

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Salinas River

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



*The gulls' raucous warnings
are heard above the din of
thunderous waves crashing
onto shore . . . 50 feet away,
protected by sand dunes,
butterflies dance gracefully
from bloom to bloom.*



History



Smith's blue butterfly
Photo © Dale Hameister



Monterey spineflower
Photo: Rachel Hurt/
USFWS

At just 367 acres, the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge boasts a colorful mosaic of coastal dunes, beaches, salt marshes, saline ponds, grasslands, and riparian habitats. During the spring and fall migrations, thousands of birds traveling along the Pacific Flyway flock to the refuge, seeking shelter and food in one of the few remaining wetlands along the central California coast, 20 miles north of Monterey. Established in 1973, Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge protects several threatened and endangered species, including Western snowy plover, Smith's blue butterfly, and Monterey spineflower.

The earliest inhabitants of the Salinas Valley were Native Americans known as the Ohlone. Spanish settlers arrived in the valley in



Ohlone winter camp
Illustration © Mark Hyllkema

1793 and quickly established a profitable cattle ranching industry. It wasn't until the late 1860s when the valley's fertile soils for farming were discovered. With the expansion of the Southern Pacific Railroad, the draining of wetlands, and more efficient agricultural techniques, commercial farming flourished.

To accommodate this booming industry, more than 90 percent of Salinas River Valley's original wetlands had been drained. Wetlands that now make up the refuge were spared from drainage because of their close proximity to the ocean, susceptibility to flooding, and military ownership; however, portions of the grasslands were converted to artichoke fields.

During World War II, the U.S. Navy established coastal defense fortifications on what is now the refuge. After the war, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Army occupied the property. In 1973, the entire property was transferred to the Department of the Interior, where it was managed under a cooperative agreement with the California Department of Fish and Game. By the mid 1980s, growing awareness of the refuge's importance as habitat for sensitive species prompted a shift toward more active management and protection of its resources. In 1991, the Service began managing the area as a national wildlife refuge.

- Be safe and prepared. The climate varies in Monterey Bay throughout the year. Fog, rain, wind or unexpected temperature drops can occur. Check the local weather forecast before you visit and wear appropriate clothing. Sturdy footwear, water, and sun screen are recommended. Be prepared to encounter ticks and mosquitoes.



Minimize disturbance to nesting western snowy plovers.

Photo © Jack Haverty

- Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife. Use binoculars or spotting scopes for a closer look and observe from the sidelines.
- Quick movements and loud noises will scare away most wildlife. Staying quietly in one location will let wildlife adjust to your presence.

- To minimize the disturbance of nesting plovers, stay on the beach for shorter periods of time during the spring and summer; or stay in the area of wet sand. Your presence may keep adult snowy plovers away from their nests



Use binoculars or spotting scopes for a closer look and observe from the sidelines.

Photo: USFWS

- or chicks for a significant amount of time.
- Be aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you will see.
- Leave young animals alone. Even though you may think they are abandoned, a parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave.
- For the protection of plants and wildlife, respect closed-area signs.

Wildlife Calendar

Visiting the refuge is rewarding year-round. Each season brings different wildlife viewing opportunities.

Winter



Northern shoveler

Photo: USFWS

Wintering waterfowl populations on the refuge vary from 500 to 3,000 depending on the availability of water. From November through January, peak numbers of diving ducks and shorebirds, such as ruddy ducks, gadwall, and Northern shoveler, can be seen in the wetlands from the walking trails.

Spring and Fall



White-crowned sparrow

Photo: USFWS

The dunes are awash with color as native shrubs and flowers are in bloom. Western snowy plovers stake out favorite spots to nest, and the spectacles known as the spring and fall migrations bring thousands of birds to the refuge. In addition to ducks and shorebirds, peregrine falcons, white-tailed kites, and ospreys can be seen along the River Loop Trail. Spring migrants like the American goldfinch and Wilson's warbler are a common sight, and fall migrants including the yellow warbler and white-crowned sparrow are visible along the River Loop Trail and parts of the Beach Trail.

