



2024 Amateur Radio Operation Guide

This document is a supplement to the IAP (Incident Action Plan) documents. Updated January 13th, 2024

What?	Emergency, Priority, Health, Welfare & Logistics communications for the Sea Otter Classic.
Where?	Back Country paved & dirt fire roads within Fort Ord National Monument
When?	Thursday April 18 th through Sunday April 22 nd 2024
How?	VHF and UHF communications. The event Net Control Station (NCS) will partner with Monterey County Regional Fire District (MCRFD), National Ski Patrol (NSP), AMR, CalStar, and others for emergency, priority, welfare, and logistic message traffic.

Volunteer Information

Each volunteer receives a 4-Day Festival Pass and an official Sea Otter Classic Volunteer T-shirt. Volunteers are also provided with lunch on the days they work.

Every volunteer wearing a Sea Otter Classic Volunteer T-Shirt is considered an ambassador for the event. It is required that there be no smoking or drinking of alcohol beverages in view of athletes, spectators or guests. Volunteers may not bring pets or children while they are working. The Sea Otter Classic requests you wear the current year Sea Otter Classic shirts and clothing for security and for the benefits of the current year's sponsors.

Note that all the planning of this event is designed to simulate what occurs in an emergency response. ICS forms, portable radio setups, teamwork and working through problems are all useful skills for ARES/RACES. Check <http://seaotterclassic.com> for the most up-to-date schedule before your assignment.

BEFORE the event, request permission and coordinate frequencies if cross band repeat will be used.

EVENT DAY: REPORT to STAGING / CAMPING – Both at “Ski Patrol Central”

A.K.A. Paddock at Laguna Seca Recreational Area – A.K.A “D” Camping (Campground)

Take Highway 68 to Laguna Seca and head up "A" Road (red line). (Event days: arriving early is best as the main entrance closes around 7 AM - or earlier depending on the crowds) If "A" Road is blocked, you will have to proceed west on Highway 68 and follow the signs for Sea Otter Classic entrance and you'll come in on South Boundary Road (green line) which will take much longer as much as 30-60 minutes. Once you get to the perimeter road, turn right and proceed around the track and follow the signs to the Paddock. The perimeter road ends into the Paddock area. Before you have a vehicle pass, please tell the security person (Miller Events) that you've just arrived and need to meet with the National Ski Patrol and are headed there for an assignment where they have your vehicle pass.



PDF: <https://sartopo.com/p/CBB8C>; map: <https://sartopo.com/m/GLK59>

10S FF 11374 49817 or 36°35.24010', -121°45.29968'W



PADDOCK AREA

Once you pass security proceed forward and off to the right. The large building with a series of garages on a two-story building is your target and Ski Patrol Central will be on the left side of the building by the stairs.



Camping: You may need to register your vehicle at Camping Registration at the Hospitality Pavilion (10S FF 11103 49580 or 36°35.11398'N, -121°45.48330'W). Let who is stationed at Ski Patrol Central know that you are part of the ham radio team and follow their instructions. Camping is on asphalt pavement in tents or campers. Restroom facilities are available, showers are about a half mile away as part of the park service. Electricity cannot be counted on and there are no RV hook up services. Best part is there is no cost to you for camping.

BEFORE EVENT DAY

You should have the following before the event:

1. Dual band (144/440) HT
2. Dual band (144/440) Mobile
3. Truck or car suitable for rough terrain
4. Half tank or more of gasoline
5. Inflated spare tire
6. Dress in layers
7. Rain gear
8. Hat to protect from the sun
9. Sun block and lip balm
10. Bug repellent
11. Folding chair
12. Paper/notebook/clipboard for notes
13. Event log sheet
14. Note cards for messages
15. Pen / pencils
16. Water (essential!) and other beverages
17. Food / snacks
18. Small folding table to operate from
19. 2023 Sea Otter Classic volunteer shirt
20. Reflective vest (or other reflective wear) if you have one (we have loaners)
21. Trash bag for your own use
22. Toilet Paper

Optional equipment/items that may be handy:

1. Dual band (144/440) mobile transceiver
2. Batteries for your HT and/or backup HT
3. Headset for your HT
4. Tent or other portable shade
5. ARES/RACES magnetic signs for your car
6. Binoculars
7. Camera (incl. media and batteries)
8. Cow bell to make noises like the Olympics
9. GPS (Global Positioning System) to give coordinates (recommended)

General Information

Report of a cyclist's injury or illness is received by a Net Control Station (NCS), the closest fire/medical unit will be dispatched. The fire/medical personnel will determine whether a ground ambulance, air ambulance, or other

option is necessary. We do NOT use down rider/patient name over the air – refer to them by bib color and number.

Communicators are “NOT expected to make medical decisions.” We report our location, when we have a “rider down,” and fire/medical units respond. You may be asked to use the medic’s radio while they attend to a patient, so be prepared to do so, but in doing so, remember at that point you are not a ham radio operator and use of your FCC amateur radio license should not be used.

There may be non-emergency transport for guests or participants that are not medical emergencies, but need transport because of fatigue or minor injuries. SAG wagons may regularly make the course rounds to provide participant’s non-emergency / mechanical breakdown transportation at the Marshall Point (MP) pick up points. Their forward progress is dictated by the flow of riders on the course and driving VERY defensively. Be aware of SAG in your area, pass this info to the cyclists who ask you and report to NCS, when SAG wagons pass by your locations. (We should have SAG wagons tracked with APRS so passing their location to NCS is low priority)

“Medical Branch” 4 X 4 fire utility vehicles will be strategically placed around the “back country” and are staffed with EMT or Paramedic fire personnel from MCRFD. They may “bump up” their initial staging assignment to follow the race or possibly re-locate to more accident-prone areas.

American Medical Response (AMR) will have committed ambulances for the event. Since most of these ambulances weigh about 6000 pounds, they will not be able to drive the dirt fire roads. If an ambulance is needed, patients may need to be carried or taken out by 4 X 4 fire utility pickup truck to the ambulance on a paved road. If a cyclist complains of neck or spine pain, there is a good possibility they will be flown out.

Note: Athletes are responsible for carrying their own water and water is provided at feed stops. Water at other points and marshal points are for staff. Water should not be denied if available, but water for staff should not be compromised either.

General Directions:

Communications will be run via a directed net on the command channel. The Net Control Station (NCS) will ID periodically and identify the net with a time stamp. Use this time to keep your log in sync with others. NCS is in charge of amateur radio communications. Direct your attention to NCS’s instructions and comply with any requests. The event leader (“Lead”) may go “direct” to a particular station as conditions warrant. Since most conversations will be relatively short you will only need to use your FCC call sign at the end of a conversation. Otherwise, use your **tactical** call. Maintain a log of your communications and turn log sheets in at demobilization. Log the following:

1. Unit check ins.
2. Receipt of Emergency or Priority traffic. Location w/ Grid ID, BIB numbers and BIB colors (not participant names for privacy reasons), nature of the event and action taken.
3. Logistical traffic and when the need is fulfilled.
4. Interoperability traffic (e.g. MCRFD, Laguna Seca Communications, Ski Patrol, etc.)
5. Any problems and suggestions for future improvements.

Remember the following rules

- Be brief – Limit chatter and keep with essential communications.

- Coordinate/calibrate time with NCS for operations and log keeping.
- Do not argue over the air.
- Do not transmit while unsure what to say. Pause, think about what you are going to say first.
- Always monitor the primary net.
- Coordinate with Lead and NCS if you will use mobile cross-band repeat functions.
- Children, pets, alcohol and drugs will not be allowed during your volunteer service.

If you happen to encounter someone from the press, it is your decision to talk to them about your personal experience as a volunteer. However, if they ask about the event business and statistics, please direct them to the event leadership team which can be found at the Media Center in the paddock area between the Expo area and the Ski Patrol Central noted by a star on the map near D5 on the Festival Map.

The Fort Ord property are not closed routes and we cannot prohibit non-participants in these areas, but we can advise them the event is going on.

