

Volunteers in Parks Program

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



California State Parks
Partnerships Division





Hearst Castle Docents enjoying the sunset (photo by Silvia Braun)

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Point Lobos State Natural Reserve school walk volunteers Leni Hazlett, Peter Fletcher, Fernando Elizondo, Jan Cambier, and Kathleen Ryan (photo from Melissa Gobell)

California State Parks
Partnerships Division
Sacramento, California
2021





2019 ACTIVITY REPORT VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS PROGRAM

Summary

Volunteers are vital partners supporting the operation of California State Parks. Without the passionate and dedicated service of volunteers in the Volunteers in Parks Program (VIP) supporting critical functions, State Parks would not be able to successfully execute its mission.

In 2019, **43,333 volunteers** provided a total of **1,138,528 service hours**, surpassing the 1 million-hour benchmark for the 11th consecutive year. These hours represent an equivalent value of nearly **\$35.9 million*** to California State Parks. Volunteers enabled the state parks to enhance outreach and community engagement activities, services to visitors, public safety, and the stewardship of our natural and cultural resources.

A whopping 81% of volunteers—**35,234 individuals**—participated as short-term volunteers (three days or less), while **8,099** people made long-term volunteer commitments. This is a decrease of just over 2% of total volunteers both long-term and short-term over 2018.

Although the total number of volunteers has decreased, each volunteer's **average number of hours contributed was 26.3 hours, a 3% increase**. This is one indicator that California State Parks' volunteers are a dedicated group of outstanding individuals willing to step up and support state parks throughout California.

Interpretation continued to represent the largest category of volunteer service, comprising 29% of all volunteer hours. Combined, hours donated working as campground hosts and public contacts, as well as performing maintenance/housekeeping tasks, account for 38% of total volunteer hours.

A pie chart providing a visual representation of volunteer hours in each service category follows; program statistics and graphs that give a five-year look at trends in volunteer activity are also included in this report.

**\$31.51 per hour as provided by www.independentsector.org. This rate is indexed for California and includes fringe benefits estimated at 15.7%.*

Staff Support and Training

In 2019, every State Parks staff hour invested in the Volunteers in Parks Program yielded nearly five hours of volunteer service. The total number of staff involved in the program reached a five-year low of 518 with 108,078 staff-support hours, averaging 208 hours per staff person, which is a drop of 43% of volunteer coordination hours from 2018.

A total of 38 staff involved with coordinating and managing volunteers attended one of the two Volunteer Coordination trainings offered in March and September 2019. This training was designed for staff new to volunteer coordination and as a refresher for veteran coordinators. The course included basic background knowledge such as legal issues, as well as human rights, accessibility, and State Parks policies affecting volunteers. There were also segments on volunteer registration, public safety, utilizing social media, risk management, creating a more diverse volunteer program, and working with cooperating associations.

Volunteer Recognition

California State Parks offers two types of awards to recognize a volunteer's cumulative contributions to parks. Poppy Awards are bestowed by district superintendents on volunteers who have contributed significantly to the betterment of California State Parks. The Volunteer Medallion Award is State Parks' highest volunteer honor and is awarded to volunteers who have made a significant contribution to the mission and goals of State Parks over the years.

State Parks staff presented 71 Poppy Awards and 25 Volunteer Medallions to outstanding volunteers meriting statewide recognition during 2019. This was a slight decrease in awards from the previous year.



Dick and Shirley Sacco with the Volunteer Medallion awarded to them for their 13+ years as volunteers for the Orange Coast District (photo from David Price)

Additionally, nearly 3,100 volunteers earned district passes and over 2,200 volunteers contributed 200 hours or more in 2019, thereby earning a statewide park pass providing free day-use access to parks as a gesture of gratitude for their service.

Volunteer Program Highlights

Throughout the state, volunteers continued to support parks through their work in visitor centers and museums; leading tours and hikes; running campfire and Junior Ranger programs; devoting hours to research; providing information to park visitors from around the world; monitoring local wildlife populations; interpreting history; maintaining grounds, gardens, beaches, and trails; helping campers; and so much more!

While there were many highlights in the Volunteers in Parks Program in 2019, there are three that are especially notable:

- In October, Point Sur State Historic Park (SHP) opened the Point Sur Naval Facility for public tours for the first time since the State acquired the property nearly 20 years ago. The opening of this portion of the park was made possible due to the hard work of the park's volunteers, and from October-December, nearly 500 visitors took tours of the Facility.



