

TOMALES DUNES

Tomales Dunes, the largest unprotected dune system in central California, is a complex of several distinct habitats: mature mobile dunes, central dune scrub, dune prairie, and dune wetlands. It is surrounded by and connected to a rich coastal environment that includes coastal prairie, coastal scrub, salt marsh, tidal flats, bay, and ocean.

Tomales Dunes is the only dune system in the state that is wholly in private ownership. It is owned by the Lawson family of Dillon Beach, which operate a cattle and sheep ranch, a sand quarry, and an RV park on the site.

Tomales Dunes supports at least 14 rare, threatened, or endangered species.

Tomales Dunes is one of only eight sites in North America where Pacific golden plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) overwinter.

Tomales Dunes is one of the few dune systems in California that has a vital population of native dunegrasses, including a recently discovered and still-undescribed species.

Tomales Dunes has an amazing “Grand Canyon of the Sands”, which is recut and reshaped in wet winters by a rain-fed underground spring. This is the only such dune canyon in central California.

In the early 1990s, an endangered plant species, Tidestrom’s lupine (*Lupinus tidestromii*), disappeared from the Dunes due in part to overgrazing and intensive recreational use.

Tomales Dunes is home to the largest RV campground on California's coast. Up to 1000 RVs camp there at a time, most of them parking in the sensitive dunes wetlands. There are 233 permanent RVs, served by over 100 unpermitted cesspits.

Point Reyes National Seashore, just across Tomales Bay, is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on a model beach grass eradication program. But the expensive effort could be undermined by the presence nearby of a source of grass that could re-invade the cleared areas.

So far there has been no oversight, no opportunity for public comment, and no environmental review of the dramatic growth that has taken place at Lawson’s Landing since it opened to camping in the late 1950s.

In 1992, the State issued an operating permit for a travel trailer park at Lawson's Landing without notifying the public, allowing public comment, or any environmental impact study. The state simply agreed to the level of use that the owners requested. As a result, the number of camp sites went from 46 to 1000.

If the proposed Master Plan is approved, existing environmentally-damaging uses, such as the sand quarrying and camping on wetlands, will receive the County’s blessing. Moreover, the availability of more water, more septic capacity, more restrooms, new RV dumps, and a modernized shop, garage, and office—not to mention the need to recoup the cost of those investments—will be a powerful inducement to growth.

For more information on Tomales Dunes, go to www.eacmarin.org