Personal Accountability:

Be accountable to each other, NCS, and Sea Otter Classic personnel

Please make sure that each station fills out an ICS-214 Activity Log. There is a copy as the last page of the IAP (Incident/Event Action Plan)

Make sure you include:

- Time you arrived on station
- Time you were set up and ready for the event to start
- Time the first riders were spotted at your station
- **Details of any significant event:**
 - **Type of event**
 - **Time of event**
 - **Rider(s) name and Bib number and color**
 - **Medical Condition if relevant**
 - **If subject needed to be evacuated,**
 - **ID of fire and medic units assisting**
 - **Where they were taking the subject.**
- Time the last rider was spotted at your station
- Time you started to break down and demobilize your station
- Time you returned to staging
- Suggestions for future events

OPERATIONS

General Rules:

1. This event will be controlled by a directed net. All traffic is to be controlled by Net Control Station (NCS) known as “LAGUNA” for the Backcountry at Laguna Seca.
2. If you need to interrupt an ongoing conversation, use a pro-word “**EMERGENCY**” (When life is in danger), “**PRIORITY**” (When life is in imminent danger) or “**BREAK**” and wait to be acknowledged by NCS.
3. Use your **tactical** call sign and make sure you use your FCC call sign at the end of a conversation.
4. Remember: communications are more often difficult than simple – this is why we’re here – check your radio periodically to make sure you can contact the command net and when calling another station, call the station, get an acknowledgement, then transmit your traffic. Avoid sending prolonged traffic without knowing if anyone is listening.

Authorized Traffic (in Priority Order):

1. **EMERGENCY** TRAFFIC – Life and death urgency to person or persons – Relay the following:
 - a. **EXACT LOCATION** including **MAP GRID and Trail ID and Direction of Travel (away from you position or toward it)**. For example: Grid V-10 – Trail 38 traveling away from my station heading toward Grid W-10.
 - b. **NATURE OF THE EMERGENCY** (e.g. single vs. multiple bicycle crash, conscious vs. unconscious, breathing vs. not breathing, bleeding, etc.)
 - c. **BIB Color & Numbers**. Never provide actual names over the air or on log sheets.

Relay information clearly, make sure it is acknowledged, and listen for further directions.

NOTE: BE SAFE, REMAIN CALM. Stay at your assigned post. Don’t go looking for an injured rider or other incident and turn into a victim or become lost. When in doubt, report it. Cyclists are good at looking after their own and will provide the best information on the downed rider. Also, those local to the area or part of past events are very familiar with the trails and will be excellent and accurate information as to the best location of the patient.

2. **PRIORITY** TRAFFIC – Important – Life in danger. Also, information having a specific time limit, not covered in the emergency category, press dispatches and emergency-related traffic.
3. Welfare inquiries from riders and NCS.
4. Logistic requests.
5. Unauthorized vehicles on the course - (very occasionally there may be a non-SOC dirt motorcycle)... BLM Law Enforcement U. S. Rangers will be on duty.
6. Check in - Roll call check in - Demobilization traffic.

If you’re asked for general or event information, please refer them to the information booths (yellow and white tents) at Laguna Seca and suggest that feed stations may have people that can help.

FORT ORD NATIONAL MONUMENT BACK COUNTRY INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE THE EVENT - Radio programming

Please program your radio for odd splits (other than 600 KHz) on 2 meters for the primary command channel. Most radios can do this, but it may take some extra programming or advanced features to do so. Be prepared to relay traffic from one station to another.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Please note that the times and details are subject to change.

In the Backcountry – each station will only have one BLM vehicle pass. In most cases you'll be partnered up with someone and only one vehicle will be allowed into the back country and the two of you will need to decide which vehicle to work out of. Understand that your vehicle won't necessarily be the one to be used.

Please keep in mind that end times are estimates. In most cases the event will end earlier, but if we have a significant incident, demobilization may go much later and especially in the back country, exit routes are closed to vehicle traffic during the event.

