1. WELCOME to the Elfin Forest. Enjoy a walk along the one-mile boardwalk loop. The numbers in this guide match numbers on the boardwalk toe rail.

There is an elevation change of 80 feet.

There are no restrooms and no access to the bay.

Poison oak occurs throughout the natural area.

Please stay on the boardwalk and designated trails.

2. ANCIENT SAND DUNES here have been stabilized by native plants that thrive in the nutrient-poor soil. Without vegetation, the dunes would blow away.

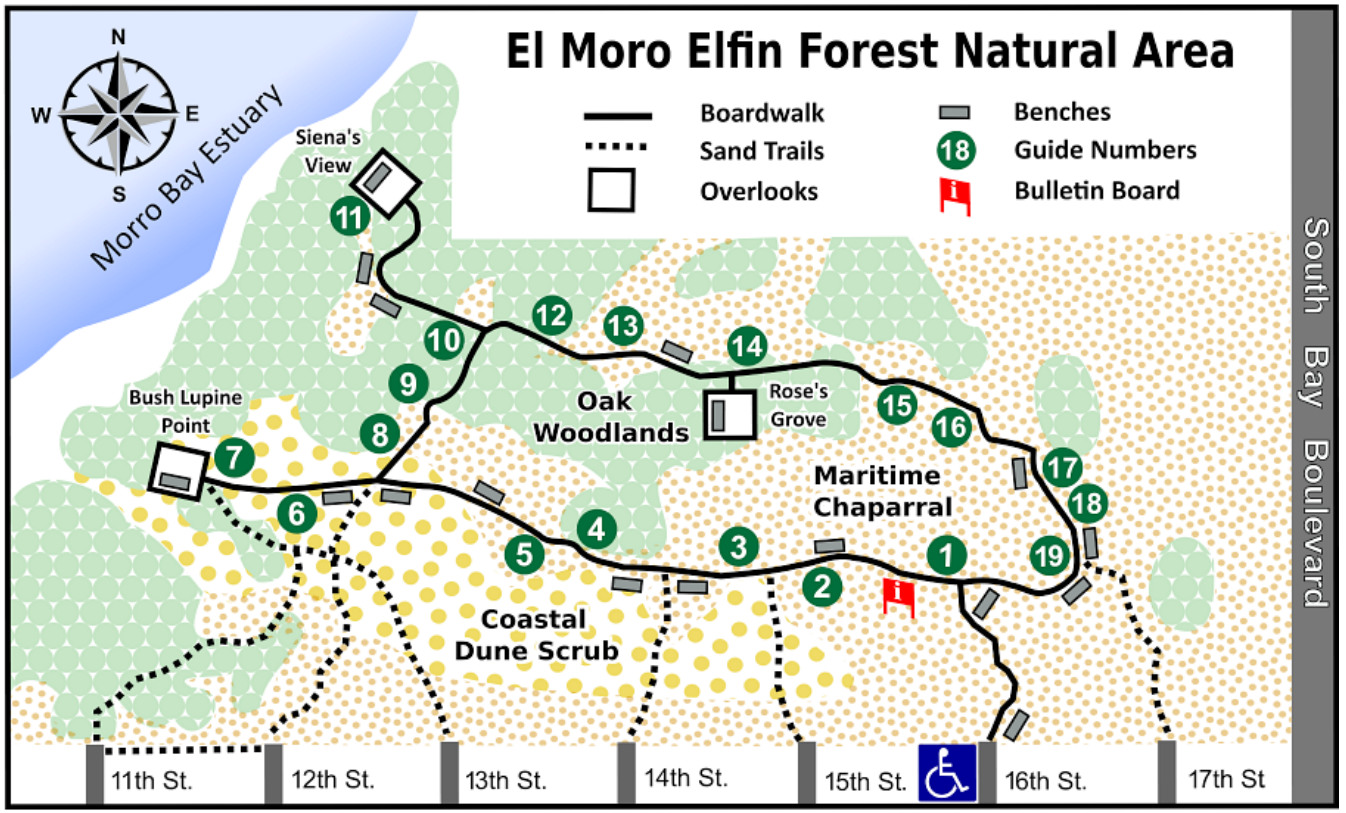
3. CALIFORNIA LILAC *(Ceanothus cuneatus)* has thick, hardy branches and light blue blooms that produce a sweet fragrance from January to April. In spring, **spittlebugs** make foamy nests among the leaves. It looks as if someone has spit on the plant!

4. PYGMY COAST LIVE OAK *(Quercus agrifolia)* The name **"Elfin Forest"** reflects the stunted stature of these trees. Farther along the boardwalk the tallest of these oaks reach a height of only 20 feet. Two miles inland, where conditions are more favorable, this species often grows 50 feet tall.

