



San Diego River Mouth Site Update

**Coral Weaver, Conservation Coordinator
San Diego Bird Alliance**



Endangered Species Depend on the San Diego River Mouth



Nuttall's Lotus

Low-growing plant that helps stabilize sandy coastal soils and provides food for pollinators like native bees

Acmispon prostratus

Status: Endangered

Coast Woolly Heads

Small coastal wildflower that makes fluffy, cotton-like flower heads, which help protect its seeds from salt spray and drying winds in dune habitats.



Nemacaulis denudata

Status: Threatened

Salt Marsh Bird's Beak

Considered an indicator of healthy salt marshes, as it only thrives in high-quality tidal wetland habitat



Chloropyron maritimum

Status: Endangered



Dog Beach

Sand Dune

Coastal Salt Marsh

Coastal Sage Scrub

Mudflats



Western Snowy Plover

Small ground-nesting birds who camouflage with the sand. They need places like the River Mouth for overwintering, non-nesting habitat.

Charadrius nivosus nivosus

Status: Endangered

This secretive bird builds nests by weaving together clumps of marsh grasses that float and protect eggs when the tide rises.



Ridgway's Rail

Rallus obsoletus

Status: Endangered



California Least Tern

Forage for small fish, such as anchovies and other coastal species. This time away from their nest makes them vulnerable.

Sternula antillarum browni

Status: Endangered

Access to Dog Beach has Improved

Before



After



- In 2024 we replaced the post-and-rope fence in collaboration with the City of San Diego and the San Diego River Park Foundation with funding from SANDAG
- Access to the beach is maintained while improving protections for sensitive species by keeping both dogs and humans on trail

144 BARK Rangers Officiated - and counting!

We also started an outreach program where trained docents educate visitors on the benefits of these habitats and encourage folks to give them space to rebound from decades of overuse by staying on the trails. This program evolved into a voluntary initiative to pledge your dog as a BARK Ranger, who would uphold good stewardship behavior.

BARK Rangers agree to protect this area and the community's access to it by ensuring their humans will:



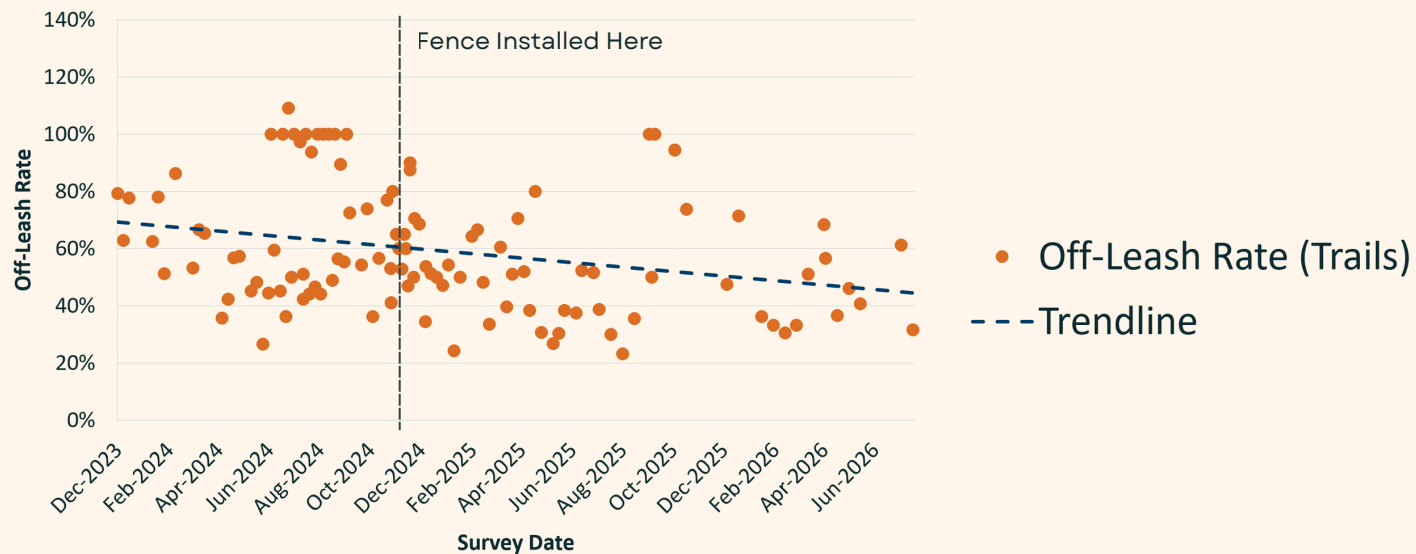
BAG YOUR PET'S WASTE *and dispose in a trash can*
ALWAYS LEASH YOUR PET *as soon as you leave the beach*
RESPECT WILDLIFE *by staying on trails*
KNOW WHERE YOU CAN GO *and help inform the community*



