



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California
2021: Annual Manager's Report

California Coastal National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 was the sixteenth year of implementation of the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM) Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed CCNM is continuing efforts to implement protection, partnerships, site characterization, gateways, seabird/marine mammal conservation, and tidepool connections. The CCNM Board of Directors, responsible for setting the vision and management priorities for the CCNM, continued to manage the CCNM in FY21.

The BLM joined the State of California's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Statewide Leadership Team as a 'Collaborating Entity' in FY21. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed that commits BLM to share information and expertise for the purpose of ensuring successful implementation of the State's MPA network, including monitoring, enforcement, public information and education. BLM staff also participated in the development in the National Park Service's Arctic-Pacific Ocean Stewardship Strategy.

A new CCNM brochure was completed and distributed during FY21. In addition to information about the CCNM's rocks and islands, the new brochure includes information about the six onshore units that have been added to the Monument since the last brochure was created.



The BLM Arcata Field Office (ARFO) oversees management of the local rocks and islands and three onshore units of the CCNM: Lost Coast Headlands (453 acres), Waluph-Lighthouse Ranch (8 acres), and Trinidad Head Lighthouse (13 acres). The ARFO continued to implement the North Coast Chapter of the Seabird Protection Network in FY2021; BLM staff and community science volunteers monitored seabird populations and implemented measures to reduce disturbance.

The BLM Ukiah Field Office (UKFO) manages the 1,665-acres of the Point Arena-Stornetta unit of the CCNM and participated as a partner in the Garcia River Estuary Enhancement Project in FY21. The project will repair historic damage to the river by strategically placing two acres of refugia consisting of channels, ponds, and large woody debris. The earthwork along the active stream channel will allow juvenile coho salmon to increase their body weight before entering the Pacific Ocean that will increase survival rate and is anticipated to increase the Garcia River's rearing habitat ten-fold. Coho salmon are a traditional food for the Pomo people, as well as an important part of the North Coast's biodiversity and nutrient cycling. The UKFO also completed approximately 15 acres of fuels reduction work on the Point Arena-Stornetta unit in FY21.

The BLM Central Coast Field Office (CCFO) completed an amendment to the CCNM Resource Management Plan (RMPA) for the Cotoni-Coast Dairies unit. The implemented plan will provide for public access to an additional 5,843 acres of BLM coastal land. This RMPA was developed in conjunction with CCFO's ongoing resource management work, including evaluation of resources, existing land rights, and improvement of grazing infrastructure to develop capacity to achieve a balance between national monument conservation values and introduction of recreational activities to these lands. The CCFO continued to collaborate with external agencies and stakeholders for implementation of the RMPA. Fire preparedness efforts continued in FY2021 following the fire the previous year that burned 1,200 acres on the western side of Cotoni-Coast Dairies prior to containment. The BLM Central Coast Field Office installed a Remote Automated Weather Station (RAWS) in collaboration with the National Interagency Fire Center. The RAWS station provides benefits both for fire preparedness and for monitoring local weather and long-term climatic conditions, which is important while BLM manages on site natural resources (vegetation and wildlife) and newly developed recreational resources (trails and related infrastructure).

BLM staff at the 19.9-acre Piedras Blancas Light Station unit of the CCNM promoted socially distanced recreation and learning opportunities through public tours and various educational programs. Tours, with modifications to protect the health of volunteers and visitors, were reinitiated in February 2021. Volunteer docents were able to return to the light station to assist with tours and other projects. BLM staff experimented with variations of tours and responded to public feedback for future ongoing improvements to public events.

The BLM Palm Springs Field Office continued to manage the CCNM rocks and islands within the field office. Outreach efforts were suspended in FY21 because of concerns related to COVID-19 but are expected to resume in FY22.



Challenges

The increase in demand for outdoor recreation due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and related health and safety concerns continued in FY21 generally resulted in increased use of the CCNM, but also prevented BLM and its partners from conducting outreach to those coastal visitors. The volunteer pool for the Piedras Blancas Light Station dwindled and concerns related to COVID-19 further complicated volunteer recruitment and training, which is already challenging due to the remote location of the Light Station.

In March 2021, a 90-foot fishing vessel grounded along coastal rocks in Marin County and posed a pollution threat to CCNM resources. The BLM joined the multi-agency response as a Technical Advisor to the Unified Command and participated in planning efforts to remove the vessel and mitigate the impacts to coastal resources. The BLM entered into a Pollution Removal Funding Authorization with the US Coast Guard that authorized reimbursement from the Oil Spill Liability Fund or Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERLA) funds. Efforts will continue into FY2022.