Point Sur SHP volunteer, Carol O'Neill, giving a tour of the Naval Facility
(photo by Rachel Young)

- Railtown 1897 SHP's Polar Express Event received the highest score of any Polar Express Event in North America. This annual event which brings to life Chris Van Allsburg's children's book, *The Polar Express*, is put on, primarily, by the park's volunteers.



Railtown 1897 SHP Polar Express volunteers (photo by William Gordan)

- Pigeon Point Light Station SHP was able to open historic buildings on the lighthouse grounds for tours for the first time in nearly 20 years, and 240 visitors took docent-led tours in the last five months of the year. On top of that, the lighthouse's 147th anniversary celebration brought a crowd of over 2,500 visitors to the park in a single day to participate in a great variety of docent-hosted activities. Volunteers look forward to completion of the project that will restore the lighthouse tower.



Pigeon Point Light Station SHP volunteer, Richard Holmboe interpreting the lens to visitors (photo by Sky Biblin)

**Program
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Although it would be impossible to include all of the other contributions volunteers made to our parks in 2019, here is a small sampling of the highlights:

Interpretation



Monterey SHP volunteer, Carol Bassoni demonstrating bobbin lace making
(photo by Aaron Gilmartin)

- At Point Lobos State Natural Reserve (SNR), the [Easy Access Adventure Program](#) continued to allow visitors of all abilities to experience the park. Approximately 3,800 visitors were served at Easy Access events in 2019.
- Old Town San Diego SHP's volunteers donated a total of 15,852 hours and put on over 216 living history activities and events, including events that brought 7,500 school-aged children to the park throughout the year.
- Año Nuevo State Park (SP), docents provided 15,517 hours of interpretation to their visitors during their 3.5 month winter season as they lead groups of visitors and school children into the preserve to see the elephant seals.
- Burleigh Murray Ranch Park Property was able to offer a [First Day Hike](#) to the surrounding community thanks to the initiative and leadership of park docent, Ginny C., who planned the hike. This was one of more than 80 First Day Hikes offered at state parks, statewide, on January 1.
- Costumed volunteers brought history to life as they interacted with and inspired park visitors at dozens of historic parks.

Visitor Services

- 67 visitor center volunteers contributed over 5,000 hours and interacted with over 150,000 visitors at Anza-Borrego Desert SP, a 50% increase in visitors over 2018 due to the super bloom.

- Old Town San Diego SHP was one of five state parks that were awarded a 2019 Earth Day Grant from the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF), and had more than 500 visitors come out for their Earth Day event that featured many volunteer-led activities.
- Seacliff State Beach's (SB) landmark "Cement Ship" celebrated its 100th birthday in 2019, and volunteers spent the first Saturday of the summer season helping to put on a centennial celebration, which saw 381 visitors (about three times the typical summer day's number) come to the park's visitor center.
- Dedicated camp hosts throughout the state answered questions, held campfire programs, sold firewood, assisted with campground maintenance, and so much more to make camping in state parks a positive and memorable experience for thousands of visitors. Some of 2019's camp host highlights included:
 - Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area (SRA) camp host, Sindee Charlton, provided outstanding service to the park's visitors and staff, and her quick thinking and actions during a structure fire in June, 2019 prevented a possible catastrophe.
 - Portola Redwoods SP camp host Mike consistently went above and beyond by helping with maintenance projects, delivering firewood to campers, and helping in the kiosk when staffing was short
 - 24 camp hosts at Pfeiffer Big Sur SP contributed an outstanding 10,982 hours of service in 2019.
 - First-time Westport-Union Landing SB hosts, Tom and Suki Gray quickly became irreplaceable through their outstanding service to the park, which included Tom replacing a message board and campground sign.



Tom Gray, Westport-Union Landing SB camp host, with the Howard Creek message board he replaced (photo by Suki Gray)

Facility Maintenance

- The Monterey District Trails Program hosted their 8th annual Sierra Club trail work week during which Sierra Club volunteers from throughout the country worked in Julia Pfeiffer Burns SP to repair the Ewoldsen Trail which was severely damaged in recent years by wildfire and winter storms. Thanks to their hard work, the trail has been reopened to the public after being closed for almost three years.
- Big Basin Redwood SP's Volunteer Trail Crew celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019, and put in a record number of 1,351 hours of service to improve and maintain the park's trails.
- Pigeon Point Light Station SHP docents built two new benches and additional display cases for new interpretive objects.
- At Point Lobos SNR, docents renovated the Information Station and Pelt Shed which also serves as a Visitor Center. The Pelt Shed was constructed by a skilled docent carpenter and much of the construction was able to be completed using reclaimed wood.



