

Cabrillo National Monument

Rocky Intertidal Stewardship Strategy

Introduction

Cabrillo National Monument attracts nearly one million visitors each year, 380,000 of which visited the coastal area in 2020. Due to its value as both a habitat refuge and public resource, it is critical for staff and volunteers to demonstrate low-impact stewardship for park visitors. The goals of this policy are to document existing laws and regulations, and to provide a framework for our Rocky Intertidal Stewardship Strategy.

Laws and Regulations

The rocky intertidal zone at Cabrillo National Monument is inside the Cabrillo State Marine Reserve. Due to this designation, it is **“unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource, except under a scientific collecting permit”** (CCR Title 14, Section 632(a)(1)(A)). In these rules, take refers to pursuing, catching, capturing, or killing any resource in the area (CA Fish and Game Code, Section 86). Similarly, “possessing, destroying, injuring, defacing, removing, digging, or disturbing from its natural state” natural, cultural, and archaeological resources is prohibited in National Parks by Federal Law (36 CFR § 2.1, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-36/chapter-I/part-2/section-2.1>). Collectively, these policies have been interpreted by Marine Protected Area Collaborative and National Park Service staff to establish the guidelines below.

Guidelines

Cabrillo National Monument staff, partners and Volunteers-in-Parks (VIPs) must demonstrate respectful stewardship for visitors by following the principles below, which are adapted from California Marine Protected Area Collaborative guidelines (<https://www.mpacollaborative.org/oc/>). Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action. Exemptions may be granted by research permits as codified above.

Never pick up, or remove, animals, plants, algae, shells, sand or rocks

Never touch or disturb octopi, with hands or objects

Never place tidepool organisms in containers such as buckets or cups

Never pick up or remove hazardous materials. This is a safety concern, and only certified staff or VIPs can interact with hazardous materials, including tar balls, containers with oil, etc.

Never approach marine mammals (The Marine Mammal Protection Act requires at least 150 ft between people and marine mammals) or sick/injured wildlife, unless you are Resources staff transporting wildlife for care

Strategies

The guidelines and regulations above are meant to guide our stewardship of the rocky intertidal zone. As stewards, we can expect park staff and the Tidepool Protection, Education, Restoration Program (TPERP) to have interpretive contacts with visitors that demonstrate low-impact stewardship practices.

For example, the policy doesn't prohibit touching all organisms – only removing them from their habitat. It is permissible to touch a hermit crab in its habitat, but the hermit crab shouldn't be removed from the tidepool or rocks. If visitors bring an organism to TPERP or park staff, turn the encounter into an interpretive moment by answering their questions about it, then reminding them to return the organism to where it was found. Let them know why it's important to observe animals and plants where they are.

Further on this topic, we don't expect TPERP to engage in law enforcement. We do expect TPERP to model stewardship behavior for visitors, and to call a Law Enforcement Ranger or the TPERP Coordinator to report egregious or repeated violations.

To clarify expectations and provide positive courses of action, we've provided low-impact alternatives for stewardship and visitor activities. These recommendations don't cover all situations or behaviors but provide ideas on how to address steward and visitor behaviors.

Examples of discouraged steward behaviors and low-impact alternatives

Discouraged Steward Behavior	Low-Impact Alternative	Outcome
Holding or carrying intertidal critters, living or dead	Using models of common items as educational tools	Less disturbance to the intertidal zone
Picking up critters in the tidepools	Pointing out critters to visitors, touching gently	Stewards model low-impact stewardship for visitors
Luring octopi out from under rocks with sticks or kelp	Observing octopi – even if it results in fewer sightings	Humans aren't altering wildlife behavior or influencing their movement
Moving critters to a more suitable habitat	If critters have been misplaced by visitors and are unattached, stewards may move them	Stewards address human-caused harm, but otherwise let nature take its course
Using flashlights or other bright lights	Observing animals under natural light – even if it results in fewer sightings	Less disturbance of animals in the intertidal zone