Visitors

Visitation to the offshore rocks is difficult to quantify, but coastal visitation in California is in the millions annually. Uses of the CCNM include day hiking, nature walks, birding, use as an outdoor classroom for local schools, contemplation and relaxation.

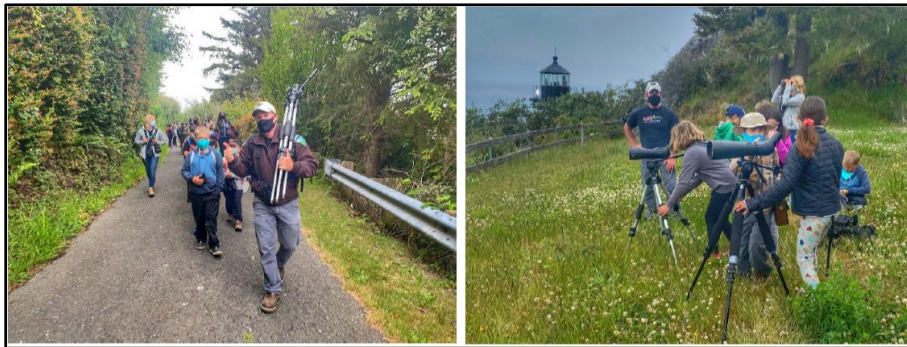
The BLM Arcata Field Office (AFO) worked with the City of Trinidad and Trinidad Coastal Land Trust (TCLT) and local recreation groups and outfitters in the CCNM Trinidad Gateway partnership to provide information and training about safe recreation, seabird safe information and how to communicate that with others. AFO also continued to collaborate with partners to engage volunteers in regular trail and beach stewardship days. The TCLT continued to develop the CCNM Ambassador program for the Gateway. They offer naturalist training with guest presentations from local expert scientists. Once the training is complete volunteers assist with CCNM focused guided hikes, land stewardship workdays, tabling and other special events.

The BLM Arcata Field Office also hosted a National Public Lands Day event at Lost Coast Headlands, removing trash and invasive plants from the Old Navy Base Trailhead. The CCNM Trinidad Gateway partners continued to open the lighthouse monthly and provide field trips of the historic lighthouse.

The BLM Arcata Field Office continued servicing bathrooms and garbage/recycling at Waluph-Lighthouse Ranch Unit of the CCNM. The existing trail is mowed annually in the spring and continues to be a popular dog walking location. The breeding Western Snowy Plovers make the beach below this site less desirable as leashes are required.

The BLM Central Coast Field Office began implementation of the recreational trail system at the Cotoni-Coast Dairies unit of the CCNM through collaboration with the Santa Cruz Mountains Trails Stewardship. A park ranger position was added to help achieve the adaptive management approach at Cotoni-Coast Dairies. Coordination with groups on site was challenging in FY21 given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Visitation to Piedras Blancas Light Station was limited to structured public access and tours were offered 3-5 days per week depending on the season. Summer “hike in” days, special events, and educational outreach programs were all provided by BLM Bakersfield Field Office staff and volunteers. Public tours resumed in February of 2021, and nearly every available tour day saw full reservations. Tour fees at the light station, once paid through a combination of in-person fee collection and reservations, transitioned to exclusive payment via the Recreation.gov website, allowing for better tour management, improved data collection, and “touchless” payment for visitors and staff. Tour visitation increased in FY2021 due to increased public interest in finding family-friendly outdoor recreation opportunities. 4,078 visitors enjoyed the new hybrid tour format offered in FY 21. The Piedras Blancas 4th Grade Outreach program resumed in September of 2021 after being cancelled in 2020, and the 22 4th graders of Cayucos Elementary School were the first to participate in the program in FY21.



Partnerships

In addition to the core managing partners, California State Parks and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) there are other resource management agencies with statutory and regulatory authority that allows them to operate within the entire area of the CCNM. In FY21 BLM staff joined the MPA Statewide Leadership Team, continued participation on the Executive Board of the Central California Coast Joint Venture and remained a member of both the Renewable Energy Intergovernmental California Task Force and West Coast Ocean Alliance.

There are nearly 40 CCNM Collaborative Partners working together to protect, conserve or restore CCNM resources within their local areas. Volunteers contribute to biological and cultural resource monitoring, garbage removal, invasive weed removal, and lead interpretive talks and hikes.

CCNM Gateways are communities that have been chosen to provide a sense of place for the monument, serve as visitor contact points, and link the CCNM with local communities and local initiatives. CCNM Gateways help develop community

involvement and a sense of community “ownership,” which aid in effectively managing the CCNM. The Trinidad and Point Arena Gateways (BLM Arcata Field Office and BLM Ukiah Field Office) serve as locations where visitors are able to receive educational and interpretive materials regarding the CCNM. The Conservation Lands Foundation worked with local stakeholders to attempt to get a CCNM Friends group and/or a CCNM Gateway to take root in Ferndale, the closest town to the Lost Coast Headlands.

