



Photo: P. Nichols

Our Mission

The mission of the 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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Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds
A Unit of California State Parks

Asilomar Dunes Natural Preserve

Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds



Aerial view of Asilomar dunes - the last remaining area of undeveloped dunes in Pacific Grove.

Awalk along the Asilomar dune boardwalk will lead you through a living environment of a California sand dune landscape. With examples of native plants and wildlife, the Asilomar dunes illustrate what can occur when balance is lost and found once again.

Historic Precedent

The original dune system along the western edge of the Monterey peninsula spanned 480 acres, from Point Pinos in Pacific Grove to Point Joe in Pebble Beach. When Europeans settled in the area, logging and grazing removed many trees and damaged the delicate vegetation which held the dunes in place.

Summer baseball in the Asilomar dunes, ca. 1917.



As time passed, sand mining, residential, and resort development reduced the area to the 25 acres that now remain at Asilomar.

When the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded Asilomar in 1913, they used the land for a summer camp and conference retreat. The dunes became an active playground with tennis courts, swimming pool, basketball court, and baseball diamond. In 1956, when Asilomar became a unit of the California State Park System, Park management continued to allow unrestricted activities in the sand dunes that broadened the trampling of the native plants and caused further erosion.

Efforts to prevent the sand from shifting and engulfing the conference buildings were started in the 1960s and 1970s. Non-native plants, particularly ice plant which is native to South Africa, were introduced and unwittingly contributed to the problem. Ice plant provided neither food nor shelter to native wildlife and invaded the remaining native plant community. By the mid-1970s, the dunes had become a virtual wasteland of bare sand and exotic plants.



Non-native Ice Plant (Cape Fig)



Asilomar Dunes with Ice Plant

A New Beginning and Restoration

The State Park staff launched an ambitious project in 1984 to restore the condition of the dunes to their "pre-European influence." Luckily, amidst the desolation, a few isolated pockets of native habitat remained. These areas became the model upon which guidelines were developed for the restoration project.

In addition, the project's goal was to allow restricted public use in the dunes. A boardwalk footpath was designed to offer the visitor a nature trail through the dunes habitat which would protect it from further destruction.

The first phase in the restoration was to acquire a seed inventory. Most of the native plant seeds were collected from the dunes, utilizing the few