

3.0 Existing Use and Access Infrastructure

This chapter describes the current public use of the Ma-le'l Dunes CMA properties and the condition of existing access infrastructure located throughout the area. Infrastructure located in Ma-le'l South and Ma-le'l North are discussed separately.

3.1 Existing Public Uses

3.1.1 Ma-le'l South

Owned by BLM, Ma-le'l South is currently open to the public daily from sunrise to one hour after sunset to non-motorized recreational uses, with the following restrictions:

- Equestrian use allowed only on designated trails and wave slope;
- Pedestrian use is allowed only on designated trails, open sandy areas and the waveslope;
- Dogs must be leashed in the developed recreation sites (parking/picnic area); otherwise dogs off leash consistent with Humboldt county ordinance;
- Organized group camping for special events may be approved on a case-by case basis
- Vegetation gathering on designated trails for personal use allowed from May to November;
- Fires allowed in designated sites only;
- General overnight camping is prohibited;
- Fishing is allowed subject to California Department of Fish and Game regulations;
- Firearm and crossbow/bow shooting, mineral sales, and livestock permits and leases are prohibited.

BLM also contracts ongoing native dune and forest restoration activities on Ma-le'l South. These are typically coordinated internally, with the assistance of the California Conservation Corps (CCC).

3.1.2 Ma-le'l North

Ma-le'l North has had restricted public access since 1994. A permit can be obtained to the Fernstrom-Root parcel by contacting the USFWS Humboldt Bay NWRC or FOD. Public access the southern portion of Ma-le'l North is limited to monthly guided walks by FOD.



Rocket-style information kiosk located at the Ma-le'l South parking and day use area.

USFWS coordinates native dune and forest restoration with the assistance of the CCC and the FOD public restoration program.

3.2 Existing Access Infrastructure

Vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian access to the Ma-le'l Dunes CMA is from Samoa Boulevard/State Highway 255 via Young Lane. Young Lane is an approximately 400-foot long, paved two-lane road that terminates into the unnamed and unpaved access road that runs in a north-south direction on top of the decommissioned Humboldt Northern line of the Hammond Lumber Company Railroad. This road provides access to the gravel parking areas of Ma-le'l North and Ma-le'l South, and is known as Ma-le'l Road throughout this Plan.

Currently, there are over 3 miles of foot trails within the CMA that traverse forested hollows, open sand dunes, and foredunes toward the beach. The foot trails are earthen paths clustered in the far southern and far northern portions of the CMA. The trails in the south are marked; the trails in the north are not. Trails are considered moderate to strenuous due to the varied topography and range of hiking duration offered. Some trails can be completed in less than 30 minutes, while others offer one to four hours of hiking. Figure 3-1 illustrates the existing infrastructure throughout the area.

3.2.1 Ma-le'l South

Amenities that support public use within the Ma-le'l South area consist of a recently improved access route, entrance signing, graveled parking lot and day use area with picnic tables, restroom, trash receptacles, information kiosks, and trail markers along dune and forest footpaths. These are described in more detail below.

Access

Ma-le'l South is accessed by turning south at Young Lane onto a gravel road owned by USFWS, known as Ma-le'l Road. The Ma-le'l South parking and day use area is reached after traveling south on Ma-le'l Road approximately 600 feet. This portion of the Ma-le'l Road has been recently regraded and improved with new gravel. The road is discussed further in the Ma-le'l North Access section.

Signing

At the intersection of Young Lane and Ma-le'l Road there is an interim entry sign which was installed by BLM. It is an inverted, truncated triangle welcome sign approximately 6' wide by 3' high and is constructed out of



The existing Ma-le'l Dunes CMA entry sign at the intersection of Young Lane and Hammond Road directs visitors to the south entrance. It was installed by BLM in June 2005.



At the intersection of Young Lane and Ma-le'l Road members of the Redwood Gun Club are directed north.