5. MOCK HEATHER *(Ericameria ericoides)* A crown of dense foliage contrasts with the bare, woody branches below. Many golden flowers produce dandelion-like seed heads from August to November.

6. REVEGETATION AREA

Volunteers painstakingly restored this open area after years of abuse and degradation by off-road vehicles. Replanting and reseeding efforts began in the 1990s. A healthy young community of native species now stabilizes these dunes. FEMEF continues to remove invasive species, especially Veldt grass.



7. SILVER DUNE LUPINE

(Lupinus chamissonis) has silver-gray leaves with fragrant lavender f lowers that bloom from April to June. This is a critical food plant for the **Morro blue butterfly** *(Icaricia icarioides moroensis).*

8. CALIFORNIA SAGEBRUSH *(Artemesia californica)* **and BLACK SAGE** *(Salvia mellifera)* Sagebrush has feathery gray-green leaves. Black sage has flower heads that resemble a stack of pompoms. Rub your hand carefully over the leaves and then smell.

9. FUCHSIA-FLOWERING GOOSEBERRY

(Ribes speciosum)

Long thorns protect this shrub. Bright red flowers attract hummingbirds in early spring. The plant loses its leaves by fall.

Poison oak grows in this area

10. POISON OAK

(Toxicodendron diversilobum) causes allergic reactions, including itching and blisters. Here the 3-leaved, green or red plant creeps into the pygmy oak tree canopy. Poison oak leaves turn bright red in summer and fall. The leaves are absent in winter. Remember, **"Leaves of three, let it be."**

11. SIENA'S VIEW provides an excellent view of the estuary and its bird life. Don't miss it.

12. COFFEEBERRY *(Frangula californica)* is a tall leafy shrub with tiny green flowers in May. Its berries turn from yellow to red to black in summer.

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13. MORRO MANZANITA

(Arctostaphylos morroensis) In Spanish, *manzanita* means "little apple," describing the plant's fruit. This large shrub produces small, very light pink, urn-shaped flowers, visited by many pollinators in late winter. Some of the new leaves are bright red. This threatened plant grows only in the fine, sandy soils from Morro Bay to Montaña de Oro State Park.

14. ROSE BOWKER GROVE

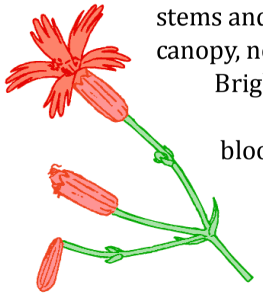
This grove is named in memory of one of the individuals who was instrumental in establishing this natural area. These **pygmy coast live oaks** are about 200 years old. **Lace lichen** (Ramalina menziesii) dangles from branches. Lichens help the oaks, collecting moisture and nutrients from the foggy air.

15. BRACKEN FERNS

(Pteridium aquilinum) thrive in the shade of the pygmy oaks and large shrubs. These ferns are lush green from May to late July.

16. CARDINAL CATCHFLY *(Silene laciniata)*

is also known as **Indian pink**. This plant has slender stems and leaves. It grows under the oak canopy, next to other plants for support. Bright red flowers with five fringed petals at the end of a long tube bloom mainly from April to August.



Trail guide produced by FEMEF for San Luis Obispo County Parks.
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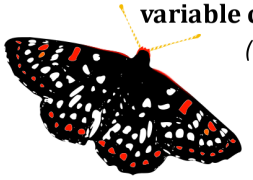
17. CHAMISE *(Adenostoma fasciculatum)*

is a wiry bush with small, dark green leaves and spikes of delicate, miniature cream-colored flowers that bloom from May to July.

18. STICKY MONKEY FLOWER

(Diplacus aurantacus) has pale orange trumpet-shape flowers from late March through early July. It loses leaves in the dry summer. Green leaves will emerge in the spring. It is a food plant for the caterpillars of the **variable checkerspot butterfly** *(Euphydryas chalcedona).*



All plant Illustratons are derived from original drawings by Bonnie Walters. Buferfly is from a photo by Pat Brown.

19. MORRO VIEW

To the north is the estuary and Morro Bay State Park. The volcanic Morros form a chain from northwest to southeast. The Irish Hills rise in the south. The Pacific Ocean, the sandspit, Morro Rock, and Morro Bay lie to the west.

FEMEF ACTIVITIES

Third Saturday of the Month Guided Nature Walks
(Topics announced monthly)

Volunteer Work Sessions
(Held periodically)
For details on upcoming activities please go to femef.org or check the bulletin board between #1 and #2.

EL MORO ELFIN FOREST NATURAL AREA

TRAIL GUIDE

- **Join**
- **Donate**
- **Volunteer**

Learn more at femef.org

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