Don Williams, Red Rock Canyon SP volunteer (photo from Lou Figueroa)

Cultural Stewardship

- Colorado Desert District Archaeology Volunteers organized the records of a past archeologist to add to the district's knowledge base and continued to work on re-inventorying their collections.
- At Anza-Borrego Desert SP, the Paleontology Program Volunteers discovered 33 new localities, which were recorded to the park's database, and completed the Rock Mammoth excavation. A group of five Paleontology Volunteers photographed, scanned, and processed imagery to produce 3D representations which can be printed and used for demonstrations to school groups, tours, and lectures.
- At Antelope Valley Indian Museum SHP, a group of archaeology students and faculty from Antelope Valley College volunteered their time cataloging hundreds of objects in the museum's collection.

Natural Stewardship

- Volunteer Carrie Durkee almost completely eradicated the invasive pampas grass from Navarro Beach in Navarro River Redwoods SP.



Carrie Durkee removing pampas grass (photo by Lynne Clenfield)

- Half Moon Bay SB combined their Coastal Wildflower Day with the CSPF's annual Earth Day Festival, and welcomed around 1,000 visitors to the park that day. Volunteers helped to plan the event and on the day of the festival, led wildflower and bird walks, children's activities, native plant information and sales, and worked on habitat restoration projects.
- Natural Resource volunteers from Mendocino Sector parks spent many hours removing invasive species from the Caspar Headlands every month, and have been stewarding the land for 20 years now.
- The Mendocino Mermaids (a local nonprofit organization) organized several volunteer beach clean ups at Big River Beach in Mendocino Headlands SP. Throughout the year, they removed over 126 pounds of garbage from beaches.

- At Fort Ross SHP and Sonoma Coast SP, sea lion surveyors collected and recorded data on the local sea lion population which is used to safeguard the continued existence of harbor seals on the Sonoma Coast.



Sonoma-Mendocino Coast District sea lion surveyors Jane Straight, Mary Pat Jacobs, and Alison Trujillo (photo from Amelia Schall)

Education

- La Purisima Mission SHP docents staffed 11 Student Living History Days which served around 900 visitors including approximately 800 4th graders.
- The school walks program at Point Lobos SNR saw a five-year high in the number of students they were able to serve. In 2019, docents led a total of 72 school walks, serving 3,183 students, over half of which were given to students from Title 1 schools.
- In the Santa Cruz District, both Rancho del Oso (a unit of Big Basin Redwoods SP) and Castle Rock SP were able to support field trips from Title I schools through the Kids2Park program. Rancho del Oso hosted 9 Kids2Park field trips, and Castle Rock SP volunteers co-led 94 hours of Kids2Parks field trips.
- Thanks to docents stepping in to help with student tours at Bean Hollow SB, 2019 saw a 25% increase in the number of students it was able to reach for a total of 250 students that participated in 2019 tours.

- Each summer, Santa Cruz Mission SHP offers weekly junior ranger programs, which often have local children who consistently participate. In 2019, three of the long-time junior rangers who “aged out” from the program the previous year returned to the park for the summer as volunteers for the junior ranger program, inspiring young visitors as they lead them in games and other activities.



Big Basin Redwoods SP volunteers, around a mock campfire, teaching young visitors about the park on Founders Day, 2019 (photo by Bill Rhoades)

Safety

- Volunteers at the Boucher Hill fire lookout in Palomar Mountain SP made 81 smoke reports and interacted with over 10,600 visitors providing tours of the tower and interpreting the history of fire lookouts.
- Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area Off Highway Vehicle and Mounted Volunteer Patrol volunteers spent their weekends and holidays lending extra support to law enforcement by assisting with traffic control and acting as an extra set of eyes on trails and areas in the park that are not easily accessible by patrol vehicles.

- Countless other state park volunteers patrolled beaches, trails, and Off Highway Vehicle areas on horseback, bike, and by foot to support local law enforcement and provide helpful safety information to park visitors.