The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association works with BLM under a Cooperative Agreement to facilitate educational outreach, interpretation, restoration and replication of historic buildings, and other programs at the light station. Other local organizations monitor CCNM resources throughout the state, including the monitoring of tidepool species through the Limpets Program (Pacific Grove Natural History Museum); U.C. Santa Cruz’s Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans and the Multi Agency Rocky Intertidal Network programs; and monitoring seals and sea lions, and roosting and nesting seabirds. Some of the groups active in FY21 include the Trinidad Land Trust, Sea Ranch Stewardship Task Force, Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, Friends of the Elephant Seals, and multiple local Audubon Society chapters.

The BLM continued to participate in Marine Protected Area Collaborative Chapters sponsored by the CDFW. BLM and the CCNM support the MPA Collaborative’s mission to empower California’s coastal communities in the stewardship of California’s MPAs. The Collaborative Chapters provide a forum for non-profit organizations, fishermen, tribal representatives, government staff, municipalities, academic institutions, scientists, teachers, and aquaria to work together to enhance understanding and compliance of MPAs. BLM staff also participated in the development in the National Park Service’s Arctic-Pacific Ocean Stewardship Strategy.



Science

BLM CCNM staff continued to participate in the Respect Wildlife Campaign to reduce human disturbance to coastal wildlife, and during FY2021 co-authored an article regarding the project: Turner, N.B., G.B. Bentall, C. Young, A.B. Johnson, and W.G. Standley. 2021. *The Respect Wildlife Campaign: A collaborative effort to reduce human disturbance to California’s coastal wildlife*. California Fish and Wildlife Journal 107(3):284-294. A web site and social media campaign will roll out in FY2022.

CCNM staff coordinated with California Audubon, California State Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife, to inventory and monitor black oystercatcher reproduction and limiting factors along the California coast. FY2021 was the last year of a 10-year inventory of black oystercatchers along the California coast, and BLM will be working with multiple partners to continue monitoring efforts on CCNM rocks and islands during FY2022, as the ten years of monitoring data are analyzed.

The BLM maintained a partnership with the US Geological Survey (USGS) to use remote sensing to monitor ashy storm-petrels, a crevice- and burrow-nesting seabird that breeds in the CCNM. The project is determining the presence or absence of ashy storm-petrels and their seasonal and inter-annual vocalization patterns using passive acoustic sensors. The results will assist with development of a standardized technique to monitor and track attendance trends among crevice- and burrow-nesting seabirds. This project implements one of the primary goals of the Ashy Storm-Petrel Monitoring Implementation Plan (BLM is a member of the Ashy Storm-Petrel Monitoring Working Group.)

The USGS also installed acoustic detectors at selected onshore and offshore locations to monitor coastal and offshore bat use. The USGS will process the acoustic data to identify species from echolocation signatures and quantify call activity rates, analyze processed acoustic data to estimate seasonal activity by species and habitats and relationships between bat activity and weather conditions.

In FY2020, the BLM provided funding for the analysis of archived aerial photographs of seabird breeding colonies to document the recent formation and growth of the Common Murre colony at Gull Rock (Sonoma County) and changes in the composition of nearby colonies. The final report was completed in FY2021: Capitolo, P.J. 2021. *An Update on the Abundance and Distribution of Breeding Common Murres, Brandt's Cormorants, and Double-crested Cormorants from Point Arena to Tomales Point, California, through 2020*. Unpublished report, Institute of Marine Sciences, University of California, Santa Cruz, California.

The BLM Arcata Field Office continued to implement the North Coast Chapter of the Seabird Protection, monitoring seabird populations and disturbance of nesting seabirds. Reduction of disturbance to seabirds, marine mammals, and cultural resources continues as the primary focus of interpretation, environmental education, and field staff involvement. The BLM also continued to participate in implementation of the efforts of the other Seabird Protection Network Chapters along the coast.



The BLM Arcata Field Office and partners continued restoration of the Trinidad Head Lighthouse throughout FY2021. Native plant funding was received to remove invasive plant species and replace with native plants.

The BLM Ukiah Field Office maintained its partnership in the Garcia River Estuary Enhancement project at the Point Arena-Stornetta Unit, which is being implemented in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. This project has the potential to bolster salmonid populations, strengthen local ecosystem resiliency, address environmental justice issues relating to traditional foods, and support government-to-government relationships.

