

Visiting California Grasslands: Palo Corona Regional Park

by Meghan J. Skaer¹, Department of Plant Sciences, UC Davis, mjskaer@ucdavis.edu

Hidden in plain sight!

You can discover a recently protected gem of coastal prairie in Monterey County, just off Highway 1 south of Carmel. Up to 3 miles of newly restored trails will take you through coastal prairie, annual grasslands, and oak woodlands and yield sweeping views of the Carmel River Valley and Carmel coastline.

History

The conservation of this 10,000-acre park managed by Monterey Peninsula Regional Parks District (MPRPD) has been ongoing since public acquisition in 2004 and has included collaboration with the Big Sur Land Trust, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Sonoma State University, among others. Ecological research has played an important role in developing effective management of native and endangered species in the park, including native grasses and the endangered Smith's blue butterfly (*Euphilotes enoptes smithi*). This 7-mile-long park extended a protected wildlands corridor, which now stretches 70 miles between the Carmel River and Hearst Ranch in San Luis Obispo County.

Conservation and Management

The latest Grassland Monitoring Report, which can be obtained from MPRPD, is part of an ongoing, adaptive management program intended to ensure the health of the grassland. Palo Corona is host to a number of native grasses, including purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*), reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), june grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), meadow barley (*Hordeum brachyantherum*), and blue wildrye (*Elymus glaucus*), among others.

Obtaining Access

Palo Corona Park is open to the public via access permit reservation. Permit requests are processed on a "first come, first served" basis and should be submitted **at least 2 weekdays in advance** of planned hike. The District will issue up to 13 permits per day (1 per vehicle or walk-in/bike-in request) for the Highway 1 (west) entrance and up to 8 permits per day (1 per vehicle or walk-in/bike-in request) for the entrance from the Big Sur Land Trust's South Bank Trail (east). Permits will be issued a maximum of 30 days in advance of the requested permit date.

For more information or to request access, visit: www.mprpd.org/index.cfm/id/10/Palo-Corona-Regional-Park



Palo Corona Regional Park. Photo: Meghan Skaer

Directions

Via Highway 1 main entrance (west gate):

Take Highway 1 south past Rio Road intersection in Carmel; proceed south of Carmel River Bridge approximately 200 yards. Make the left-hand turn into the park entrance driveway. Do not block driveway. Limited parking is available on the shoulder of Highway 1.

Via the new South Bank Trail (east gate):

Parking is available in the new Big Sur Land Trust parking lot at 26700 Rancho San Carlos Road, which is about 0.40 miles from Carmel Valley Road, over the Carmel River bridge. **There is no parking along the road shoulders.** Turn right at the mailbox into the first small, gravel parking area. Parking is very limited and available on a first-come, first served basis.



¹Meghan Skaer is a doctoral candidate in the Ecology Graduate Group at UC Davis and aims to advance native grassland conservation through her dissertation work, which focuses on the ecology and management of invasive grassland weeds.