Crystal Cove SP Trail Assistant Volunteer Stephen Brown
(photo from Winter Bonnin)

Miscellaneous

- Asilomar SB and Conference Grounds tour docent, Bryndie Beach, collaborated with a Monterey Peninsula College Landscape design class to give students the opportunity to create landscape design for an area of the park.
- Volunteers were featured in various publications throughout the year, including Old Town San Diego SHP's fiber artist, Susan Hector, who was featured in *Fibre Focus* and Old Town San Diego SHP's blacksmith Beth Holmberg, who was featured in a San Diego Union Tribune's *Someone San Diego Should Know* article.
- Volunteers created and/or contributed to their parks' newsletters. Publications such as Railtown 1897 SHP's *The Turntable*, Columbia SHP's *Streets of Columbia*, and Half Moon Bay SB's *Dunes Dispatch* helped to keep volunteers (and staff) informed and educated of happenings in the park and historical information relevant to the park's interpretation.
- Volunteers were celebrated and honored at dozens of volunteer appreciation events that took place across the state throughout the year.

VIPP Operational Improvements

2019 also saw the continued roll out of California State Parks' statewide volunteer management database, using Better Impact's Volunteer Impact software. The software was acquired in 2018, based on the Transformation Team's identification of the need for a single volunteer management database to replace the various volunteer management programs and methods being used in parks previously.

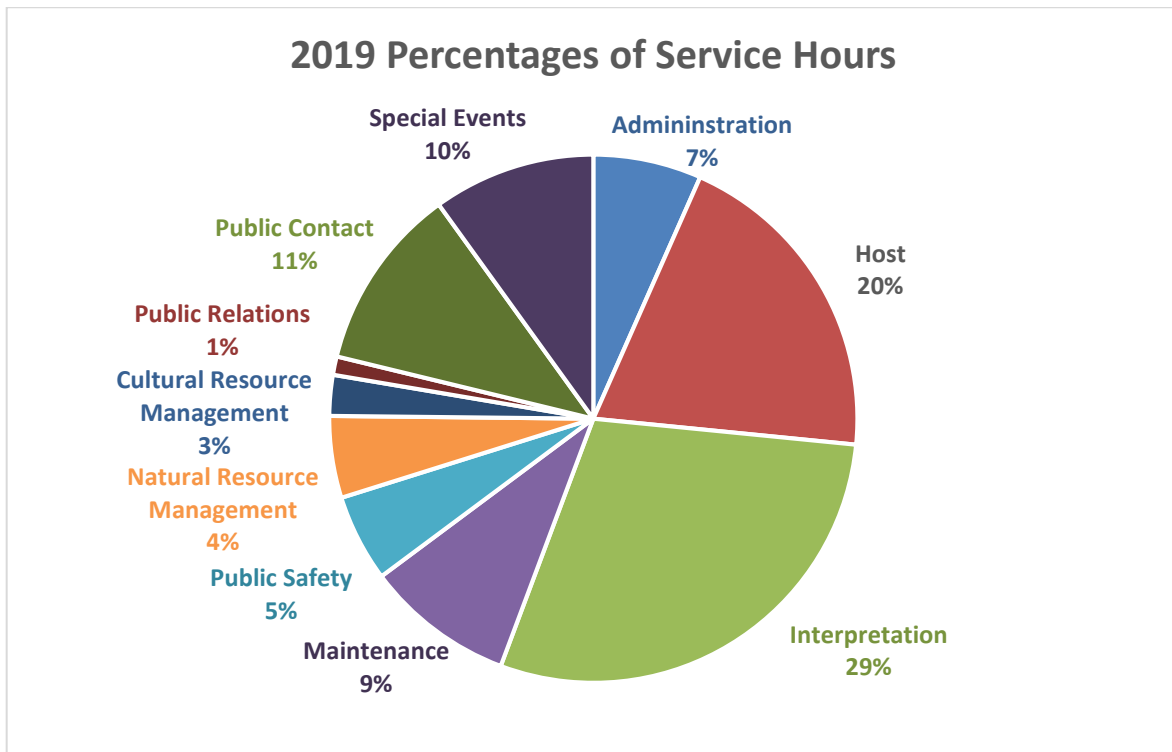
Parks are now using this database to track their volunteers' activities and hours, run reports to capture their volunteers' activity data, and to communicate with their volunteers.