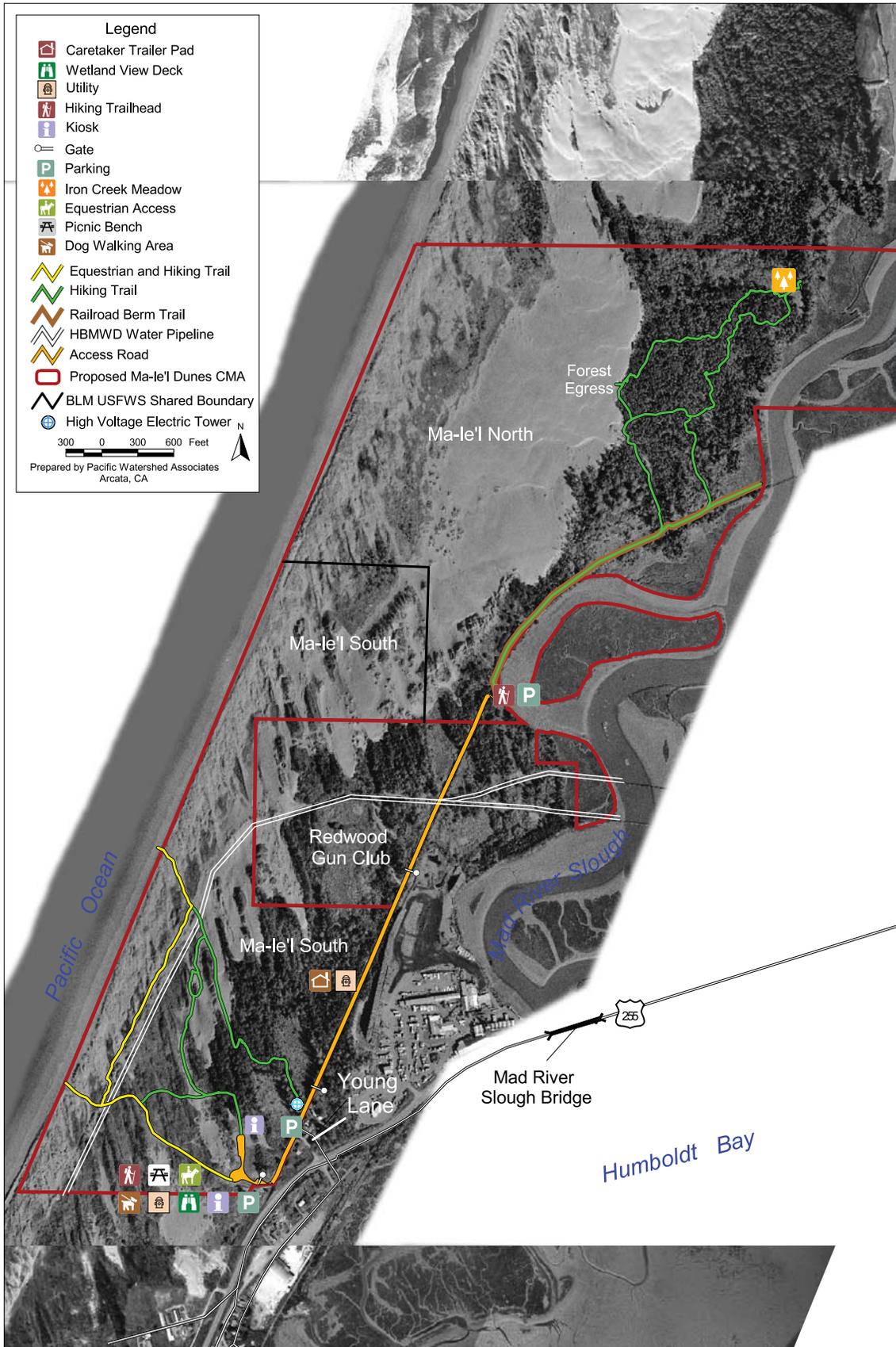


Figure 3-1. Existing Features Map

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medium density overlay plywood with a brown background and white lettering. It reads, "Ma-le'l Dunes Cooperative Management Area" and directs visitors to the Ma-le'l South parking area. Adjacent to the welcome sign is a sign that directs members of the RGC north.