Examples of visitor behaviors and encouraged responses

Visitor Behavior	Stewardship Strategy	Outcome
Building sandcastles or stacking rocks	Ask visitors to knock them over when they leave	Visitors learn about leave-no-trace
Collecting intertidal critters or seaweed for an aquarium	If it is safe, ask them to not collect. Radio the TPERP Coordinator or Law Enforcement	Visitor is educated on Marine Protected Area (MPA) rules or Law Enforcement Ranger enforces rules

Approaching a steward while holding a critter, seaweed or rock	Answer questions, ask them to return the critter or rock and observe animals where they are	Stewards educate visitors on MPA rules
Entering Zone 3 or Sea Cave Area	If it is safe, educate visitors that the area is closed to visitors; radio the TPERP Coordinator or Law Enforcement if they don't turn around	Law Enforcement Ranger enforces closed area
Touching a sea anemone, hermit crab, limpet, or other intertidal critter or seaweed	If the visitor is touching it gently, no action is needed. If not, use it as an interpretive opportunity	Visitors and stewards can touch critters and seaweeds, but leave them in their habitat
Bringing pets or service animals into the tidepool area	Inform visitors that pets are allowed on the Coastal Trail, but not in the tidepools If visitor states their animal is a service animal, allow access to the tidepools If service animal behavior is concerning, contact Law Enforcement	Service animals are allowed in tidepools, pets are not Increase in wildlife safety and decrease in disturbance

Support

The Cabrillo National Monument Rocky Intertidal Stewardship Strategy was made with consultation and input from:

- California State Parks
- Orange County Marine Protected Area Council members
- Non-profit partners
- National Park Service partners

Former Cabrillo National Monument Natural Resources and Science Program Manager and Marine Biologist Benjamin Pister, PhD (current Director of the Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center) was instrumental in the establishment of the Cabrillo State Marine Reserve and the creation of TPERP. He was consulted in January 2022, and had the following message to share:

"I am pleased to see the direction and evolution the [Rocky Intertidal] Stewardship Strategy is taking. It's incredible to realize the interpretive and educational potential of 380,000 [per year] visitors to the rocky intertidal, the only easily accessible marine habitat with abundant marine life. But, that is an incredible amount of potential disturbance, as well. When I was at CABR, I

used to remind the TPERP and park staff every year that the organisms in the intertidal are simply not adapted to endure that many steps, or that much touching. They just aren't. Imagine 380,000 people marching through your living room. What would that do to your floor? Imagine 380,000 people picking up all the stuff on your coffee table, or your mantle? All your pictures? How long would they last? Would they be put back in their places? The big difference between those things and the rocky intertidal is that the things in the intertidal are living things. It is our job to preserve them for this AND future generations. Now, and the future. In perpetuity. The ONLY way to do that with so many people is with gentleness and respect for those organisms, codified (and adhered to) in a strategy like this. When I was in grad school in the early 2000s, I heard from colleagues (and observed myself, indeed helped document this fact) that Cabrillo had the best-preserved intertidal area on the mainland of southern California. In order to keep it that way stewardship demands a strong adherence to policies and strategies like this one. TPERP is critical to the preservation of those tidepools."

Contact Information and Resources

For more information on California Marine Protected Area legislation and stewardship, please visit the following websites:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/conservation/marine/MPAS>

<https://www.mpacollaborative.org/oc/>

<http://www.crystalcovestatepark.org/faq-tidepool/>

<https://www.lagunaoceanfoundation.org/how-to-tidepool/>

<https://wildcoast.org/how-to-be-a-good-tide-pooler/>

For more information on the Federal Code of Regulations and its applications to natural resources stewardship, please visit the following website:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-36/chapter-I/part-2/section-2.1>

If you have questions about this policy, please contact the TPERP Coordinator (charlotte_wiggins@partner.nps.gov).

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