



Restore Critical Dune Habitat

Point Reyes National Seashore is proposing to restore to its former high quality dune habitat a 300+-acre section of the park south of Abbotts Lagoon. Habitat would be restored by removing nonnative plant species which have greatly altered sand movement, dune structure and habitat function for native plants and animals.

The Seashore preserves some of the last remaining high quality coastal dune habitat in the United States for 11 federal listed species including western snowy plover, Myrtle silverspot butterfly, beach layia and Tidestrom's lupine. However, this habitat and species that depend on it is seriously threatened by the rapid encroachment of two nonnative plant species, European beachgrass and iceplant. Over 70% (1,000 acres) of the park's dune habitat is dominated by these species, and they are rapidly spreading to other areas.



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The park is currently preparing an environmental assessment to compare the environmental pros and cons of two alternatives to remove these invasive nonnative plants. Stable foredunes resulting from the nonnative European beachgrass and iceplant form parallel to the beach and are particularly problematic for nesting western snowy plovers, as they block access to and from feeding habitat and provide cover for species that predate on plover chicks. Therefore the focus of one alternative would be to create the greatest amount of treated foredune habitat and thereby maximize the recovery of snowy plovers.

Habitat for the other federally listed species in the project area is not restricted to the foredune area, but occurs in the rear dunes as well. Therefore, a second alternative would treat the same number of acres of dune habitat, but would include both fore and reardune sites.



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Point Reyes National Seashore has targeted the Abbotts Lagoon area as the site that offers the largest acreage of potentially high quality dune habitat in the park. After completing several smaller scale removal projects, the Seashore staff has identified mechanical removal using heavy equipment such as excavators to dig out all biomass and then bury it under a thick cap of plant free sand has been found to be the most effective means of removing European beachgrass and iceplant. This treatment method is therefore common to both alternatives.

Treatment is expected to return over 300 acres to one of shifting sands where dune formation, vegetation and wildlife are typical of natural ecological processes and biota, and where rare, threatened and endangered species native to this habitat can flourish.