

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT (not for publication):
Jennifer Murray, 831-515-2802
jennifer@millermxfield.com



Nonprofits Invest \$500K to Improve Visitor Experience for Elephant Seal Tours at Año Nuevo State Park

The upgraded gateway to the Año Nuevo Coast Natural Preserve provides a beautiful setting with educational opportunities, place to relax

DEC 12, 2024 —PESCADERO, CA —California State Parks, Coastside State Parks Association (Coastside) and Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks (Friends) today announced the “Staging Area” at Año Nuevo State Park has been renovated to improve the visitor experience and the new space will open in time for the start of Guided Elephant Seal Tours on Dec. 15.

“This project is an outstanding example of our partners in action!” said State Parks District Superintendent Chris Spohrer. “We could not have completed this wonderful facility enhancement without the dedicated efforts of the Coastside State Parks Association and Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks.”

The more than \$500,000 project provides park visitors with a greater area to shelter from inclement weather and allows for larger interpretive tours and talks. Coastside State Parks Association and Año Nuevo volunteer docents began a fundraising campaign in 2018 to improve the Staging Area. Fires and COVID slowed progress, but construction started in June of this year.

“The Coastside Board of Directors is pleased that the project is being completed this week, meaning we will be ready for the annual breeding season as planned,” said Coastside Treasurer Janet Oulton. “The building is beautiful and will add value to the visitors’ experience for many years to come.”

State Parks staff from several divisions contributed to the project, including Interpretation, Visitor Services, Facility Maintenance and Natural and Cultural Resources. Roads & Trails crews recently graded the ½-mile trail to the facility. Through their unique operating partnership with State Parks, Friends entered a contract with M3 Integrated Services, Inc. on behalf of State Parks to manage this project. Local businesses hired include Knox Roofing and architect Brett Brenkwitz of Franks and Brenkwitz.

“The Staging Area project shows how nonprofits can work with government to focus our community’s love for our parks into enhanced facilities and experiences for visitors,” said Friends Executive Director Bonny Hawley.

Often called the “Staging Area” because it’s where tours begin, the new facility is bigger and features beautiful 8-foot-tall panels with more-recent information about the wildlife people will see during tours of the preserve. There is also a map of the trails with distances, an overview of Año Nuevo Point, and a display of skulls, teeth, fur and whiskers.

"This is the gateway to the Año Nuevo Natural Preserve," State Parks Interpreter I Susan Blake said. "It's where, in the winter, people gather for the beginning of the tour and in the non-tour season it's where people learn about the natural preserve and its inhabitants."

Northern elephant seals have one of the longest migrations of any mammal and some have been recorded traveling over 13,000 miles round trip. During the winter, male elephant seals come ashore to battle on the beaches to establish dominance to mate. Females are pregnant and often give birth on the dunes at Año Nuevo. Docents keep a "pup count" during this time.

Guided walks are required in and around the elephant seal colony from Dec. 15 to March 31. [Make a reservation through Reserve California to guarantee a spot on a tour](#). Space is limited to 15 people per tour. Tickets are \$10.99 per person (\$7 tour fee plus a \$3.99 reservation fee). Same day elephant seal tours are available on a first come, first served basis. Arrive before 10 a.m. on weekends and holidays for a walk-up ticket; arrive by noon on weekdays. For visitors without a reservation, tickets are \$7 per person. Parking is \$10 and helps Friends support our parks.

About California State Parks

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, popularly known as State Parks, and the programs supported by its Office of Historic Preservation and divisions of Boating and Waterways and Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation provides 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. Learn more at parks.ca.gov.

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Blog](#)

About Coastside State Parks

The Coastside State Parks Association (CSPA) supports 15 California State Parks along 36 miles of San Mateo County coastline from Gray Whale Cove State Beach in Montara in the north to Año Nuevo State Park in Pescadero to the south. In partnership with California State Parks, CSPA raises funds to support vital education and interpretation programs and projects. Learn more at www.coastsidestateparks.org.

About Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks

Established in 1976, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks (Friends) is a vital partner with California State Parks, creatively working to ensure our cherished local parks and beaches are thriving and available to all. Friends' innovative and collaborative community partnership provides support and investment for education, equity and inclusion, conservation, facilities improvements, historic preservation and cultural events. Friends currently operates a robust online ParkStore offering nature- and history-themed merchandise for sale to benefit local parks and beaches. Friends also operates ParkStores at Natural Bridges, New Brighton, Santa Cruz Mission, Seacliff and Wilder Ranch. Learn more at www.ThatsMyPark.org or via [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#) and [YouTube](#).

###