It is expected that a majority of parks will fully implement Better Impact in all of their volunteer programs by the end of 2020, and that all 2020 VIPP hours will be logged in the database.

The database is helping to streamline volunteer coordination and management in the field, provide real-time information, and improve data collection on volunteers and their contributions.

In 2019, the VIPP also created a statewide volunteer coordinator and resource roster. The roster contains the names and contact information for each park's volunteer coordinators as well as the names of contacts at headquarters who can assist coordinators with various aspects of their volunteer program. This roster is regularly updated and e-mailed to volunteer coordinators, statewide.

2019 VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS PROGRAM
Distribution of Volunteer Hours Per Service Category



Category	Examples	Hours
Administration	Office and computer work, training	75,490
Campground/Park Host	Day/night operations	227,028
Cultural Resource Management	Archaeological/curatorial assistance, research	28,401
Interpretation	Nature walks, campfire programs, museum tours, school group tours	331,672
Maintenance/ Housekeeping	Trail work, litter removal, painting, construction	103,792
Public Contact	Visitor center, fee collection	128,192
Natural Resource Management	Habitat restoration and monitoring, wildlife surveys	57,031
Public Relations	Media contacts and marketing	12,831
Public Safety	Mounted assistance units, search and rescue, bike patrol, first aid	60,803
Special Events, Park Champion Events, and Other	Special Events, Park Champion events, other duties	113,289
Total Donated Hours		1,138,529

2019 by the Numbers: VIPP Spreadsheets and Five-year Comparisons



Monterey SHP Alta California Dance volunteers performing at the July 4th Living History Festival (photo by Aaron Gilmartin)

