

Classification Definitions from the California Public Resources Code



State Park (PRC 5019.53)

State parks consist of relatively spacious areas of outstanding scenic or natural character, oftentimes also containing significant historical, archaeological, ecological, geological, or other similar values. The purpose of state parks shall be to preserve outstanding natural, scenic, and cultural values, indigenous aquatic and terrestrial fauna and flora, and the most significant examples of ecological regions of California, such as the Sierra Nevada, northeast volcanic, great valley, coastal strip, Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains, southwest mountains and valleys, redwoods, foothills and low coastal mountains, and desert and desert mountains.

Each state park shall be managed as a composite whole in order to restore, protect, and maintain its native environmental complexes to the extent compatible with the primary purpose for which the park was established

Improvements undertaken within state parks shall be for the purpose of making the areas available for public enjoyment and education in a manner consistent with the preservation of natural, scenic, cultural, and ecological values for present and future generations. Improvements may be undertaken to provide for recreational activities including, but not limited to, camping, picnicking, sightseeing, nature study, hiking, and horseback riding, so long as those improvements involve no major modification of lands, forests, or waters. Improvements that do not directly enhance the public's enjoyment of the natural, scenic, cultural, or ecological values of the resource, which are attractions in themselves, or which are otherwise available to the public within a reasonable distance outside the park, shall not be undertaken within state parks. State parks may be established in the terrestrial or nonmarine aquatic (lake or stream) environments of the state.

State Reserves (PRC 5019.65)

State reserves consist of areas embracing outstanding natural or scenic characteristics or areas containing outstanding cultural resources of statewide significance. State reserve units may be established in the terrestrial or nonmarine aquatic (lake or stream) environments of the state and shall be further classified as one of the following types:

State Natural Reserve (PRC 5019.65)

(a) State natural reserves, consisting of areas selected and managed for the purpose of preserving their native ecological associations, unique faunal or floral characteristics, geological features, and scenic qualities in a condition of undisturbed integrity. Resource manipulation shall be restricted to the minimum required to negate the deleterious influence of man.

Improvements undertaken shall be for the purpose of making the areas available, on a day use basis, for public enjoyment and education in a manner consistent with the preservation of their natural features. Living and nonliving resources contained within state natural reserves shall not be disturbed or removed for other than scientific or management purposes.

Classification Definitions from the California Public Resources Code



State Cultural Reserve (PRC 5019.65)

(b) State cultural reserves, consisting of areas selected and managed for the purpose of preserving and protecting the integrity of places that contain historic or prehistoric structures, villages, or settlements, archaeological features, ruins, artifacts, inscriptions made by humans, burial grounds, landscapes, hunting or gathering sites, or similar evidence of past human lives or cultures. These areas may also be places of spiritual significance to California Native Americans. Within state cultural reserves, the highest level of resource protection shall be sought. Improvements may be undertaken for the purpose of providing public access, enjoyment, and education, and for cultural resource protection. Improvements made for the purpose of cultural resource protection shall take into account the possible need for access to the site for ceremonial or spiritual purposes. Living and nonliving resources contained within state cultural reserves may be used for ceremonial or spiritual purposes, consistent with other laws, and if the use is not harmful to threatened or endangered species or to the cultural resources intended for protection by this designation. Management actions shall be consistent with the preservation of cultural resources and with federal and state laws.

Natural Preserve Subclassification (PRC 5019.71)

Natural preserves consist of distinct nonmarine areas of outstanding natural or scientific significance established within the boundaries of other state park system units. The purpose of natural preserves shall be to preserve such features as rare or endangered plant and animal species and their supporting ecosystems, representative examples of plant or animal communities existing in California prior to the impact of civilization, geological features illustrative of geological processes, significant fossil occurrences or geological features of cultural or economic interest, or topographic features illustrative of representative or unique biogeographical patterns. Areas set aside as natural preserves shall be of sufficient size to allow, where possible, the natural dynamics of ecological interaction to continue without interference, and to provide, in all cases, a practicable management unit. Habitat manipulation shall be permitted only in those areas found by scientific analysis to require manipulation to preserve the species or associations that constitute the basis for the establishment of the natural preserve.

Cultural Preserve Subclassification (PRC 5019.74)

Cultural preserves consist of distinct nonmarine areas of outstanding cultural interest established within the boundaries of other state park system units for the purpose of protecting such features as sites, buildings, or zones which represent significant places or events in the flow of human experience in California. Areas set aside as cultural preserves shall be large enough to provide for the effective protection of the prime cultural resources from potentially damaging influences, and to permit the effective management and interpretation of the resources. Within cultural preserves, complete integrity of the cultural resources shall be sought, and no structures or improvements that conflict with that integrity shall be permitted.