At the entrance to the Ma-le'l South parking area, there is another inverted, triangle sign that reads, "Ma-le'l Dunes Cooperative Management Area, South Entrance." Directional signs located at the parking area trailheads have universal symbols to indicate trail uses.

Gates and Fencing

There is one steel access gate at the entrance to Ma-le'l South that is padlocked from one hour after sunset to sunrise. Posts have been installed for a board fence along the property boundary between BLM and the adjacent private residence. However, fence boards are currently absent.

A post and wire fence exists along approximately 2,000 feet of foredunes along the western edge of the Ma-le'l South property line. Dilapidated wooden post and wire fences also exist near the special events area and along Ma-le'l Road north and south of the caretaker's area. These are discussed further in subsequent sections. The northern Ma-le'l South property line (bordered by Ma-le'l North properties) is delineated by 2,400 feet of metal post and wire fencing.

Parking and Day Use Area

Currently, there are two vehicle-parking areas along Ma-le'l Road that provide access to Ma-le'l South. One is the large, main gravel lot at the southern end of Ma-le'l Road, and the other is a small pullout a short distance north of Young Lane, also on Ma-le'l Road, under a Pacific Gas & Electric high voltage transmission line/tower.

The main Ma-le'l South gravel parking lot is about 20,000 sq. ft. and designed to serve approximately 20 vehicles, including buses and horse trailers. In February 2005, RCAA resurfaced this parking area with base material gravel and installed a perimeter fence of peeler core posts and cable. Three new concrete picnic tables and four trash receptacles were installed and native shore pines were planted to create a vegetative buffer between the parking area and the residence to the south.

The pullout parking area beneath the Pacific Gas & Electric high voltage transmission line/tower has room for approximately five vehicles. Based on observation it appears that many people use this parking area to access the trailhead located here and walk through the forest to the beach.



Ma-le'l South parking area entrance.



Fence between Ma-le'l South and Ma-le'l North, is 2,400 feet long.



Power tower parking area holds about 5 cars and is used frequently by hikers and dog walkers.

Trails and Trail Amenities

Two trailheads with “rocket-style” information kiosks exist at the Ma-le'l South parking area. One is for equestrians and the other for pedestrians.

The equestrian trail begins as a compacted dirt roadway that, after a short distance, passes through an open area that was used by previous owners for special events. This flat, compacted open area is about an acre in size and contains a dilapidated wood post and wire fence around its perimeter, and the remains of a dismantled large shed. A well-defined, marked trail leads north from the open area through a hollow and into the nearshore dunes. At a well-defined intersection the trail splits, with one trail leading west to the beach and another heading north along the HBMWD pipeline, or “waterline trail.” The “waterline trail” continues north until it intersects with other foot trails (discussed below) and turns west through the nearshore dunes to the beach. Large 5-foot diameter concrete standpipes protrude from the dunes at approximately 200-foot intervals along the HBMWD pipeline. This trail is used by HBMWD for regular pipeline maintenance inspections. Portions of an exposed wooden sand drift fence, which was installed by the HBMWD to prevent the uncovering of their pipeline, exist at the intersection with other foot trails.

The pedestrian foot trail departs the north end of the Ma-le'l South parking area. It leads briefly through forested dunes and then through a series of dune swales along a poorly defined foot trail in a northerly direction. The foot trail meets an open moving dune and joins a trail from the forest in route to the equestrian trail mentioned above, where it continues to the beach.

One of the more commonly used foot trails in Ma-le'l South extends west from the small pullout parking area adjacent to the high voltage transmission line/tower discussed above. The trail is well defined and passes through forested dunes toward the open dunes and beach. Some of the trail is difficult to traverse due to steep slopes and seasonal standing water and mud. There is a steep section of trail that has a wooden stairway and rail, which is rotten and in disrepair. There are several locations where casual trails branch off into the forest, and are likely associated with plant material gathering and illegal camping. Once out of the forest, the trail passes over and down the center of the moving dunes. This path through the dunes is somewhat obscured by moving sand; however, the lay of the land makes the path identifiable. At the foot of the moving dune/deflation plain there is the well-defined intersection mentioned above, where it joins the equestrian and foot trails from the Ma-le'l South parking area.

