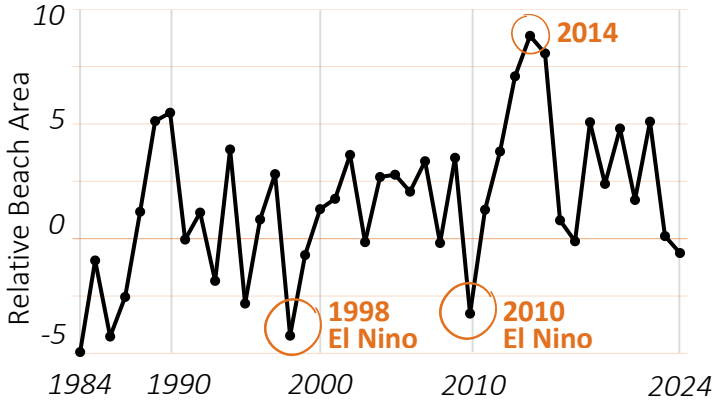
SANDY BEACHES

California Coast and Ocean Report
Status, Progress, and What's Ahead
2026

For millions of Californians, the beach is one of the most visited and beloved places in the state, a place to swim, surf, fish, and gather. Beyond recreation, beaches protect coastal communities from erosion and flooding and provide essential habitat for wildlife. These defining features of California's coastline face a long-term challenge: they are slowly shrinking due to sea level rise and other stressors.

STATUS

Most California beaches have been shrinking, or narrowing, since the record-high widths in 2014. Due to the strong winter storms of 2023, beaches in Central California have been shrinking more than beaches in Northern and Southern California.



Changes in beach area as tracked by satellite measurements. Beaches were smallest during the El Niño storm years of 1998 and 2010, and largest in 2014 due to calm conditions that allowed sand to accumulate.

PROGRESS

Keeping California's beaches intact requires addressing the sources of sand that feed them. **Reconnecting inland sediment through healthy rivers, such as the historic Klamath Dam removal**, can restore the natural flow of sand and sediment to the coast, replenishing beaches starved of naturally occurring sediment. The state has also made **historic investments in dune and wetland restoration**, which not only protect beaches from erosion today but also create pathways for beaches to migrate inland as sea levels rise.

LOOKING AHEAD

Beaches are dynamic environments that vary naturally from year to year, however **rising seas, beach erosion, and development** are putting California's beaches under long-term pressure — a problem scientists call 'coastal squeeze.' Through the development of a **Beach Resiliency Plan** and **planning for sea level rise**, the state is taking a proactive, coordinated, and consistent approach to support coastal planning that prioritizes beaches and the public's right to enjoy them.

BEACH SIZE FLUCTUATES ALONG THE CALIFORNIA COAST

Following a considerable loss of sand in 2010 due to storms, California beaches recovered to near-record widths in 2014. Since then, those wide beaches have been shrinking, but these patterns vary considerably from beach to beach. More beaches are losing sand in Central California, and beaches are consistently shrinking in places like Surfside and San Clemente. The state and local planners must consider beach-specific differences when planning for sea level rise.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

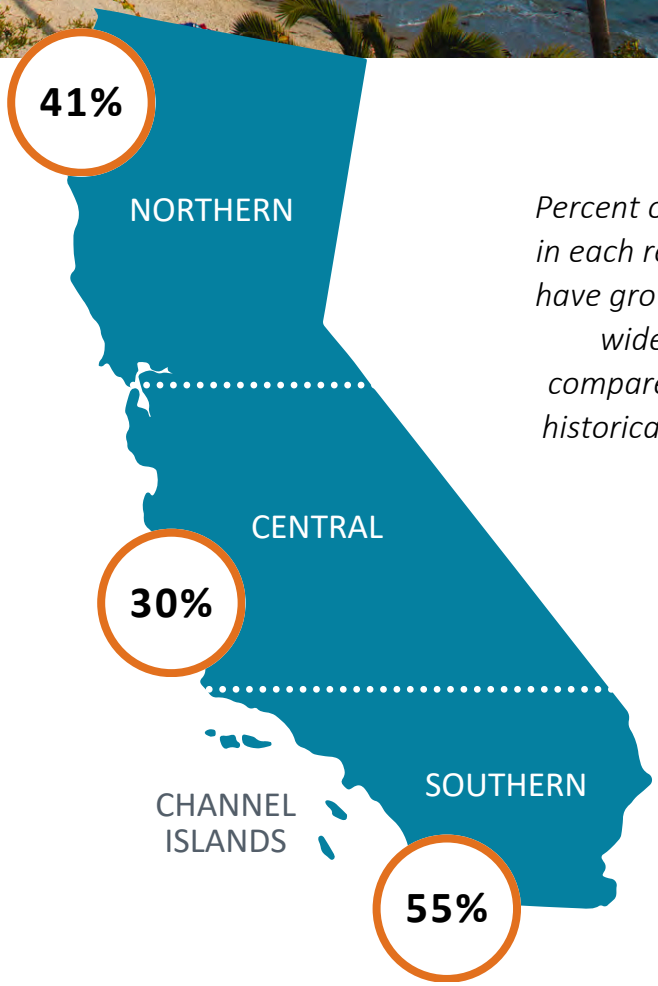
59% of beach segments are narrowing and **41% are widening**. There was a moderate narrowing trend over the past four years.

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

70% of beach segments are narrowing and **30% are widening**. There was a strong narrowing trend over the past four years.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

45% of beach segments are narrowing and **55% are widening**. There was a weak narrowing trend over the past four years.



Percent of beaches in each region that have grown, or are wider, in 2024 compared to their historical average.

CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

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