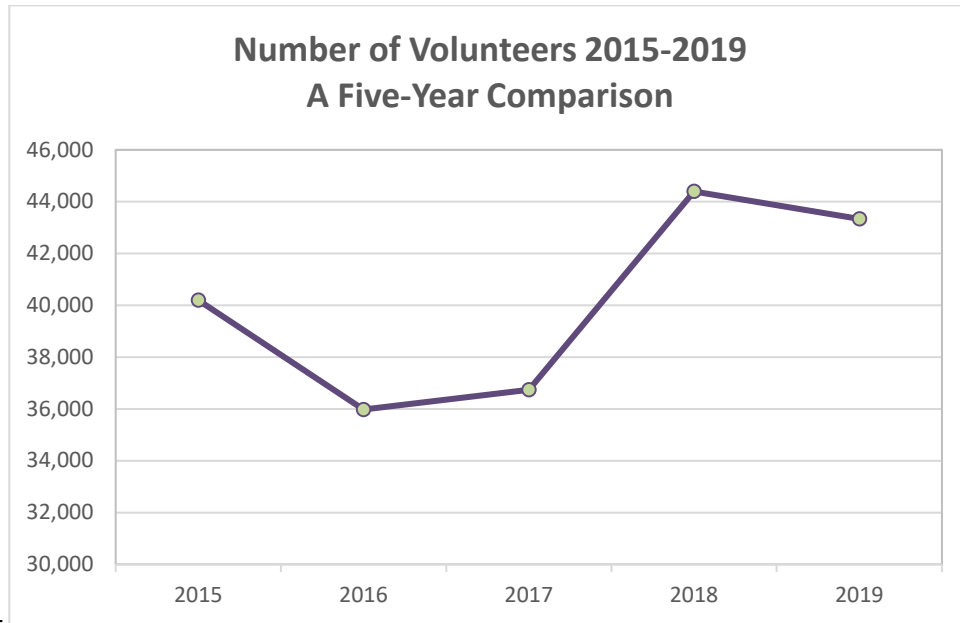
2019 Service Categories and Hours

District	Admin	Host	Interp	Maint	Public Safety	Nat. Res. Man.	Cult. Res. Man.	Public Relations	Public Contact	Spec. Events	Total Hours
Angeles	3,978	2,609	13,509	712	18,965	4,769	940	0	858	1,575	47,915
Bay Area	6,241	9,652	8,002	5,111	7,577	1,418	395	103	5,179	2,223	45,900
Capital	9,673	0	90,519	10,744	9	0	13,436	54	9,351	15,392	149,178
Central Valley	1,425	8,063	30,282	8,486	192	80	158	7,590	497	10,405	67,178
Channel Coast	100	36,375	12,582	9,997	0	1,387	0	0	5,800	5,570	71,811
Colorado Desert	2,869	3,540	1,771	2,631	3,113	13,671	6,176	0	5,787	2,310	41,866
Diablo Range	5,443	517	6,648	7,093	5,710	2,939	609	601	16,656	1,735	47,951
Division of Boating & Waterways	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,445	0	2,445
Gold Fields	1,347	8,967	16,414	11,543	4,807	200	158	58	4,583	2,579	50,656
Great Basin	998	121	2,692	874	287	301	78	0	1,570	344	7,265
Headquarters and OHP	1,281	0	0	0	0	144	1,434	0	51	0	2,910
Inland Empire	286	2,834	3,691	390	1,135	530	246	0	4,572	1,666	15,350
Monterey	12,600	11,636	24,357	8,187	0	5,676	376	184	5,367	6,578	74,961
North Coast Redwoods	517	18,655	2,335	2,882	169	1,931	1	0	5,499	28	32,017
Northern Buttes	1,480	7,915	5,323	1,246	201	36	708	813	1,647	2,016	21,384
Oceano Dunes	1,669	0	4,367	0	0	312	0	0	947	60	7,355
Ocotillo Wells	0	1,701	171	2,944	60	0	0	0	0	0	4,876
Orange Coast	1,329	15,917	10,510	7,851	7,671	2,669	200	600	5,224	45,788	97,759
San Diego Coast	8,734	21,125	22,270	6,292	0	6,011	237	39	10,400	2,922	78,029
San Luis Obispo Coast	5,154	19,150	13,619	1,434	900	7,688	783	0	13,670	567	62,965
Santa Cruz	4,555	21,158	46,780	11,226	8,545	3,536	1,608	506	10,113	8,733	116,760
Sierra	4,528	8,280	12,429	2,721	443	1,048	711	176	7,957	1,120	39,412
Sonoma-Mendocino Coast	1,284	28,813	3,403	1,429	1,019	2,685	148	2,107	10,020	1,678	52,586
Total Hours	75,490	227,028	331,672	103,792	60,803	57,031	28,401	12,831	128,192	113,289	1,138,528

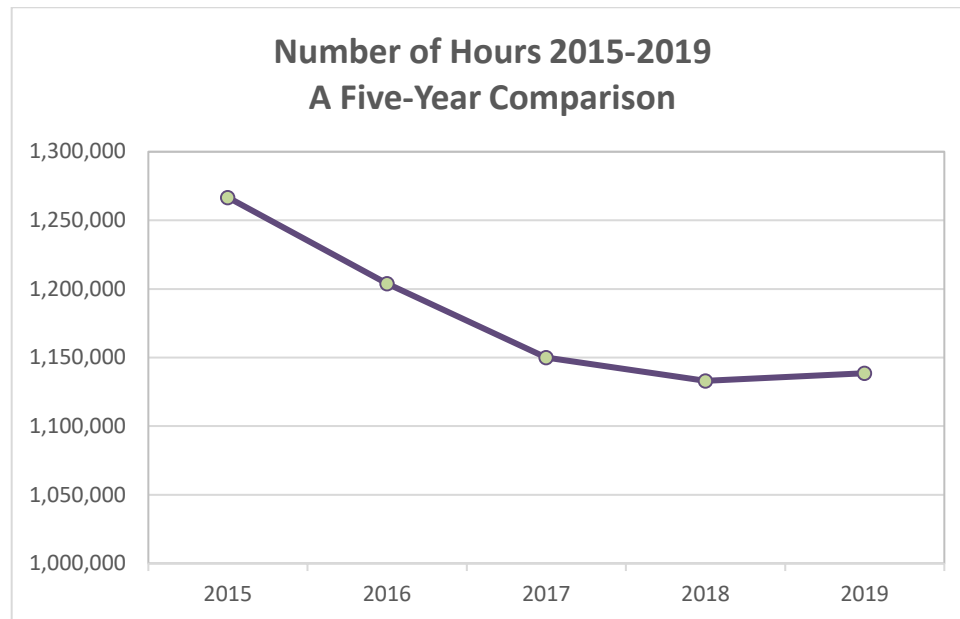
District/Program	Volunteers in Parks Numbers			Staff Hours	
	Total # Volunteers	Long Term	Short Term	Staff Hours	# Staff
Angeles	679	329	350	959	17
Bay Area	2331	445	1886	1,297	42
Capital	751	667	84	21,667	38
Central Valley	770	536	234	5,898	14
Channel Coast	363	261	102	6,790	32
Colorado Desert	515	440	75	3,100	13
Diablo Range	439	423	16	3,263	13
Division of Boating & Waterways	150	150	0	50	1
Gold Fields	459	320	139	5,200	10
Great Basin	236	158	78	587	20
Headquarters and OHP	16	15	1	10	1
Inland Empire	606	102	504	2,800	15
Monterey	639	411	228	6,825	66
North Coast Redwoods	304	274	30	4,912	15
Northern Buttes	296	79	217	1,604	24
Oceano Dunes	7690	90	7600	2,700	5
Ocotillo Wells	25	15	10	300	1
Orange Coast	20821	413	20,408	4,825	23
San Diego Coast	1510	622	888	6,640	50
San Luis Obispo Coast	760	672	88	7,054	44
Santa Cruz	3120	1045	2,075	16,794	52
Sierra	451	394	57	2,804	18
Sonoma-Mendocino Coast	402	238	164	2,000	4
Totals	43,333	8,099	35,234	108,078	518

