

A DESCRIPTION AND BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF VENTURA SECTOR STATE PARKS

One of the busiest sectors in the DPR Southern Division, the Ventura Sector of the Channel Coast District encompasses 12 miles of beaches, 7 separate park units including a natural preserve and the Channel Coast District Office. The states finest employees administer this fine tuned natural and recreational resource for Californians. Five field rangers, a supervising ranger and a plethora of volunteer hosts and park aids make up our work force.

Our sector from the southeast boundary begins in Oxnard, California with **MANDALAY STATE BEACH**. Owned by the State but operated by the City of Oxnard, this day use park/beach includes Mandalay Beach and 5th Street Beach. The 5th Street Beach area is located between a housing area and the SCE power plant. Because of its seclusion (5th Street Beach) our officers often investigate crimes of indecency, driving illegally off road and uncontrolled pets. Since the area has been recognized as a *snowy plover* nesting area, increased vigilance and enforcement have been necessary.

Next, “up” coast is **MC GRATH STATE BEACH** located on the upper west border of Oxnard. This campground, bordering the Santa Clara River Natural Preserve, contains 174 developed sites, an employee housing area and the bulk of our campground hosts. Historically, McGrath State Beach was part of the original McGrath Ranch properties (1,337 acres) purchased by Irish settler Dominick McGrath in 1875. A lucrative “deal” in the late 1950’s allowed the State to purchase the beach front property and Santa Clara River Mouth. The campground was opened in 1961 to the public. Each summer visitor services interpreters (i.e.: SIS, Rangers, Lifeguards, Park Aid and Guest Speakers) provide the visiting public with three campfires and three nature walks weekly, daily Pre Jr. Rangers, Junior Rangers and spontaneous demonstrations by Rangers on patrol. Our SIS / Bat Specialist, Kris Mashburn presents her bat program on a weekly basis. After 10 years it is still a #1 hit at the campground and according to Kris, a reason why many folks return. This year marks the return of the Park Chaplain Program and will include Sunday morning services at the campfire center. McGrath is also known as a popular “airfield” and nesting area for the rare and endangered *Snowy Plover* and *Least Tern*. These federally endangered birds receive an incredible amount of attention and TLC by staff to ensure their survival and propagation. To that end they are doing quite well with their numbers increasing steadily. Common criminal issues are homelessness and the accompanying usual issues: misdemeanor and felony warrants, non-payment of fees, illegal narcotics possession and use, vehicle registration violations and theft. We also deal with a huge influx of minors from the San Fernando Valley /Santa Clarita area during Spring Break. For six weeks during the spring, this (minors in possession, DUI, all-night parties, drug violations, etc.) is an all encompassing task.

Bordering McGrath State Beach on the northwest is the **SANTA CLARA RIVER ESTUARY NATURAL PRESERVE**. For years Ventura Visitor Services staff attempted to gain preserve status for the ecologically sensitive confluence of the Santa Clara River and the Pacific Ocean. Finally in 1977 “Ranger Rick” Sermon created a “Preserve” proposal that was accepted and thus history was made. Because of the status change from State Park to Natural Preserve, careful management and a high degree of protection, the area has had a chance to recover over the last 25+ years. The preserve now provides a safe and peaceful haven for endangered species including migratory/ resident waterfowl, invertebrates, estuary fishes/amphibians and native plant life. The area is featured as a “must see” for birders throughout the world.

Two miles north of the Preserve lies **SAN BUENAVENTURA STATE BEACH** within the city limits of Ventura. SBSB is considered the #1 draw for recreational and special event visitors to the City. Stretching along 2 miles of beach, the park is bordered on the west by the longest wooden pier in California (originally built in 1872) and on the east by the Ventura Harbor Marina.

Aside from the obvious draw of the ocean and related sports, the actual grassy picnic area boasts a widely used special event area and a retreat for “stressed out” locals and Los Angelenos alike during the summer months. Common issues are illegal transient camps with related problems i.e.: illegal camping, drugs, fights and public intoxication.

Within the confines of San Buenaventura State Beach but separated by the 101 freeway, **ALLESANDRO LAGOON** is a wildlife oasis next door to one of the busiest thoroughfares in California. Wildlife groups and high school biology classes monitor the Lagoon. Other than domesticated waterfowl being abandoned, happily I might add, the Lagoon area acquires few problems and is sequestered by a cyclone fence protecting the inhabitant wildlife from disturbance.

Bordering the extreme north of the city of Ventura lies a sub-portion of Emma Wood State Beach, the **VENTURA RIVER GROUP CAMP**. Union Pacific Railroad, the 101 freeway and the Ventura River border the park. Considered a “gem” of the park System, the four-sectioned Group campground also includes a Hike and Bike camp, day use area, secluded stretch of cobble beach, two host sites and two distinct nature trails. A highlight of the park is two remnant WWII 155 mm cannon foundations half buried in the sand at the tide line. These cannons were established in 1942 to fend off potential attacking Japanese forces after the attack on “Pearl”. The Group Camp is mainly utilized by youth, church and large family groups where 30 to 120 people can gather in one place for weekends or weeklong retreat camping trips. Extensive native re-vegetation has been a focus along this riparian campground. Common issues include lewd and lascivious behavior, public intoxication, illegal homeless camps, prostitution, fugitives and individuals possessing felony warrants, illegal narcotic possession/UI/sales. However since the “enacting” of the much needed Superintendents Order # 910-02-29 and #910-02-27 consumption of alcoholic beverages within the day use area and limited hours and days within hike and bike camping have reduced the crime rate considerably. Recently an experimental and temporary (30 day) homeless “tent city” referred to as *River Haven* was approved by State and City officials providing shelter for current river bottom dwellers. The program was short lived as the recent deluge of winter storms wrecked havoc on the park. The Ventura River overflowed and the *River Haven* “Tent City” was evacuated.

Recognized in the classic surf film *Big Wednesday* as “Overhead”, **EMMA WOOD STATE BEACH - NORTH BEACH** has been a favorite of surfers, campers, beachcombers and fisherman since 1957. Until that time, the park was actually a roadway and part of the Highway 1 interstate coastal route. That year the Emma Wood property was deeded to the State of California for specific use as a public park and campground. The park currently contains 90 primitive campsites (for RV use only) and a popular day use area. Most of our visitors are comprised of locals and folks from the LA area/San Fernando Valley and desert areas looking to “cool off” and enjoy epic sunsets. Since the adoption of an evening gate closure, campground host and elimination of tents in the campground, the crime rate has been reduced by 80%.

State Park Ranger / Peace Officer