Outreach + Fencing Show Improvements for Birds

- Over the last 3 years, docents have kept track of the rate of disturbance birds face here
- The trail system has undergone significant changes since 2023 both through consistent outreach of our docents and the replacement of the post-and-rope fence in the Fall of 2024.
- Since the fence does not fully enclose the sensitive habitat, off-leash dogs can still be seen entering from the bike path, the sand dunes, or the mudflats.

Off-Leash Dog Rate — Trail System



The average percentage of off-leash dogs compared to on-leash dogs has decreased from 75% to 45% by mid 2026

Ongoing Disturbance Has Impact



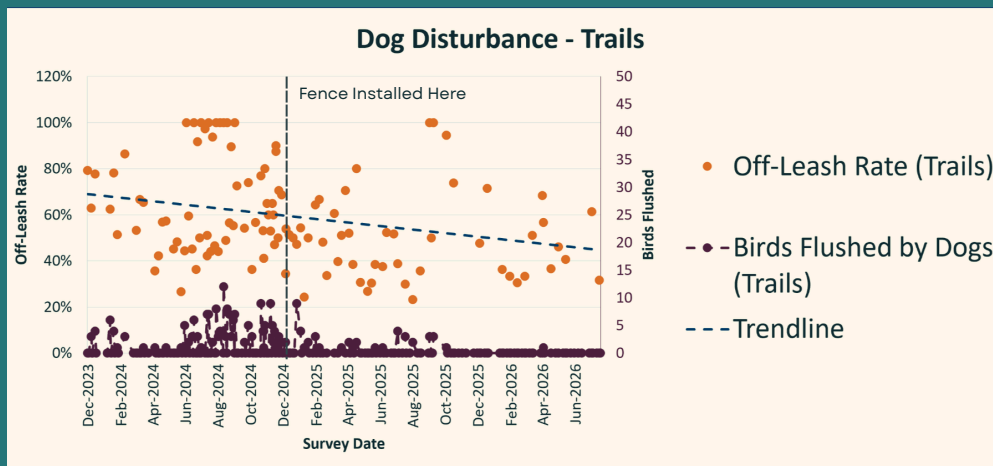
- Birds perceive ALL DOGS as predators, no matter how friendly they are
- When birds are flushed they expend precious energy they need to migrate, reproduce, and forage for food in an increasingly challenging environment.
- One third of North America's bird population (about 3 billion birds) has been lost in the past 50 years, and only 10% of both wetland and sand dune habitats remain in California
- Places like the San Diego River Mouth are a vital refuge for these birds and must be managed in a way that allows birds to rest, forage and reproduce before biodiversity declines further.
- The City identifies this area as Multi-Habitat Planning Area core biological and sensitive habitat, and the City receives the MSCP benefits by agreeing to manage this area for its biodiversity



