

Coastal Access Navarro River Redwoods State Park

DID YOU KNOW?

The battle over access to Navarro Beach ended in a California Supreme Court ruling in 1970 that has helped protect public access to our coast.

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Public Access – Quite a Story

The road from here to Navarro Beach set a precedent in California history that helped solidify the public's right to access our coastline. The legal history of the road is linked to the Public Trust Doctrine and the California Constitution, the principle that certain resources like our coastline are preserved for public use, and that the government is to maintain them for the public's reasonable use. Starting in the 1960s, public use of Navarro Beach Road and access to Navarro Beach were in jeopardy and may have been successfully closed if it were not for the perseverance of individuals like Lester and Lotus Dietz.

Navarro Beach was always thought of as a "public" beach long before it became a State Park. In 1959, Robert B. King purchased the property west of the Inn and in the 1960s repeatedly attempted to block access to the beach with large logs, chains, and "No Trespassing" signs. Mr. King claimed that the road had only been opened to the public by the good graces of the former landowners and that the public had not established any right to use the beach. However, the roadblocks and signs he erected were routinely removed in short order by the continued stream of visitors attempting to

access the beach. A final attempt was made in the summer of 1966 by Mr. King using a bulldozer to install a permanent barrier.

That year, the Dietzes filed a class-action lawsuit and won a temporary restraining order stopping Mr. King from erecting the barrier. Their claim was that Navarro Beach had been used by the public for camping, fishing, picnicking and collecting driftwood for fuel. The Mendocino County Superior Court ruled in favor of Mr. King, concluding that there had been no dedication of the beach or road, and that widespread public use did not lead to an "implied dedication".

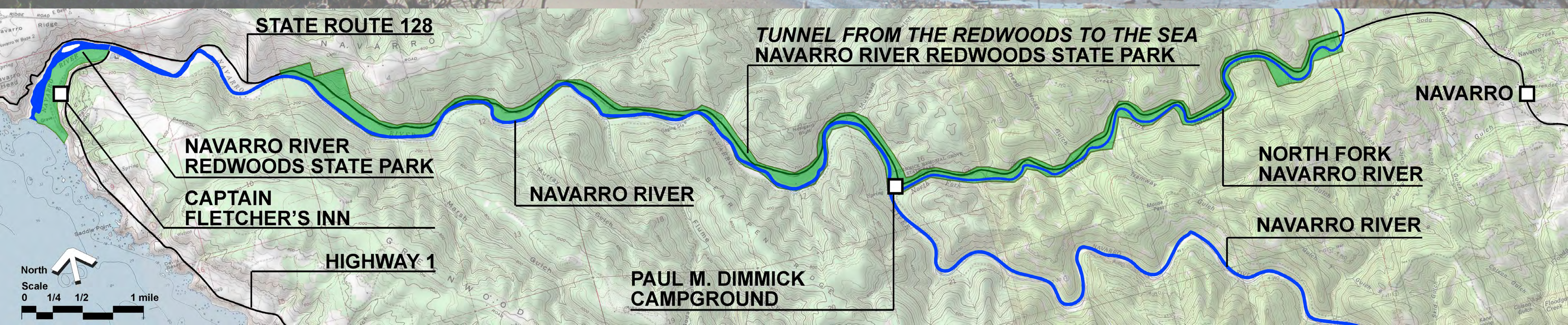
However the Dietzes and others did not give up and appealed to the California Supreme Court. In 1970, the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision that recognized the long-standing public use of Navarro Beach and deemed the road a public right-of-way. The Dietzes perseverance helped to protect public access to and use of Navarro Beach.

Navarro River Redwoods State Park

Approximately 660 acres of the 726-acre State Park is located parallel to the Navarro River as it flows alongside Highway 128. This portion of the Park was acquired by the Save the Redwoods League in 1987 and donated to the State. It offers an approximately 14-mile drive in what has been called the "tunnel from the redwoods to the sea". The approximately 66-acre portion of the Park west of Highway 1 includes the Navarro River Estuary, Mill House and Inn, and Navarro Beach.

In 1975, the Kings sold the parcel encompassing Navarro Beach to the State. With little management presence, Navarro Beach became known as the last "free beach" in California. A group of permanent residents occupied the area in old trailers, buses, tents and even a teepee. With no sanitation facilities, and growing challenges in attempting to manage the "squatters", the State grew short of funds and patience. On February 3, 1994 the State evicted about 60 people from Navarro Beach.

In 1980 the State acquired the parcel containing the Mill House. The most recent acquisition for the Park came in 1996 when the closed and deteriorating Inn was purchased.



CHALLENGE

Are there ways that you can be involved in helping to protect and maintain our public resources, like Navarro Beach and Navarro River Redwoods State Park?