

Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety

Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety (LE) is responsible for investigating crimes against the United States and for monitoring activities and enforcing regulations on the national seashore's 71,000 acres of land, surrounding water areas, and 21,000 acres of other National Park Service lands in the San Francisco Bay Area. Law Enforcement accomplishes this with six patrol rangers and two LE supervisors (eight rangers in total). Point Reyes National Seashore coordinates with other law enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard and the Marin County Sheriff's Department. Ensuring visitor safety and protecting resources requires a variety of activities including front- and backcountry patrol, marijuana cultivation control, search and rescue, and marine operations along the coast of the Pacific Ocean and in Tomales Bay.

Frontcountry patrol focuses on more accessible areas within the national seashore including parking lots, beaches, and areas prone to illegal camping, vandalism, and resource violations. Backcountry patrol focuses on areas that are less accessible, including trails and walk-in campgrounds. Eight rangers patrol these areas and conduct all other law enforcement activities. Present staffing levels allow for adequate frontcountry patrol for minor resource violations such as off-leash dogs, off-trail bicycling, and driving infractions. Major incidents such as drowning, assaults, domestic violence, and vehicle accidents can consume all available staff time. The national seashore would like to increase its backcountry patrol efforts to educate campers about safety, expand resource-based protection, and to monitor trail use.

In addition to ensuring visitor safety, LE is responsible for protecting the seashore's abundant natural and cultural resources. Activities include the deterrence of poaching, as well as the enforcement of camping and marine equipment regulations. Abalone and elk antler poaching are areas of concern. Rangers frequently encounter individuals that collect more abalone than permitted and divers that do not follow regulations. Antler poaching has decreased since the 1990s because of intensive monitoring in recent years. Given additional staff, LE would like to increase efforts to monitor poaching activities and to educate visitors about the effects of poaching on the natural environment.

Deterring marijuana cultivation is the largest area of concern. Point Reyes National Seashore is one of the top four illegal marijuana growing sites of the national parks within California.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND VISITOR SAFETY OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

Protect Point Reyes National Seashore visitors and resources in a safe manner.

Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety (LE) is responsible for protecting visitors and resources through patrol activities. LE would like to respond to a greater percentage of visitor safety and resource protection issues in a way that ensures ranger safety. Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety would also like to increase efforts to deter marijuana cultivation within the national seashore.

Increase marine operations.

Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety would like to decrease the number of incidents and fatalities in Tomales Bay. Many accidents and fatalities occur along the opening of the Bay. Abalone poaching is also of concern. Increased marine operations would allow LE rangers to enforce boating safety regulations and to monitor poaching more closely.



A Point Reyes National Seashore Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety ranger inspects a beached vessel. PHOTO BY DAVID MIYAKO

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND VISITOR SAFETY OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES (continued)

Implement the strategies of the fire management plan.

Wildland Fire will continue to implement the objectives of the fire management plan (FMP) by strategically reducing acres of highly flammable vegetation that threaten key resources, public safety, and nearby communities. The division is charged with clearing areas of defensible space around structures and creating zones of reduced vegetation that would slow the progress of wildfires and increase the effectiveness of firefighters as they work to suppress wildfires. The division would like to enhance efforts to use prescribed burning and mechanized vegetation management to continue to create areas with less flammable vegetation where strategically needed and maintain areas that were previously treated. The objective of these efforts is to reduce the potential reoccurrence of a catastrophic fire such as the 1995 "Vision Fire," which destroyed 44 homes in a subdivision adjacent to the national seashore. The division will be mindful of the need to reduce impacts to air quality and global warming by following the emissions reduction measures for prescribed burns adopted in the FMP.

Continue to support the fire management programs within the San Francisco Bay Area Parks Network.

Wildland Fire Management provides planning, emergency response, and training for other national parks in the San Francisco Bay Area and works cooperatively with other Seashore divisions to achieve shared goals. Wildland Fire also builds working relationships with local agencies and organizations to reduce fire hazards, improve fire prevention, and enhance natural and cultural resources both in the Bay Area Network parks and in the wildland urban interface. The division would like to enhance efforts to develop fire hazard reduction projects, provide regulatory compliance support, and provide expertise in the preparation of education, interpretation, research, and monitoring strategies for the Bay Area Network of national parks.

Law Enforcement works to monitor activities related to marijuana cultivation and to catch drug trafficking organization leaders operating within the national seashore. Law Enforcement also works to eradicate marijuana fields upon discovery, which can consume multiple days and require extensive labor. In 2006 Point Reyes National Seashore confiscated and destroyed 45,000 marijuana plants, worth about \$110 million. Law Enforcement would like to continue deterring marijuana cultivation in a manner that is safe for the seashore's rangers. Any effort to discover and eradicate marijuana gardens requires all eight patrol rangers, staff from Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and nearby law enforcement agencies for safety purposes.

Search and rescue encompasses all activities related to assisting lost or injured visitors. All law enforcement personnel are certified first responders for injuries. Most incidents occur in backcountry areas, which require rangers to hike long distances. Incidents include occurrences such as visitors falling off horses, lost and injured hikers, missing bicyclists, and boat accidents.