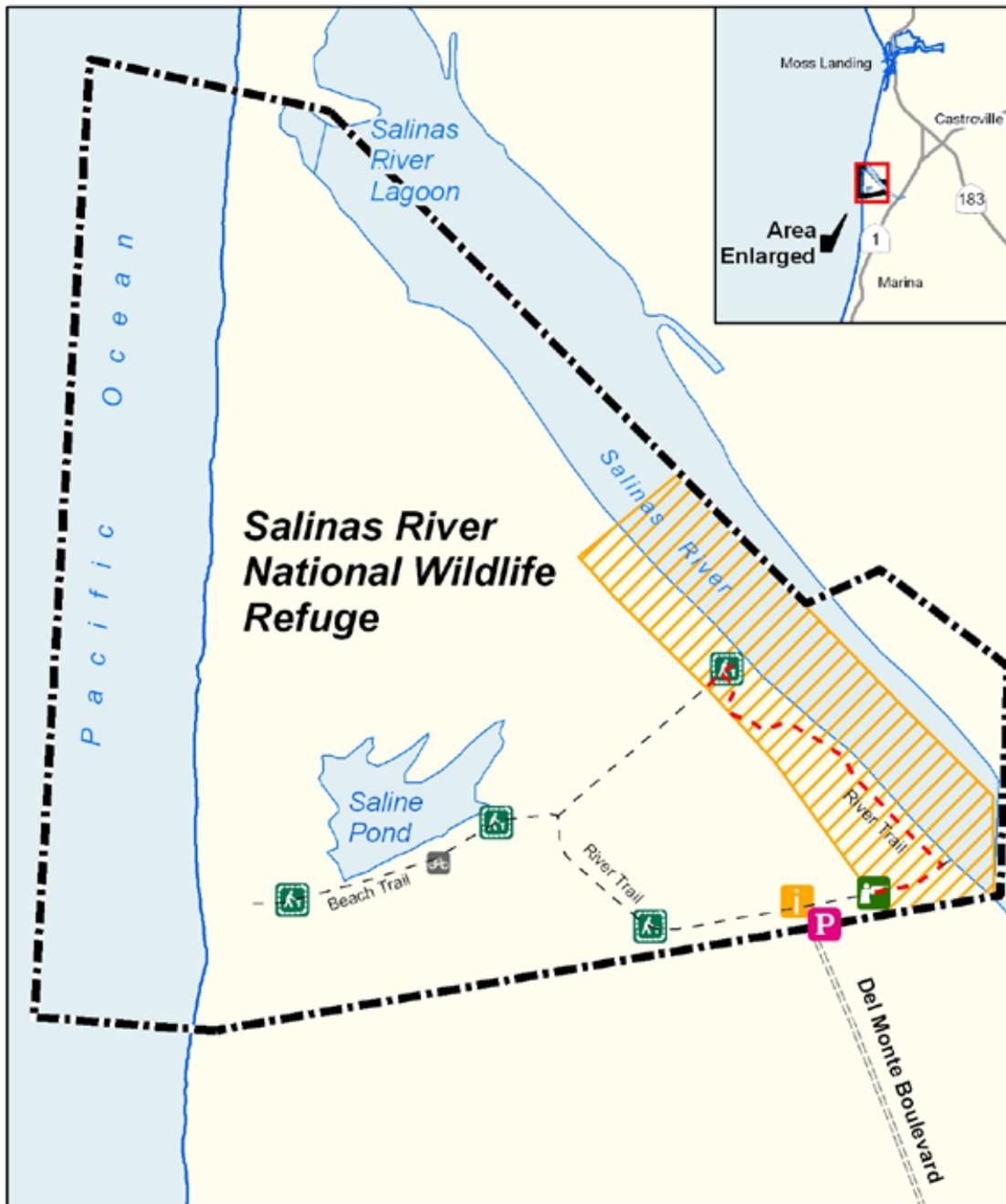
Summer



Western snowy plover on nest

Photo © Dave Dixon

By April and May most of the migrant birds have flown north to nest, while residents choose to nest on the refuge. Some nesting waterbirds include American avocet, killdeer, and Caspian tern. Western snowy plovers and their young chicks can be seen on the beach, in the dunes, and along the edge of the saline pond. In the upland areas along the River Loop Trail, nesting barn and cliff swallows, common yellowthroat, and song sparrows are common. Birds such as gulls, herons, and egrets can be seen year-round feeding and roosting on the refuge. Some non-breeding birds that visit the refuge are brown and white pelicans. As many as 1,400 pelicans have been seen roosting at the river mouth during the summer.



- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Bike Rack - No bikes beyond this point
- Trail closed during hunt season

- Information Kiosk
- Interpretive Signs
- Waterfowl Hunt Kiosk
- Waterfowl Hunt Area



Salinas River



Brown pelican
Photo: USFWS

Rivers carve channels, carry and deposit sediments and create valuable habitat as they journey to the ocean. The Salinas River where the ocean waters mix with fresh river waters, provides important roosting sites for California brown pelicans, nesting sites for the threatened Western snowy plover, and feeding areas for fish such as the Sacramento blackfish and Sacramento sucker.

Riparian

Riparian habitats on the refuge form a narrow band adjacent to the Salinas River and on islands within the river. These types of habitats help slow down bank erosion and are used heavily by wildlife. Ospreys, American kestrels, red-tailed hawks, and merlins can be seen foraging along the river and roosting in this habitat.



Osprey (right)
Photo: Glenn and Martha Vargas © CA Academy of Sciences

Saline Pond

The saline pond is flooded periodically by the tide and the Salinas River, which maintains the balance of fresh and salt water in and around its banks. Many waterbirds such as Caspian terns and mallards can be seen around the saline pond feeding in the mud or nesting on the bank.

Caspian terns
Photo © Bill Purcell



Salt Marsh

Salt marsh is one of the most productive habitats on Earth and is the foundation of many food webs. Large shorebirds, dabbling ducks, herons, and egrets frequent these habitats, as well as mammals such as muskrats and deer mice.



Pickleweed (right)
Photo: Larry Wade/USFWS

Dunes



Pink sand verbena
Photo: Rachel Hurt/USFWS

Sand dunes are highly dynamic—their position and form constantly shifting in response to wind, wave erosion, and sand supply. Native dune plants like the seacliff buckwheat and coast buckwheat rely on these constant changes for its survival. Without these plants, the endangered Smith's blue butterfly would cease to exist. Other wildlife species that occur in this habitat include garter snakes and California legless lizards.

Beach

At low tide, sandy bottoms of beach are exposed for shorebirds to forage for crabs, worms, and other



Sanderlings
Photo: Larry Wade/USFWS

invertebrates. Many bird species, including gulls, Western snowy plovers, and sanderlings also use the beaches for roosting, feeding and/or nesting.

Grasslands



Garter snake
Photo: Rachel Hurt/USFWS

Comprised mostly of coyote brush and grasses such as wild rye and California barley, these uplands on the refuge are one of the largest areas of open upland habitat in the Monterey Bay area. The uplands provide habitat for many animal species such as the gopher snake, black-tailed jackrabbit, and California quail.

Hours: The refuge is open year-round during daylight hours.

Volunteers: Volunteers are an important component of the refuge's success. They work alongside refuge staff contributing to wildlife management activities and a variety of maintenance duties. Please contact us for more information or to volunteer.

Facilities: Existing facilities are limited to an isolated, unpaved parking area and several walking trails. Please help keep our trails clean and take your trash home with you. There are no restrooms, drinking water, or picnic facilities at the refuge. While the refuge is open year-round, access is difficult during the rainy season due to mud on the entrance road.



Brush rabbit
Photo © Larry Sansone

Pets: Due to the sensitive nature of the wildlife living on the refuge, and for protection of endangered species, pets are not allowed on the trails or elsewhere in the refuge. This includes horses and dogs.

Wildlife Observation/Photography: Wildlife observation and photography are encouraged on refuge trails and along the beach during daylight hours. Hundreds of animal species can be found on the refuge. Please stay on the trails at all times.

Western fence lizard
Photo: Larry Wade/
USFWS



Hunting: Waterfowl hunting is allowed on designated areas of the refuge during waterfowl hunting season subject



American wigeon
Photo: USFWS

to both State and Federal regulations. Firearms are permitted only while engaged in legal hunting activities during the established season. Hunting dogs are permitted during the hunt season in the designated waterfowl hunt area only. Please contact the refuge for more

details and/or a copy of the Salinas River NWR Waterfowl Hunting brochure available at <http://www.fws.gov/sfbayrefuges/salinasriver/huntbrochure.pdf>

Access to Surf Fishing: The refuge provides access to surf fishing on the beach. Fishing in the Salinas River is not allowed.

