and beach layia (Layia carnosa) right, are two endangered plants that live only in open dunes on the California coast. These and other native plants de-cline as European beachgrass and iceplant invade open areas.

The Abbotts Lagoon Dune Restoration Project
To protect the rare plants and animals that live in the sand dunes at Abbotts Lagoon, National Park Service staff are working to restore the dunes to a more natural state. This restoration effort involves removal of the non-native plants European beachgrass and iceplant, which completely displace native plants. Due to the sensitive nature of the habitat, removal is being conducted by small work crews and volunteer groups using hand tools. Removal of these non-native plants will preserve views of shifting sand dunes and provide habitat for rare plants and animals.

Point Reyes National Seashore is not alone in its efforts to save dunes along the Pacific coast. Federal and local agencies, as well as non-profit community organizations, are working hard to protect dune systems from Oregon down to the beaches of Southern California. For more information on dune restoration, stop by the Bear Valley Visitor Center.