EVENT DAY

REMINDER: This area is environmentally sensitive. **Tread lightly.**

Please make sure you check out a Silke Commercial Radio – Tune it to the simplex channel and make sure you can communicate with the Ski Patrol team.

Always clearly display your BLM pass and surrender it to the BLM U.S. Ranger if requested.

- a. Avoid leaving ruts on the fuel break roads
- b. Observe 20 MPH Maximum on dirt roads or as road conditions permit
- c. Observe 30 MPH Maximum on paved roads
- d. The Basic Speed Law always applies (CA VC 22350. No person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property.)

Please note that in the Fort Ord Back Country, Drix Berger is equivalent to the incident commander on this course. Spook Groenewald is his assistant. If they need your assistance, your priority is to help them as your skill set allows. Please notify NCS if you are able, but your priority is to assist them especially if it is an emergency or urgent matter.

On station

Start your log in your ICS-214 and log all relevant activities at your site.

Coordinate and set up station with personnel co-located with you and inform them you are there to pass emergency, and health and welfare messages. Check in to NCS that you are on station.

Please monitor the simplex channel on the Silke Radio and listen for traffic from Ski Patrol team mates. They will contact a ham radio station to relay traffic if they cannot reach NCS with their radios. Please make sure you get their station name with the information you would gather if the traffic originated at your station.

Keep your eyes and ears open. If you spot an incident near you or observe one in the distance (where binoculars come in handy), note its position relative to yourself and call NCS.

You may be called to help move supplies or equipment. Please coordinate any movement with "Ops" who will serve as traffic control to assure the path is sufficiently clear of cyclists.

| It has not happened yet, but if there is a nearby lightning storm, we will likely put all activities on hold until it passes. If this happens, listen for on air directions.

After the Event – Demobilization (De-Mob) – Back at Rally Point 2 (follow the ops instructions)

1. Physically check out with Lead or designated operator.
2. Sign your ICS-214 log sheets.
3. Turn in ICS-214 log sheets.
4. Turn in BLM Passes.
5. Turn in borrowed magnetic door signs.
6. Turn in borrowed vests.
7. Receive course exit (extraction) instructions (strategy).

Background

The Sea Otter Classic has its roots in world class bicycle racing. Its first “back country” event was in 1991 with 150 riders and 350 spectators. “You guys should put on a mountain bike race.” That simple statement from a Monterey bike shop owner in 1990 was the genesis for the Sea Otter Classic. Co-founders Frank Yohannan and Lou Rudolph hosted the inaugural Laguna Seca Challenge on April 6 & 7, 1991. In 1993 the event was renamed the Sea Otter Classic and is now a part of the Life Time corporation. The Life Time Sea Otter Classic hosts over 9,000 athletes, 74,000 fans and is universally regarded as the world’s premier cycling festival.

For some interesting history of Fort Ord, see:

http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/content/ca/en/fo/hollister/fort_ord/index.html

ACRONYMS/DEFINITIONS

AAR	After Action Report
ACS	Auxiliary Communication Services
ALS or ACLS	Advanced Life Support or Advanced Cardiac Life Support
AMR	American Medical Response
ARES	Amateur Radio Emergency Service
ARRL	American Radio Relay League
BEU	CalFire – San Benito Monterey Unit
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BLS or BCLS	Basic Life Support or Basic Cardiac Life Support
CARMELO	Gran Fondo – Route through the Carmel Valley
CALSTAR	California Shock Trauma Air Ambulance
DEMOB	Demobilization
EMT-1	Emergency Medical Technician
EMT-P	Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FONM	Fort Ord National Monument
FOPL	Fort Ord Public Lands
Gran Fondo	Gran Fondo means long distance or great endurance (Italian)
IAP	Incident Action Plan
ICS	Incident Command System
LSRA	Laguna Seca Recreation Area
MCRFD	Monterey County Regional Fire District
Mother Lode	National Ski Patrol - Mother Lode Region
MP	Marshall Point
NCS	Net Control Station
NSP	National Ski Patrol
OPS	Operations
RACES	Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service
SAG	Vehicle that provides event complimentary shuttle service for cyclists and their bikes to non-emergency transports; however, the SAG drivers are NSP and they would be evaluating the riders as they drive them back to the LSRA.
SBC	San Benito County
Silke	Silke Communications – Radio vendor for the Sea Otter Classic
SOC	Sea Otter Classic
TBD	To Be Determined
UXO	Unexploded ordnance (explosives)
XBE	San Benito County
XCZ	Santa Cruz County
XMY	Monterey County
XSC	Santa Clara County