Special Use Permits: Special Use Permits are required for any activities not listed above, including research and all commercial activities. Permit proposals may be submitted by contacting the refuge office during business hours.

Directions: From Monterey: Go north on U.S. Highway 1 approximately 11 miles to exit 412 for Del Monte Blvd. (first exit after Reservation Rd.) Go left on Del Monte which becomes a dirt road. The dirt road ends in the refuge parking lot.

From Castroville: Go south on U.S. Highway 1 approximately 3 miles to exit 412 for Marina/Del Monte Blvd. Go right on Del Monte Blvd. which becomes a dirt road. The dirt road ends in the refuge parking lot.



Beach morning-glory

Photo: USFWS

Recreational opportunities on refuges reflect the wildlife-oriented mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While enjoying Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge, please obey the following regulations which are designed to protect both wildlife and visitors.

Protect sensitive wildlife. Dog walking, kite-flying, motorized vehicles, horseback riding, fires, fireworks, overnight parking, camping, and weapons (except firearms used for waterfowl hunting in

permitted areas during legal hunting season) are not permitted.



Mule deer
Photo: USFWS

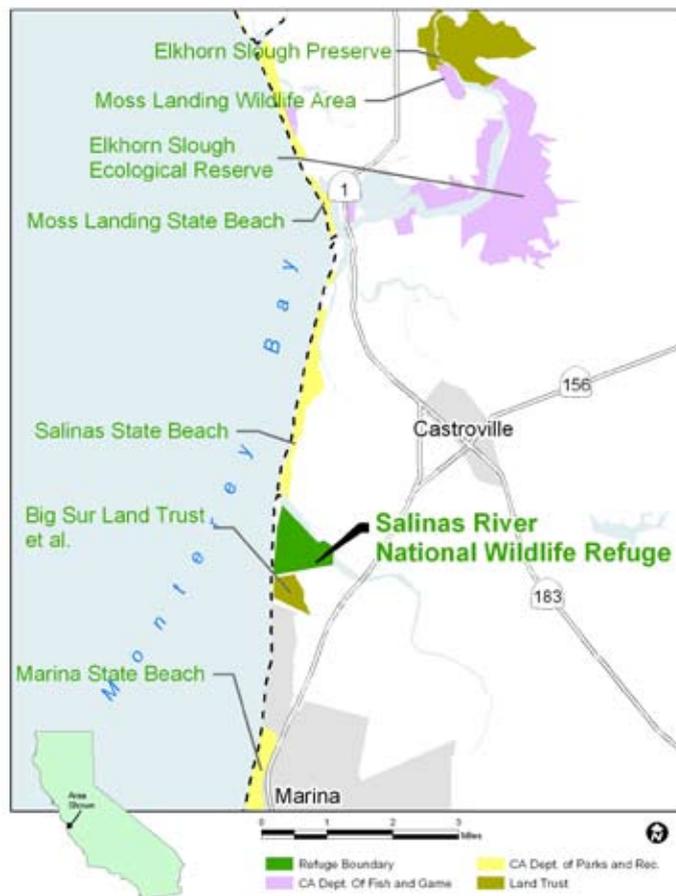
Respect closed areas. Sensitive dune habitat is closed to the public for the protection of nesting snowy plovers and other threatened and endangered species in the dunes.

Ensure a quality refuge experience for visitors and provide minimal disturbance to wildlife. Collecting plants, natural features, wildlife or historic artifacts is prohibited.

Sand dollar
Photo: USFWS



Visitors on a tour of the refuge Photo: USFWS



The “Blue Goose,” designed by conservationist J.N. “Ding” Darling in 1934, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

A variety of agencies manage natural areas along the central California coast. Unique among the group is the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge, one of seven refuges managed as part of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex. It is one unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System which includes more than 545 refuges across the country and is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This network of lands was established for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife and plant resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge
c/o San Francisco Bay NWR Complex
9500 Thornton Ave.
Newark, CA 94560
510/792-0222
<http://www.fws.gov/sfbayrefuges>

For Refuge information
1 800/344 WILD

California Relay Service
TTY 1 800/735 2929
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

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