A Five-year Look at the Volunteers In Parks Program: 2015–2019

Year	Number of Volunteers
2015	40,195
2016	35,977
2017	36,741
2018	44,392
2019	43,333



Year	Volunteer Hours Contributed
2015	1,266,695
2016	1,203,992
2017	1,150,086
2018	1,133,052
2019	1,138,528



2019 VIPP Photo Album



Pismo SB volunteer, Pete Weiner (photo by Jorge Moreno)



CSPF volunteers (Park Champions) at Half Moon Bay SB (photo from Ellen Tjosvold)



Red Rock Canyon SP volunteers Darcy Hubbard, Don Williams, Tim Gassaway, and Linda Gassaway (photo from Lou Figueroa)



Santa Cruz District college interns at Wilder Ranch SP's 4th of July event. Sandy Raya, Natalie Chamberlin, Sam Roberts, Sofi Forsman, and Ben Dorfman (photo from Linda Hitchcock)



Ano Nuevo SP volunteers Gus Bergnes, Cornelia Smart, Trevlyn Williams, and Valerie Powell (photo by Mike Merritt)



Sandy Petricka, "The Plant Lady" at Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds (photo by Lisa Bradford)



Pfeiffer Big Sur SP camp hosts. Left: Steve Raney, Bob Vesci, and Steve Snyder; Right: Karen Raney and Carrie Jernigan (photos by Betty Le Macpherson)





Staff, volunteers, and nonprofit partners from Los Angeles SHP: Luis Rincon, Jenny Aleman-Zometa, Marissa Llanez, Xochitl Manzanilla (with her Volunteer Poppy Award), Selene Castillo, Liza Xu (with her Volunteer Poppy Award) (photo from Selene Castillo)



Wilder Ranch SP Docents. Left: Tom and Libby Purdy with Emma, the sheep (photo from Sky Biblin). Right: Docent Class made up of Olivia Siemer, Valerie Siemer, Sian Burckett St. Laurent, Sullen Pritchard, Diane Koenig, Joan Rost, Anna Winn, Marion Towar, Ciro Alvino, and Carrie Niblett (photo by Ken Sievers)



Ashley Wemp, Chris Cross, Steve Watkins, Seacliff SB volunteers, preparing for Marine Protected Area survey (photo by Sandy Raya)

Cover Photo Credits

Top Row (L-R):

Marybeth MacLean, Año Nuevo SP Docent (photo by Jorge Moreno)

Linda Eglin, Half Moon Bay SB volunteer (photo by Emily Richards)

Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve SNR visitor center volunteers (photo by Jorge Moreno)

Bottom Row (L-R)

Barbara Virlingerie, Mounted Volunteer Patrol volunteer at Pismo SB (photo from Danielle Bronson)

Bridgett Davis, Amanda Moore, and Fanny Factory, volunteers at Colonel Allenworth SHP (photo by Steve Ptomey)

Jeff Allen and Robin Surmont, Old Sacramento SHP and California State Railroad Museum volunteers (photo by Adeline Yee)