DANGER

Due to the potential for unexploded ordnance, **DO NOT ENTER** areas posted with **DANGER** signs that look like one shown below. Off-road vehicular traffic is prohibited on the former Fort Ord.

PELIGRO

Debido al potencial para material de artillería, **NO ENTRE** en áreas marcadas con letreros de **PELIGRO** como los que se muestran abajo. El tráfico automotor fuera de la vía principal está prohibido en el antiguo Fort Ord.



If you have questions regarding the military munitions cleanup program at the former Fort Ord, please contact:

Si tiene preguntas relacionadas con el programa de limpieza de municiones militares en el antiguo Fort Ord, por favor póngase en contacto con:

**U.S. Army Base Realignment and Closure
Fort Ord Office 831-393-1284**

SAFETY ALERT

Military munitions at the former Fort Ord

If you discover any object that resembles those shown inside this brochure

DO NOT TOUCH IT!

Instead, **MARK THE LOCATION,**
and **CALL THE POLICE – 911**

to report what you've found.

ALERTA DE SEGURIDAD

Municiones militares en el antiguo Fort Ord

Si descubre cualquier objeto que se parece a los que se muestran en este folleto

¡NO LO TOQUE!

En su lugar, **MARQUE LA UBICACIÓN,**
y **LLAME A LA POLICÍA – 911**

para reportar lo que encontró.



HISTORY

Fort Ord was an Army training center. The Army conducted live-fire training and other munitions-related activities at Fort Ord from 1917 until base closure in 1994. Because of these training activities, military munitions may remain present on the surface and within the subsurface of the former Fort Ord.

After reviewing records of past training activities, the Army identified areas where munitions may be present, and implemented munitions investigation and cleanup. The Army's ongoing cleanup supports the reuse plans the local community selected.

Because of its history as a former Army base, military munitions including unexploded ordnance may be encountered at the former Fort Ord. Munitions items have been found in unexpected places such as construction sites and people's homes.

Metal detection is prohibited on the former Fort Ord due to the potential for remaining explosives hazards.

If you discover any object that resembles those shown in the photograph

**DO NOT TOUCH IT
MARK THE LOCATION
CALL 911**

Si descubre cualquier objeto que se parece a los que se muestran en la fotografía

**NO LO TOQUE
MARQUE LA UBICACIÓN
LLAME AL 911**

WARNING: Not to be used for identification.

Projectiles



37mm Projectile 40mm Projectile



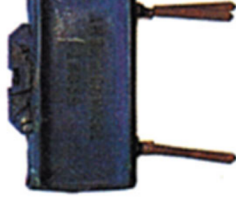
75mm Projectile



Flares and signals



Hand grenades and fuzes



Mines and fuzes



Demolition firing devices



Blasting cap



81mm Mortar



81mm Mortar



60mm Mortar



22mm Sub Cal



Rifle grenades



Rockets



Introduction

The Army first established Fort Ord as an Army training center in 1917. DoD closed Fort Ord in 1994. The Army conducted live-fire training and other munitions-related activities at Fort Ord between 1917 and 1994. Because of this live-fire training and munition-related activities military munitions may remain present on the surface and within the subsurface of the former Fort Ord.

After reviewing records of past training activities, the Army identified areas where munitions may be present and implemented munitions response efforts (cleanup) to remove munitions from the surface and subsurface of the Former Fort Ord. The Army's ongoing cleanup supports the reuse plans the local community selected. The conventional munitions encountered at Fort Ord include artillery projectiles, rockets, hand grenades, practice land mines, pyrotechnics, bombs, demolition materials and other munitions used by the Army.

