

Coastal Prairie and Coastal Scrub Mapping

by Alexis LaFever-Jackson, CNPS Intern

Being on the coast of northern California is like a dream that you never want to wake up from. When I visited MacKerricher State Park and Jughandle State Park during March, I was welcomed by bright-blue skies and the perfect breeze. I was there to practice the CNPS vegetation survey protocol alongside some DKY chapter members. As we walked along the coastal trails near Glass Beach we noticed that a few species were beginning to flower which sparked excitement for the upcoming field days.

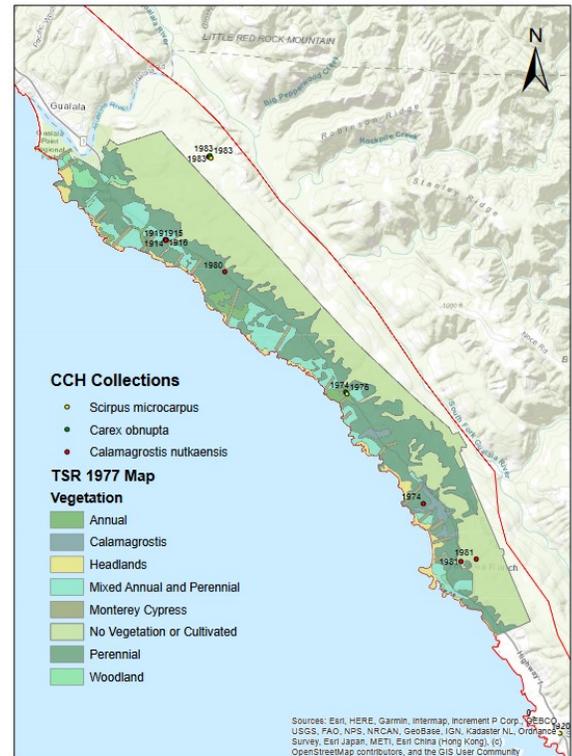
However, the internship had to take a different route as shelter in place orders rolled out across California. Given the new circumstances, I redirected my time to compiling data pertaining to the Mendocino and northern Sonoma county coastline. From historic vegetation classification data to rare plant occurrences, I have been actively searching for any existing information to create a comprehensive GIS (Geographic Information System) dataset for this area.

The project focuses on the coastal prairie and coastal shrub habitats that range from MacKerricher State Park to Salt Point State Park. I have been able to participate in a variety of online courses that have bolstered my abilities to process and analyze data. My experience with GIS is limited to a few college courses so the opportunity to expand this knowledge was greatly appreciated. I took advantage of a free training video from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife that covered MS Access software basics so that I can better understand how our databases function.

I spent the first week of this internship at a CNPS-CDFW Vegetation Mapping workshop in Redlands. The training focused on identifying vegetation patterns from both aerial imagery and on the ground. This experience proved to be much more helpful than I anticipated. I have had to utilize the knowledge gained from the workshop to better interpret aerial imagery to identify underrepresented vegetation types.

The field work encompasses much of the public land between MacKerricher State Park and Salt Point State Park. Although a large gap in collection points exists between the Navarro Point Preserve and Manchester State Park. I have been collecting data since May and have personally surveyed 80 plots. Additionally, 300 species have been identified and roughly one-fourth of the plots had a rare species present. This data will be entered into the California Natural Diversity Database. Most surveys were conducted on State Park land however, a handful were collected on land either owned by the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy or Mendocino Land Trust.

As the season for herbaceous species comes to a close, the internship is shifting gears once again, now the field work will focus on surveying evergreen species like *Pinus contorta* ssp. *contorta*. 🌲



Above is an example of a digitized map using the vegetation map (below) from the 1977 article in *Madroño*, Vegetation Analysis of a Northern California Coastal Prairie: Sea Ranch, Sonoma County, California by M.M. Hektner and T. C Foin. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/185587#page/100/mode/1up>

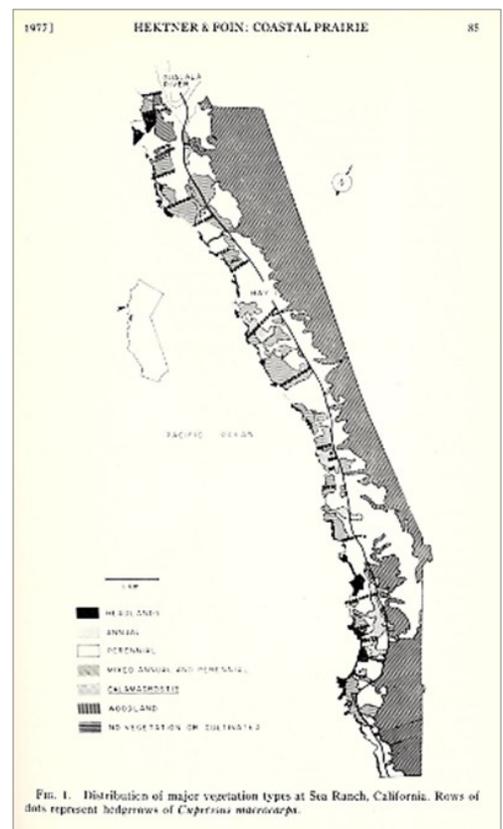


FIG. 1. Distribution of major vegetation types at Sea Ranch, California. Rows of dots represent hedgerows of *Cyperus microcarpus*.