



Butano State Park

1. 60 seconds

Butano State Park, situated in the Santa Cruz Mountains midway between Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay, is prized for the diversity of its habitats and wildlife, and for the depth of its solitude. The park was created in 1957 to protect California's coast redwoods from logging. Today's visitors will discover a quiet canyon filled with towering second- and third growth- redwood trees, babbling creeks, and more.

The human and natural histories of Butano State Park are closely linked. Though the indigenous people profoundly altered the natural landscape, they also remained intimate with it and dependent on it. When the first Spanish explorers reached California after 1769, what is now Butano State Park lay within the territory of the Quiroste tribe—a large group of Native Americans who had settled the area many thousands of years before. The Quiroste hunted game, harvested plant foods, and in Autumn, burned large tracts of meadowland to manage the foods they ate, which improved plants that fed deer, pronghorn, and tule elk they hunted. Their once-managed landscape has reverted to wilderness.

In the late 1860's, three families resided in the area—the Jacksons, Taylors, and Mullens. These settlers and a man named Purdy Pharis logged the canyon, transforming the old-growth redwood forest into a variety of second- and third growth- habitats. Stumps and non-native vegetation are now the only signs of the logging that finally ended in the mid-1950s.

Those who take the time to stroll along a park trail or set up a tent will discover the beauty and solace of one of California's least-known parks. The park features 40 miles of hiking trails that wind through over 4,000 acres of canyons and uplands. Scattered throughout are patches of oak woodland, wet riparian, and sunny chaparral ecosystems. Among the diverse wildlife and plants in the park, hikers may spot woodpeckers, newts, and flowering calypso orchids in springtime.

2. 180 seconds additional

Threats

Redwoods get about 30 percent of their vital moisture from fog. As the earth's climate warms, reduced fog threatens the redwoods' survival.

Some potential effects of climate change on Butano SP may include:

- Habitat loss and shifts: The combination of warmer temperatures and drier summer conditions may eliminate some plant communities and animal habitat, greatly fragment other habitat, and cause some habitats to shift. The moisture-dependent wetland, riparian, and redwood forest plant communities could be especially affected at Butano SP. Since the park is in the southern end of the coast redwood's range, these trees are especially vulnerable to the effects of warming.
- Fire danger: As the climate warms and possibly dries, wildfires may become more frequent in some areas of California. Increased fire could cause wildlife losses and contribute to poor air quality in the park.
- Severe storms and flooding: Climate change may alter the frequency and intensity of winter storms. Storms and resultant flooding and mudslides could damage park infrastructure and access roads.
- Fishery habitat change: Over the next century, spawning streams may warm above temperatures suitable for cold water fish such as salmon and steelhead. Reduced summer stream flow due to evaporation will also cause a loss of fish habitat.

Wildlife/Trees

Butano State Park harbors six distinct natural communities—each named for its most prominent natural features.

- Redwood/Douglas-Fir Forest— Much of the interior of Little Butano Canyon is dominated by towering redwoods and mossy Douglas-firs. Huckleberry bushes top the stumps of fallen redwoods. Redwoods hollowed out by ancient forest fires provide homes for bats. In wet weather, watch out for newts and banana slugs along the trails through the ground cover. Look for tiny winter wrens, nearly invisible until their resonant songs give away their locations among the logs and stumps.
- Coastal Grassland—The entrance area is grassland dominated by bush lupine and coyote brush. Blue-eyed grass and coastal suncups grow here. Sunrise and sunset are the best times to see such predators as bobcats and coyotes.
- Alder Woodland—The first half-mile of Little Butano Creek is shaded by alders. Under their canopy, blackberries, stinging nettles, elderberries, dogwoods and willows provide food and shelter for insects, small mammals, reptiles and a variety of birds. Trout, crayfish and endangered red-legged frogs live in and around the creek. Look for flowering currants, twinberries, thimbleberries, salmonberries, osoberries, gooseberries and baneberries.
- Oak Woodland— On the side of the canyon above the park entrance, grasslands give way to a grove of live oaks. Bright orange chanterelle mushrooms sprout from the decayed oak tree litter. The duff provides a garden bed for honeysuckle, coffeeberry, blackberry and poison oak. Look for arboreal salamanders on the ground and chickadees and warblers overhead.

For more information go to this link:

<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/536/files/ButanoWebBrochure2014.pdf>

Value as water supply

The park has separate septic systems serving the visitor center, the picnic area, the Ben Ries Campground, trail camp, and staff residence buildings. Little Butano Creek supplies water that is processed in a water treatment facility east of the campground. From there potable water flows by gravity to the entrance area facilities. Downstream of the visitor use area, within the park, is a small dam on Little Butano Creek. The dam allows the diversion of a limited amount of water from the creek between November 1 and the end of April each year by off-site agricultural lessees of the Peninsula Open Space Trust, which owns property west of the park.

Local organizational involvement

In 1921, the Sempervirens Club, the Save the Redwoods League and the Sierra Club all joined the efforts to preserve the land, and spent over two decades advocating for the land's protection. The property was acquired by California State Parks in 1956. In 1949, the Sierra Club held club campaigns to preserve South Calaveras Grove in the Sierra and Butano Forest in the Coast Range. At the suggestion of Director Norman Livermore, the club sponsored a High Sierra Wilderness Conference, the first of 14 biennial wilderness conferences.

Current situation

Butano State Park camping— Hidden amongst the redwoods the park provides 21 drive-in campsites, 18 walk-in campsites and a backcountry trail camp with 8 campsites. Restrooms with running water are provided in the main campground. Drinking water is available at the park in both the main campground and the day-use areas.

Trail Camping—Backpackers may camp only at designated sites.

Hiking—Inviting walks allow visitors to photograph mushrooms in January, spot newts in February and orchids in March, or simply to stroll among the alders on the Six Bridges Trail.

Picnicking—Seven picnic sites are equipped with picnic tables and upright barbecue grills. Parking and pit toilets are located nearby.

Guided nature walks and weekend campfire programs are offered during the summer.

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

3. Additional resources: sources, links, photos, maps

https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=536

<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/21299/files/butano%20prelim%20gp%20exist%20cond%20thru%20issues.pdf>

<https://sempervirens.org/butano-state-park/>

<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/536/files/ButanoWebBrochure2014.pdf>

<http://vault.sierraclub.org/history/timeline.aspx>