There are several other casual trails throughout the Ma-le'l South nearshore dunes that lead to the beach. These are the result of the public hiking



The first trail head at Ma-le'l south directs equestrians to the beach and the old “waterline trail”.



The second trail head at Ma-le'l South leads pedestrians to the beach through dune swales and along the base of moving dunes. The trail joins the equestrian “water line” trail as it crosses primary dune ridges to the beach.

throughout the area, as well as extensive beachgrass eradication and dune restoration work that have been occurring since 1990.

Caretaker's Area

At approximately 750 feet north along Ma-le'l Road there is a gravel spur onto BLM property that leads to a 2,500 square foot clearing and gravel pad where a trailer and caretaker of the former Mad River Slough and Dunes CMA was located. The site has power, telephone and water, and also contains a 10' x 6' wooden storage shed with padlock.

Utilities

Where they exist, water, power, and telephone lines are approximately three feet beneath ground surface.

Water

Potable water service is supplied to three locations within the plan area: the Ma-le'l South main parking area, the Ma-le'l South special events area, and the caretaker's area. Several water spigots exist in various locations at the Ma-le'l South parking area, one spigot exists at the special events area, and at the caretaker's area. Meters are located adjacent to the board fence that delineates the Ma-le'l South parking area and at the intersection of Young Lane and Ma-le'l Road.

Power

The only location in the plan area served with electricity is the caretaker's area. This location is metered by Pacific Gas & Electric. However, it is unknown if the service is operational. The electrical line is buried along the west side of Ma-le'l Road.

Telephone

The only location in the Plan area served by telephone service is the caretaker's area. It is assumed there is no operational account at this time since the site is vacant. The RGC is also serviced by telephone and is currently operational.

Sewer

Although there is no sewer service to the plan area, Manila Community Services District provides service to the adjacent residential properties to the south and east of the CMA.



Private property fencing along Ma-le'l Road. Upon turning north along Ma-le'l Road, the power tower parking area is visible as are the signs and gate to RGC and the USFWS property beyond.

3.2.2 Ma-le'l North

Amenities that support public use within Ma-le'l North consist of Ma-le'l Road, a gravel parking lot, and unmarked footpaths. Two empty kiosks in addition to boundary signs that mark the southern Fernstrom-Root property line exist in the area.

Access

Ma-le'l North is accessed by the single lane, gravel access road that extends from Young Lane to the USFWS parking area in the north, known as Ma-le'l Road. Ma-le'l Road is approximately 4,400 feet long and centered on a 60-foot wide right of way owned by USFWS. It is built on the remnants of the old Hammond Lumber Company logging railroad that used to extend from Samoa, through the Plan area, and across the Mad River Slough to Crannell Road. The railroad operated in this area until it was abandoned in approximately the 1950s. The Hammond Lumber Company removed the rails, ties, and some of the rock ballast in the late 1960s, after which the portion of the railroad berm within the CMA was converted to a gravel roadway (Personal communication, Bob Fallis, 2005).

RGC has been responsible for maintenance of Ma-le'l Road, from Young Lane to the club's entrance, since establishment of the club in the early 1970s. From 1992-1994 when the Mad River Slough and Dunes CMA was open to the public, the Ma-le'l Road experienced accelerated degradation due to increased public traffic. After the CMA was terminated the TNC repaired Ma-le'l Road under the direction of the RGC. Since then the club has assumed responsibility of road maintenance, with some minor exceptions (personal communication, Bob Fallis, 2005). The current road maintenance method and schedule is outlined in Appendix A.

On the west side of Ma-le'l Road, before the first gate (discussed below), is the small pullout parking area of Ma-le'l South previously discussed. North of the first gate, heading toward the RGC property, Ma-le'l Road mostly cuts through a large forested sand dune, which gives away to wetlands in some areas.

