

Center for State of the Parks



CABRILLO NATIONAL MONUMENT

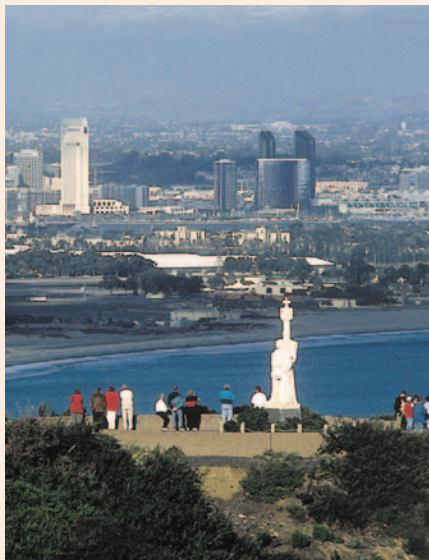
SNAPSHOT

Cabrillo National Monument, located on the tip of the Point Loma peninsula in San Diego, California, is home to a wealth of natural and cultural resources. This 288-acre park offers visitors the opportunity to explore the secret world of shoreline tide pools; enjoy spectacular views of the San Diego Bay; spot migrating birds and gray whales; and explore historic structures that include the 19th-century Old Point Loma Lighthouse (one of the first built on the West Coast) and 20th-century military structures. In 2007, about 750,000 people visited the park.

HISTORY

The area in and around present-day San Diego has supported humans for at least the last 12,000 years. Some of the first inhabitants include the Kumeyaay people, known as The Fifth Nation. Spanish explorers first arrived in the mid-16th century, but they did not gain significant control over the area until they established missions in the late 1700s. At that time, San Diego became a bustling port that drew commerce and peoples from distant shores.

With the conclusion of the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, ownership of California was transferred to the U.S. government. The Gold Rush of 1849 lured tens of thousands of



American immigrants to the West Coast, as did California's statehood in 1850. With a new coast to protect, the U.S. government began to scout areas that would aid in the defense of California. Point Loma peninsula, with its 422-foot ridge that offered panoramic views of the harbor and sea, formed a natural barrier to the port of San Diego. These attributes made the peninsula an ideal location for coastal defense, and it was set aside as a military reservation in 1852. Two years later the Old Loma Point Lighthouse was built to help guide ships; it was replaced in 1891 by a lighthouse that is still in use today. The government continued to construct military installations on Point Loma, which were used extensively during the 20th century, providing vital coastal and

harbor defense systems during the two World Wars.

In 1913, President Woodrow Wilson set aside a one-half-acre monument on the Point Loma peninsula to commemorate 16th-century explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. Over the years, Cabrillo National Monument has grown to include an additional 160 acres of land and 128 acres of rocky intertidal area. The park also manages the surrounding waters to a distance of 900 feet from the mean lower low water tide line, and it co-manages the 640-acre Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area.

THREATS

- The park might be forced to cancel two of its popular annual events—the Cabrillo Festival and the Whale Watch Weekend and Intertidal Life Festival—partly because it does not have funds to hire needed interpreters or to cover other expenses to host these events. In 2006 and 2007, the U.S. Navy hosted the Cabrillo Festival on Naval Base Point Loma, and the Cabrillo Festival, Inc.—a community nonprofit group—took on greater responsibility for producing the festival. It is unknown if this support will continue. Also in 2006 and 2007, the Cabrillo National Monument Foundation coordinated fundraising and received grants and donations to put on the Whale Watch Weekend and Intertidal Life Festival. Funding for these events is being evaluated on a year-by-year basis.



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- San Diego Bay is one of the most polluted bodies of water in the United States, a major concern for the park. Heavy metals, endocrine disrupters, and carcinogens—all pollutants known to exist in the bay—may be carried by ocean currents to the shores around Cabrillo.
- While ocean breezes help protect the peninsula from some air pollution, smog limits views of the San Diego skyline, the Coronado Islands, the Cuyamaca Mountains, and migrating whales. The monument's stunning view of the bay is a major tourist attraction, but between 2001 and 2006, visitation dropped by 22 percent. Fewer visitors translate to lower revenues and less funding for conservation projects.
- Historically, 19 species of reptiles and amphibians resided on Point Loma. More than one-third are now gone. The health of these species is directly tied to ecosystem health; their decline signals overall degradation of the environment.
- The park needs a historic resource study, updates to the administrative history and cultural bibliography, a complete archaeological assessment, an archival assessment, and a new historic structures management plan. Also needed are historic furnishing plans for coast defense structures, which would inform and guide interpretive exhibits. In turn, interpretation would help visitors make emotional and intellectual connections with the coast defense structures, the people who staffed them, and the roles those people played in defending San Diego during World War II.
- A number of projects are stalled as a result of staffing and funding shortfalls: non-native vegetation removal; periodic assessments of the condition and relative abundance of park

mammals, sensitive/rare plants, and other taxa; and development of a thorough species inventory for both marine and terrestrial invertebrates. In addition, there are not enough interpreters on staff to serve visitors on busy weekends and holidays.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- **Cultural resources care improved.** A new storage facility for the park's museum collection and archives was recently completed, and the Old Point Loma Lighthouse has been restored to reflect daily life in the late 19th century. The newly reconstructed Assistant Keepers' Quarters features an exhibit about the history of Point Loma's three lighthouses. Much-needed staff were also recently acquired—a historian, historic preservation specialist, and museum technician.
- **Non-native plants removed and native species reintroduced.** Staff and volunteers have wrestled with non-native, invasive vegetation at the park for the last 20 years. Recent restoration successes include reintroducing native vegetation around the Old Point Loma Lighthouse and removing most of the aggressive ice plant from the park. Some native plants are being propagated in a greenhouse for use in future reintroduction efforts.
- **Collaborative management flourishes.** The monument shares the peninsula with the U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, Fort Rosecrans Cemetery, and the Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant. With these and two additional entities—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game—it co-manages the 640-acre, largely undeveloped Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area. "Good Neighbor" and "Working Group" meetings are held as a way

to foster communication and collaboration among the various stakeholders.

ABOUT NPCA AND CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Cabrillo National Monument, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on Cabrillo National Monument, contact Ron Sundergill, Director of NPCA's Pacific Regional Office, at 415.989.9921, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/cabr. For media inquiries, please contact Lindsay Bartsh, NPCA media relations manager, at 415.989.9921 or lbartsh@npca.org. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit www.npca.org/take_action.