

# Sunset & Manresa State Beaches



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Discover the many states of California.™

### Sunset and Manresa State Beaches

201 Sunset Beach Road

Watsonville, CA 95076

(831) 763-7062

Cover photo courtesy of Mark Whitney

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*Monterey Bay offers a  
chance to watch dolphins,  
sea otters and gray whales.  
Shore birds, white-tailed  
kites, western snowy  
plovers and red-tailed  
hawks make Sunset and  
Manresa their home.*





## peaceful campground under the pines,

picnicking on the beach, and unmatched views of Monterey Bay make Sunset State Beach a favorite year-round destination. Manresa State Beach rewards visitors with sweeping views of bluff-backed sand and sea, including the Santa Cruz Mountains to the northwest and the forested hills of the Monterey Peninsula to the southwest. Sunset and Manresa state beaches are approximately one mile apart on Highway 1.

### AREA HISTORY

Long before the arrival of Europeans, the Ohlone lived along the coast between San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay. They traded mussel and abalone shells, as well as dried abalone and salt for piñon nuts and obsidian. They also hunted small game, elk, deer, and bear. Sea mammals were a food source, and streams supplied salmon and trout.

The mission system forever changed the lives of the Ohlone. The effect on their culture and traditions was disastrous, and their numbers were nearly decimated by exposure



Walk-in campsites at Manresa State Beach

to European diseases, to which they had no immunity.

From the 1830s to the 1870s, Ranchos San Andreas and Bolsa del Pajaro encompassed the area. In 1852, John H. Watson claimed a half interest in Rancho Bolsa del Pajaro to build the town of Watsonville. His claim was later overruled, but the town continued to grow. Pajaro Landing, built in 1868, became a major produce shipping point before Southern Pacific took over freight conveyance in the 1880s. In 1903 lumber dealer W. J. Rogers built Port Watsonville to offer steamship service to San Francisco, but the port went bankrupt by 1913.

Dairy farmer William Van Laanen acquired the land in 1938. His widow sold eight acres to the State in 1983, adding to 159 acres that had been acquired in 1931 for Sunset State Beach. The Van Laanen farm complex near the entrance station includes a redwood frame farmhouse dating from the early 1900s.

As private development increased in the area, residents concerned about losing public access to the beach became the driving force behind public ownership of sensitive coastal resources. Manresa State Beach was acquired by the State in 1948.

### NATURAL HISTORY

**Sunset State Beach** supports four major plant communities and associated wildlife.

- **Coastal scrub**—Mock heather, bush lupine, beach sagewort, Monterey spineflower, poison oak, sand gilia and seaside woolly sunflower cover the sandy slopes and dunes. Wildlife includes brush rabbits,

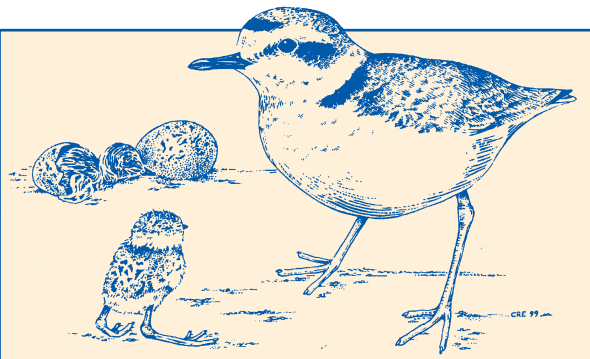


California pocket mouse

dusky-footed wood rats and pacific gopher snakes. Song sparrows, rufous-sided towhees, American kestrels, red-tailed hawks and Anna's hummingbirds are common.