Just past the RGC entrance and the second gate (also discussed below), Ma-le'l Road narrows as it passes through a wetland area before the HBMWD easement crosses the road. North of the HBMWD easement the road cuts into another forested dune area as it nears the new Ma-le'l North property boundary. This roadway surface of the final section of Ma-le'l Road has not been improved or maintained. The road here is narrow and dense vegetation exists on either side.



Ma-le'l Road lies upon the Humboldt Northern line of the Hammond Lumber Company rail road and was originally built in 1905. It is a single lane gravel road.



Redwood Gun Club boundary signs are posted along Ma-le'l Road in only a few locations.

Signing

Very little directional signing exists throughout Ma-le'l North. A set of antiquated signs exists near the intersection of Young Lane and Ma-le'l Road that directs traffic north to the RGC and lists RGC hours of operation. There is also a large "No Trespassing" sign. Boundary signing exists in only a few locations along Ma-le'l Road just north of the RGC entrance. It reads "Danger Shooting Range Keep Out." USFWS Humboldt Bay-NWRC boundary posts and signs exist along the western and southern property boundary of the Fernstrom-Root at approximately 500-foot intervals. There are currently no signs (no trespassing or other use) associated with the HBMWD easement that crosses Ma-le'l Road.



USFWS Humboldt Bay NWRC boundary signs exist along the western and southern boundaries, at 500-ft intervals.

Gates and Fencing

There are two access gates along northern portion of Ma-le'l Road:

1. A gate near the high voltage tower north of Young Lane. Although the gate is located on USFWS property, it is actually owned and operated by the RGC. This gate is open for the club Saturday and Sunday 10 am to 4 pm. There is a RGC sign and a private property/no trespassing sign located at this gate.
2. A gate located north of the RGC entrance, approximately a half-mile north of Young Lane. It was installed by the Buggy Club, and at this time can only be accessed by HBMWD, USFWS and FOD.

Wooden post and wire fencing also exists around the entirety of the RGC property, including along Ma-le'l Road. However, along the southern boundary of the club's property there are two locations where repair is required. Except for some signing on the club's fence that borders Ma-le'l Road, signing around the rest of the club's property boundary is completely lacking. There is also chain link fence with locking gates on the west side of Ma-le'l Road where the HBMWD easement crosses the road.

There is no fencing along the east side of Ma-le'l Road, except for a series of chain link fences that border several residences and appear to encroach into the road right-of-way. The fences here are inconsistent and do not provide privacy to the residents or a feeling of safety to recreational visitors. In lieu of a fence along Ma-le'l Road/SPI property line, there is a ditch and a berm vegetated with shore pine and undergrowth. There is also a five-foot high locked metal gate on the east side of the road where the HBMWD easement crosses the road



A padlocked five-foot gate closes the entrance to the HBMWD, but is unlikely to deter to curious pedestrians. No signage on the gate exists.

Parking and Day Use Area

At the northern terminus of Ma-le'l Road is a gravel clearing adjacent to the Mad River Slough that serves as a parking area and was previously used as the parking area for the Mad River Slough and Dunes CMA. The clearing is approximately one-third of an acre in size and can accommodate about 10 vehicles. The clearing is bordered by a narrow strip of salt marsh to the northeast and a low-lying wire fence to the south, beyond which a casual trail leads through a grassy area with scattered shrubs and beach pines and a picnic table. Around the rest of the perimeter are beach pines and brush. Two simple benches are located on the edge of the parking area overlooking the slough channel. At the northern edge of the area, there is a wooden entry sign demarcating the parking area of the Mad River Slough and Dunes CMA, a metal bike rack, and an iron ranger that demarcates the trailhead.



The old Mad River Slough and Dunes parking area is gravel and can accommodate approximately 10 vehicles.

Kayak and Canoe Launching and Landing

Kayak and canoe enthusiasts use the Mad River Slough extensively. Boat launching into the slough commonly occurs beneath the Mad River Slough Bridge on Highway 255 where a concrete ramp is located, and on the Lanphere Road bridge, where a rock abutment to the bridge is located. The existing parking area of Ma-le'l North is adjacent to an intertidal channel of the Mad River Slough that is a popular boat-landing site during high tides. Due to the presence of salt marsh habitat and trampling that has occurred from boaters, CNLM established symbolic fencing to discourage boat landing.