Munitions, which may be encountered anywhere, should be considered dangerous. They may be heavily corroded, whole or in parts, buried, or covered with leaves, making them difficult to recognize. Should you suspect that you have encountered a munition, never approach, touch, move or disturb it. Even old munitions can detonate causing severe injuries or death. If visiting the former Fort Ord National Monument, learn and follow the 3Rs of Explosives Safety.



Surface munitions debris at the former Fort Ord

Former Fort Ord Army Installation

Emergency Contacts

If you encounter or suspect you have encountered a munition:

- Do not approach, touch or disturb it!
- Mark the location near the munitions
- CALL - 911
- Leave the area carefully, the way you entered

Danger signs are posted around areas where munitions may be present. Do not enter these areas. Off-roading is prohibited on the former Fort Ord.

If you have questions about the Army's cleanup efforts at the former Fort Ord visit www.FortOrdCleanup.com or call 1-800-852-9699.

Follow the 3Rs of Explosives Safety

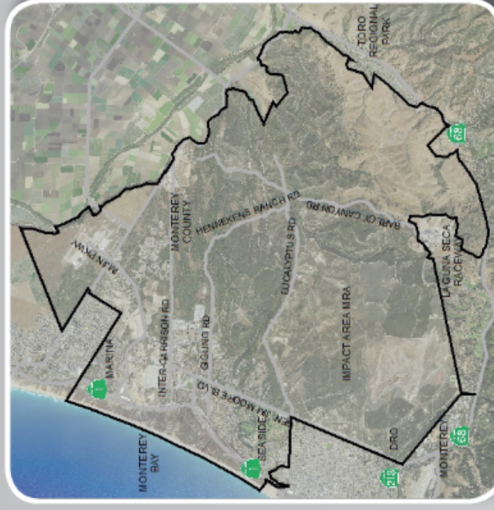


Visit the U.S. Army's Explosives Safety Education website: 3Rs.mil

3Rs Safety Guide

Former Fort Ord Army Installation

California
Monterey County



Follow the 3Rs of Explosives Safety



Historical Photograph of Fort Ord

Recognize

Recognize when you may have encountered a munition and that munitions are dangerous.

Recognizing when you may have encountered a munition is the most important step in reducing the risk of injury or death. Munitions may be encountered on land or in the water. Although munitions may be present almost anywhere, they may be easy or hard to identify.

To avoid the risk of injury or death:

- Never move, touch or disturb a munition or suspect munition.
- Be aware that munitions do not become safer with age, in fact they may become more dangerous.
- Don't be tempted to take or keep a munition as a souvenir.

Munitions come in many sizes, shapes and colors. Some may look like bullets or bombs while others look like pipes, small cans or even a car muffler. Whether whole or in parts, new or old, shiny or rusty, munitions can still explode. The best way to avoid injury or death is to stay out of areas marked with warning signs or charted as restricted.

Retreat

Do not touch, move or disturb it, but carefully leave the area.

Avoid death or injury by recognizing that you may have encountered a munition and by promptly retreating from the area.

If you encounter what you believe is a munition, do not approach, touch or disturb it. Instead, immediately and carefully leave the area by retracing your steps—going out the way you entered. Once safely away from the munition, mark the path (e.g., with a piece of clothing) so response personnel can find the munition.



Report

Notify the police at 911.

Protect yourself, your family, your friends and your community by immediately reporting munitions or suspected munitions to the police.

Provide as much information as possible about what you saw and where you saw it. This will help the police and military or civilian explosive ordnance disposal personnel find, evaluate and address the situation.

If you believe you may have encountered a munition, report:

- The area where you encountered it.
- Its general description. Do not approach, touch, move or disturb it to get a better description.
- When possible, describe its
 - Estimated size
 - Shape
 - Visible markings, including coloring



Pacific Poison Oak *Toxicodendron diversilobum*

General Description

My evening walk through the nearby grassy oak woodlands has taken its predictable late spring turn. No more careless plowing along the trail with eyes trained upwards for birds. I now pick my way carefully around and over the new growth of trailside poison oak, sometimes requiring extreme body contortions. Remember the game, *Twister*?