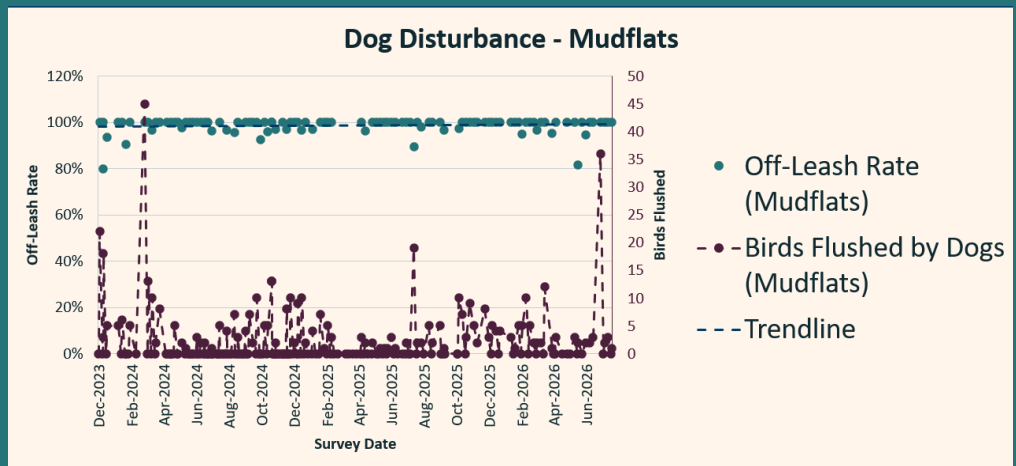
We Measured the Impact



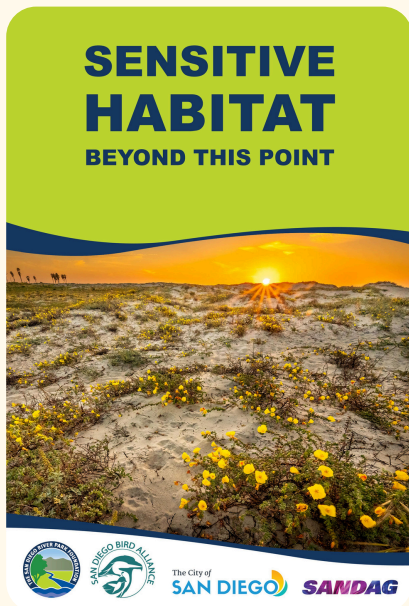
- Over the last 3 years, docents have kept track of the rate of disturbance birds face in this designated MHPA.
- The trail system has undergone significant changes since 2023 both through consistent outreach of our docents and the replacement of the post-and-rope fence in the Fall of 2024. Since the fence does not fully enclose the sensitive habitat, off-leash dogs can still be seen entering from the bike path, the sand dunes, or the mudflats.



Off-leash dogs are still prevalent in the fenced area but are overall trending downwards, meaning that less wildlife is impacted by dogs over time. Importantly the rate of flushing has dropped since the installation of the fence.



In the mudflat habitat to the East of the trails, most survey days report 100% of the dogs as off-leash. Birds are frequently flushed in this habitat and face undue stress while occupying a known Important Bird Area (IBA).



The Ask: Improved Signage and Clearer Dog Beach Boundaries

- An uninformed public cannot be expected to act in a way that preserves vital habitat
 - Interpretive signs are not enough to inform where the off-leash area ends
 - The mudflat area is disproportionately affected by off-leash dog use, and this is also where the majority of sensitive species exist
- We need a better defined boundary of where the off-leash area begins and ends, just like any other off-leash dog park
 - The community deserves clearer guidance
 - The sensitive wildlife deserve more protection
- **We request that the Mission Bay Park Committee write a letter to the Parks and Recreation leadership requesting that they formally identify the boundaries of dog beach and the reserve, so that the public knows how best to take care of this sensitive place**

Thank you to our many community supporters!



Follow this QR code to the San Diego River Mouth Storymap for more information.



Contact Us

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