Law Enforcement rangers patrol around Tomales Bay and the coast of the Pacific Ocean on an infrequent basis. Rangers need to be certified in water operations, and boat maintenance is labor-intensive because of the saltwater environment of the seashore. Incidents such as boating safety violations occur frequently in Tomales Bay. Marine patrol would be used primarily for poaching abatement and search and rescue if staff time was made available. Law Enforcement also works with the U.S. Coast Guard when necessary and when legal jurisdiction permits. Point Reyes National Seashore would like to increase marine operations to reduce the number of visitor safety incidents on the water, to reduce poaching, and to build relations with the U.S. Coast Guard.

Law Enforcement maintains and monitors dispatch and security alarm systems. Members of the LE staff also issue keys and alarm codes to individuals. The national seashore presently has two separate transponder stations that are not linked with each other. Additionally, Law Enforcement is required to carry a separate radio system to communicate with the Marin County Sheriff's Department. Point Reyes National Seashore radios need repair or replacement more frequently than other national park units because of the corrosive saltwater environment.



Point Reyes National Seashore LE rangers conduct a search and rescue operation. PHOTO BY DAVID MIYAKO

“There’s no more slow season at Point Reyes National Seashore. Every season has its own unique problems. We’ve found that anything that can happen in San Francisco can happen here. And pretty much has.”

—BRUCE DOMBROWSKI
POINT REYES LE RANGER

Wildland Fire Management

Wildland Fire Management provides emergency suppression response to all national seashore wildfires, plans and implements fire prevention and education programs, and works closely with local agencies to ensure coordination of efforts in all facets of wildland fire management. Additionally, the division provides emergency fire suppression response for other units of the San Francisco Bay Area Network including Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Muir Woods National Monument, Pinnacles National Monument, John Muir National Historic Site, and Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site. Wildland Fire also provides training to the Presidio of San Francisco Fire Department. Wildland Fire is not responsible for structural fire response.

Wildfires threaten the safety of visitors, staff, and adjacent communities, and could destroy important natural and cultural resources. Wildland Fire implements the fire management plans (FMPs) adopted for the seashore and for each of the Bay Area Network parks. The FMPs detail hazard reduction projects, which reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires occurring in the national parks. Examples of hazard reduction projects include creating and maintaining areas of defensible space around national seashore structures, constructing shaded fuel breaks in strategic areas that would aid firefighters in suppressing wildfires, and conducting prescribed burns to reduce highly flammable vegetation along heavily traveled highways. During the Vision Fire of 1995, 44 homes were destroyed and 12,000 acres were burned. Wildland Fire would like to ensure that such a fire does not occur again.

Fire crews, planners, and ecologists work closely with the Natural and Cultural Resource divisions on many FMP projects. Certain invasive plants are widespread throughout the national seashore and grow very densely. These plants could outcompete native plants for space and nutrients and create areas of high fire hazard.

Wildland Fire develops plans to reduce ignition materials through prescribed burns and other means. The division ensures that its actions comply with all federal environmental regulations, develops post-burn reports, studies the effects of fire, seeks to educate the public about the effects of fire, and consistently strives to improve the safety of visitors, residents, and staff by reducing the risk of wildfires. Wildland Fire monitors fire behavior and the long-term outcomes of prescribed burns and other hazard reduction projects that do not involve burning. Fire ecologists and

fire planners use this data to determine if past projects perform as expected. The division continually researches new strategies for improving methods employed in prescribed burns and other treatments.

The division is charged with implementing the Federal Wildland Fire Policy. The national seashore works closely with neighboring Fire Safe Councils and fire departments in developing community wildfire protection plans that promote the safety and protection of areas in the federal wildland urban interface. The division consults with local entities throughout the state that have received grants from the National Park Service and need assistance in developing effective project plans and completing regulatory requirements.



Firefighters work in an amber atmosphere of heat and smoke. NPS PHOTO

MARIJUANA ERADICATION AT POINT REYES

In 2006 Point Reyes National Seashore eradicated 45,000 marijuana plants from park lands. Federal lands are preferred growing spots for many marijuana producers because of laws that require individuals convicted of cultivating marijuana to forfeit the land upon which their plants are grown. In the past, law enforcement rangers would fly around the park to spot marijuana gardens from the air. Some marijuana growers have learned from these past efforts and have set up infrastructure under tree canopies to hide from air patrol. Air operations are still helpful to spot gardens that are not under tree canopies.

Growers will smuggle individuals from neighboring countries to work in the fields. Often, these smuggled individuals will not know where they are or be able to discuss the greater trafficking organization. Growers will till the land and set up infrastructure such as propane tanks and other equipment, which ruin the natural environment.

Given the substantial street value these plants have, growers will also set up defenses around their gardens. Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety rangers have found firearms in the past. For safety reasons, all eight patrol rangers must work together to monitor fields.

Marijuana eradication consumes all protection staff time when fields are discovered. Plants must be destroyed the day they are found because growers will collect the remaining plants if they are not destroyed in a timely manner. This involves heavy manual labor to hack plants, often requiring many volunteer hours. Eradication efforts are expensive because of increased labor needs and the use of helicopters to transport plants away from the garden site. The national seashore would like to continue deterring marijuana cultivation on park lands.

Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety rangers patrol park lands that are vulnerable to marijuana growing operations. NPS PHOTO