Toxicodendron diversilobum, otherwise known as Pacific or western poison oak, is a perennial, deciduous shrub—sometimes growing as a vine—that dons its leafy cloak in February and March. Its stems grow quickly over the next 2 months, innocently dangling over your favorite trail. New leaves are shiny and reddish, maturing into green for the summer and back to yellow or scarlet red before dropping in the fall. The leaves are lobed, from 2 to 15 cm (1–6 in) long, and typically arranged as 3-leaflets on stems (“leaves of three – let it be”) that grow alternately from the branch. Some stems, however, have up to 5, 7, or even 9 leaflets.

Poison oak is not an oak at all, though its leaves resembles the white oak. Rather it is in the sumac, (or cashew) family, Anacardiaceae. Pacific poison oak and its close cousin, western poison ivy (*Toxicodendron rydbergii*) both have the allergen, urushiol oil, that causes contact dermatitis (an itchy rash) in most people. The oil is present year-round, even on bare branches in the winter. Pacific poison

oak grows in the coastal Pacific Northwest and California, while western poison ivy tends to grow further inland, though their ranges have some overlap and hybrids have been found. Poison oak leaves have more rounded and irregular lobes than poison ivy leaves, which have pointed tips and are not distinctly lobed. The genus *Toxicodendron* includes eastern U.S. species of both poison oak and poison ivy, as well as poison sumac.

Habitat and Distribution

Pacific poison oak is native to the Pacific Northwest, from British Columbia down through California. It grows below 1500 m (5000 ft) in mixed evergreen forests, woodlands, chaparral, and riparian areas in both sun and shade. Shady areas favor its vine form, while full sunlight favors dense shrub thickets.

Ecology

Poison oak is a resilient, native shrub valuable in many ways to its plant and animal community, despite our unhappy, itchy relationship with it. Birds, particularly the California towhee, but also American robins, catbirds, and grosbeaks forage on its berries, spreading its seeds through their droppings. Birds also dine on insects hidden in poison oak vines. Its dense foliage has been known to support nests of the endangered least Bell’s vireo, and one study highlighted its importance to bird abundance and variety in cottonwood/poison oak woodlands along the Sacramento River in California. Because the urushiol oil does not affect wildlife as it does humans, ungulates, like black-tailed deer and livestock, can browse its nutritious leaves, as can small mammals, which also shelter in its thickets.

Poison oak is a pioneer species, readily sprouting in disturbed areas, such as in recent burns. By stabilizing newly disturbed soil, it paves the way for other plants to establish—a process known as succession.

Reproduction

Poison oak has two different strategies for reproduction. It can sprout vegetatively from



Pacific poison oak, with some new red leaves.

rhizomes (stems just under the soil surface that can grow roots) and from its root crown, or it can sprout from seed. Pacific poison oak blooms from March to June, forming small half-centimeter-sized, star-shaped, greenish-white flowers. Male and female flowers look similar but typically grow on different plants, making this species “dioecious.” Later in the summer the flowers mature into round, greenish-white globe-like fruits that persist through fall and into winter.

Relationship with Humans

Most humans will break out into an itchy red rash within hours to a few days after contact with the urushiol oil in poison oak. It’s actually quite potent, even in small doses. The reaction tends to get worse with increasing exposure and is particularly dangerous when triggered by inhaling the smoke of burning poison oak. Despite this, parts of the poison oak plant were reportedly used by some Native American tribes of California, including the Chumash Indians, for uses as varied as to remove warts and calluses, stop bleeding, treat dysentery, weave baskets, and tattooing.

Where to See

Within Klamath Network parks, Pacific poison oak grows in Oregon Caves NMP, Redwood NSP, and Whiskeytown NRA.

Learn More

<http://nativeplantspnw.com/poison-oak-toxicodendron-diversilobum/>

<https://www.elkhornslough.org/poison-oak/>



Flowers and fruit of Pacific poison oak.

©Charles Schelz

NPS/Santa Monica Mountains NRA

©Sonya Daw



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