Canoe and kayakers have historically used the Ma-le'l North parking area for boat landing. Unmanaged, this use has caused trampling of the adjacent salt marsh and erosion.

Trails and Trail Amenities

Railroad Berm Trail

A well-defined, flat footpath varying from two to six feet in width extends from the north end of the parking area. It follows the railroad berm in a northeasterly direction for a distance of approximately 2800 feet along the edge of the slough to where an abandoned railroad trestle is located. Following the edge of the slough, most of the trail is 5 feet above the mean high, high water (MHHW) line, and overgrown with vegetation in many locations. There are two forest loop trails branching off of this trail (discussed below). There is one simple wooden bench (approximately 500 feet north of the parking lot) along the trail facing east over the slough.



The main trail into Ma-le'l North follows the old railroad berm along the Mad River Slough.

Erosion and slumping along the slough side of the railroad berm is evident in many locations and is likely due to wind wave processes. However, the rate of shoreline loss is unknown. There is evidence of efforts to mitigate this effect by placing brush cuttings and fill material along the bank, including a boxcar imbedded into the berm at one location.



An abandoned railroad trestle crosses Mad River Slough at the north end of railroad berm trail.

Dune Overlook Trail

A short distance from the parking area along the railroad berm trail, a spur trail extends west 80 feet up to a vantage point atop a dune at an elevation of approximately 90 feet above mean sea level. From this location one has a 360-degree view of the Pacific Ocean, landforms of the dune and forest complex, the Mad River Slough, the Arcata Bottoms, the coastal foothills and Humboldt Bay. This point is known as the "dune overlook." The steep trail up the dune is comprised of loose sand and has an approximate grade of 35%. Restoration crews use this spur trail as an access to the nearshore dunes below, and an obscure trail across the sand leads steeply down the face of the dune and beyond. European Beachgrass populates the dunes in this area and wherever it is absent, sands frequently alter the shape of the top of the dune. The BLM/Ma-le'l South and USFWS/Ma-le'l North boundary fence is clearly visible from the dune overlook.



The view north from the Dune Overlook Trail at Ma-le'l North.

Forest Loop Trails

There are two trails that depart from the main railroad berm trail and lead into the forested dunes. Combined, these two trails create a loop through forest towards a clearing adjacent to Iron Creek, a fresh water stream. Approximately half way along the length of the forest trails there is a short-cut that creates a shorter loop. The trails are generally well defined and approximately two to four feet in width. In a few places the trail route becomes poorly defined and there is evidence of a number of casual trails. In at least two locations along the forest loop trail there are remnant ATV wheel tracks. The remains of four completely dilapidated cabins are located in the clearing adjacent to Iron Creek. There is a path from the clearing towards the creek and some erosion of the bank is visible here. Along a portion of forest trail there is a dilapidated wooden staircase with rail, and a bench in good condition located at a vantage point of the slough and Arcata Bottom.

Dune Trail to the Beach

Where the forest loop trail is closest to the dunes there is a weathered but intact kiosk and a trail that leads out of the forest and up to the open, moving dune system. The trail up the dune is steep and in loose sand. Once on top of the dune, the trail appears to follow the Humboldt Bay NWRC posts and signs along the Fernstrom-Root southern boundary to navigate to the beach. Moving sand across the dune often obscures most evidence of any dominant foot trail. A tangle of wire and metal posts is periodically exposed near the dune deflation plain. At the back/leeward side of the primary foredune a poorly defined footpath is visible to the beach.

Wetland View Deck

Approximately 0.25 miles north of the parking area, on the west side of the railroad berm trail, there is a 10 ft x 10 ft wooden view deck and memorial bench cantilevered over a marsh area on the west side of the trail. The view deck was originally constructed in 1993 and, although it is still intact and stable, it appears to be decaying and potentially unsafe for more than two or three persons to stand on.



A wetland view deck is located along the railroad berm trail