In FY2021, BLM conducted the first small animal survey as a precursor to a longer term proposed predator/prey study at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. The annual National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/ National Marine Fisheries Gray Whale cow/calf survey returned to the light station for the 27th year after a cancellation in 2020. USGS personnel placed equipment and collected data on seismic movement at Piedras Blancas to trace and predict earthquake occurrence and magnitude. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo researchers conducted population surveys of the Piedras Blancas elephant seal rookery. Newborn seals were weighed, measured, and tagged to measure health and track the seals as they mature. BLM staff surveyed and mapped *Dudleya* species at the light station to get baseline data in response to recent poaching activity along the Pacific coast and new California state laws regarding these plants.

Climate Impacts

Drought, increased tsunami warnings, predicted long-term sea level rise, increased wildfires and longer and increasingly unpredictable wildfire season are all indicative of climate change affecting the coast. Sea level rise has the potential to fundamentally challenge some species, particularly the black oystercatcher, a bird occupying a narrow niche of onshore rocks. Wildfires have affected air quality and have forced an alertness

in case of immediate threat to the light station and the public. Road closures on the coastal highway (Highway 1) due to wildfires and subsequent mudslides during rains have affected local tourism and the ability of visitors to access the CCNM. Sea level rise also has the potential to literally undermine cultural resources. As sea levels increase, new portions of the land base will be subject to tidal fluctuations which may in turn result in archaeological resources sloughing and eroding into the ocean.



Social and Environmental Justice

The BLM provides educational and experiential opportunities to reach a variety of audiences. Staff work with schools at all levels but have made a concerted effort to reach out to lower-income schools to include them in educational outreach programs. The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association, for example, pays for transportation to BLM's free school outreach programs to alleviate pressure on schools' field trip budgets. Many of the students are underserved youth and first-generation Americans. Some have never been to the coast despite living only 20 miles away.

The BLM Arcata Field Office worked with the City of Trinidad and Trinidad Coastal Land Trust to develop a plan to enhance at least one ADA accessible CCNM vista location. The location will include CCNM interpretive signage.

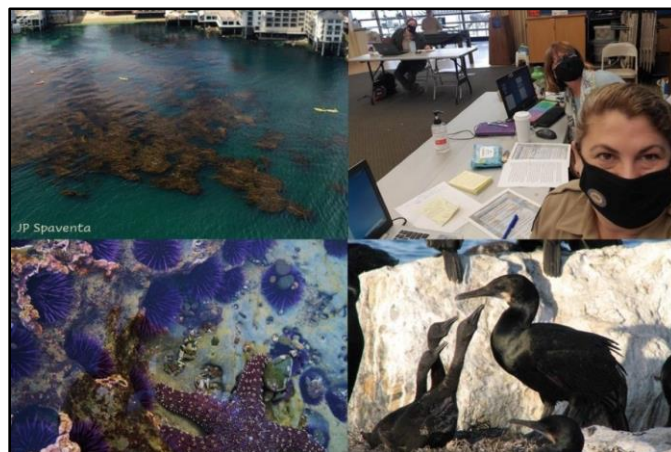
The Garcia River Estuary Enhancement project on the Point Arena-Stornetta Unit (described above) has the potential to bolster salmonid species which were and are an important subsistence food source for the Bokeya Manchester Band of Pomo Indians. By increasing the health of this fishery and salmonid stocks, at some point in-the-future, the local Tribal community will have increased access to this culturally important and nutritious food source.

Events

6th Annual Coastal Wildlife Disturbance Symposium: BLM assisted in planning this virtual event discussing the latest efforts to mitigate human-caused disturbance to an array of coastal species, with workshop on real-world issues, and networking with people from agencies and organizations throughout the state and beyond who are working to protect coastal wildlife.

Trinidad Appreciation Weekend: The Trinidad Gateway hosted this event that included mini-kayak tours, bi-lingual walks to the Trinidad Lighthouse, fishing off the pier, coastal clean-up, and seabird watching.

National Public Lands Day: The BLM Arcata Field Office hosted a Public Lands Day event at the Lost Coast Headlands unit of the CCNM focused on removal of trash and invasive plants.





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Central California District Office
Bureau of Land Management
Marina, CA 93933
Phone: 831-582-2200

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmcalifornia/albums/72157629681168810>

Report compiled by: William Standley, CCNM Natural Resource Specialist; Leisyka Parrott, Acting Assistant Field Manager, Ukiah Field Office, and Interpretive Specialist, Arcata Field Office; Mike Powers, Natural Resource Specialist, Central Coast Field Office; Jodie Robb Nelson, Acting Manager Piedras Blancas Light Station and Outdoor Recreation Planner, Bakersfield Field Office; Tracy Albrecht, Interpretive Specialist, Palm Springs Field Office

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