- **Coastal woodlands**—Introduced Monterey pine, Bishop pine and Monterey cypress are dominant. They support an understory of coyote brush and sea fig that shelters California pocket mice, pinyon mice, chestnut-backed chickadees and Steller's jays. Eucalyptus trees are a gathering place for monarch butterflies.
- **Dune mat/Coastal strand**—Park managers are replacing the habitat-destroying European dune grass with native beach bur, sand verbena and beach sagewort to attract once-plentiful native birds, such as white-crowned sparrows, California towhees, and dark-eyed juncos. The mouth of the Pajaro River shelters California brown pelicans, Caspian, elegant and royal terns, and California gulls. Deer mice and brush rabbits live in low dune vegetation. Reptiles include black legless lizards, northern alligator lizards and coast garter snakes.
- **Marshlands**—The coast gum plant, pickleweed and coastal salt grass of the salt marsh areas attract cinnamon teals, savannah sparrows, meadow mice and raccoons. The willow, California bulrush and broad leaf cattail in the wetlands at the mouth of the Pajaro River provide food and habitat for cinnamon teals, mallards, American bitterns, red-winged blackbirds and long-billed marsh wrens.





**Western snowy plovers** use both beaches and their foredune areas for nesting, rearing of young, and winter habitat. This bird builds its nest directly on the beach sands. Disturbing a posted plover nesting area is a violation of federal law.

**Manresa State Beach** supports two major plant communities and associated wildlife.

- **Coastal scrub**—Coyote brush, coastal sagebrush and lizardtail grow on the bluff. Allen's hummingbirds, various finches, white-crowned sparrows, rufous-sided towhees and brush rabbits live on the bluff and in its understory.
- **Coastal strand**—Sea rocket, sand verbena and beach primrose grow in intertidal and offshore environments, sheltering sand crabs and beach hoppers. Jellyfish and other organic material support sanderlings, whimbrels, willets, western and Heermann's gulls, and surf scoters. Sea mammals, including California gray whales, dolphins and sea otters, play offshore.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Contact the park for information on the Junior Ranger Program, nature hikes, campfire programs and upcoming events.

- **Camping**—Sunset State Beach has about 90 shady, dune-protected family sites without hookups that hold recreational vehicles up to 31 feet in length. Parking for over 60 walk-in tent sites at Manresa Uplands is in a separate lot near the campground (no RVs are permitted). To reserve from early spring until October, visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or call (800) 444-7275. Pets must not be left unattended in campsites.
- **Fishing**—Starry flounder, California halibut, barred surf perch, striped bass and surf smelt can be caught at Manresa. At Sunset, surf perch, sardines and striped bass may be caught. A sport-fishing license is required.
- **Picnicking**—To reserve two large ramadas for special events at Sunset State Beach, call (831) 464-6290. At Manresa State Beach, picnic tables along the top of the bluff offer panoramic ocean views.
- **Glider port**—Remote-control glider enthusiasts will find a glider port at Sunset State Beach.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

**Sunset State Beach**—A beach wheelchair is available at the kiosk first-come, first-served. Accessible picnic tables, campsites and restrooms are located at each beach area.

**Manresa State Beach**—There are currently no (wheelchair) accessible activities at Manresa State Beach.

Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- At both beaches, dangerous rip currents, frigid water and deep offshore dropoffs make surfing and swimming hazardous for any but the most experienced surfers.
- Natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Do not feed or leave food out for wildlife.
- Alcohol is not permitted on the beach or in the day-use areas.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not permitted on Sunset Beach; leashed dogs are allowed at Manresa State Beach. Dogs are allowed in both campgrounds on a six-foot-maximum leash.
- Fires are allowed only in park fire rings.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS OFF HWY. 1

- Seacliff State Beach, 201 State Park Dr., Aptos 95003 (831) 685-6500
- The Forest of Nisene Marks, Aptos Creek Road off State Park Drive, Aptos 95003 (831) 763-7062
- Zmudowski State Beach, 1 mile north of Moss Landing off Struve Road (831) 649-2836

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact:  
 Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks • 144 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
 (831) 429-1840 • [www.thatsmypark.org](http://www.thatsmypark.org)

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