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King Tides at San Elijo Lagoon Feb. 7-9

Extreme Tides Reveal An Entirely New Perspective at Lagoons and Beaches

ENCINITAS— As February’s King Tides return for the last time this winter, visitors to our beaches will have an opportunity to see a whole different view of San Elijo Lagoon.

It’s been likened to a “big bird buffet,” and you’ll see why as the gravitational effects of the sun and moon combine to create dramatic tides that cause some beaches to literally disappear from sight. California King Tides will occur February 7-9, 2013.

It’s a three-ring nature circus if you know what to look for: Mullet swim upstream and leap into the air, only to come splashing back into the water; Terns can be seen diving with pinpoint accuracy to snap up top smelt; and, as the rising tides first cover the mud flats and eventually the cord grass and pickleweed, the Light-footed Clapper Rail and Belding’s Savannah Sparrow become more active.

Then, as extreme tides recede, exposed mud flats become rich buffets for many birds and small mammals that dig for invertebrates. Striped shore crabs, fiddler crabs, and California horned snails scuttle across the pockmarked ooze. Egrets, poised as if in ballet rehearsal, gracefully await the chance to strike for a crab or fish.

It’s all part of the magic and mystery of San Elijo Lagoon during these extreme high and low tides—something that’s fun for the entire family, whether you are looking for special photographs or just to take in all the action.

“The King Tides present a fantastic opportunity to see a wide variety of birds during winter migration,” said Doug Gibson, Executive Director and Principal Scientist at San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy. “This is when you can see the maximum extent of feeding as the mud flats are exposed. About 40-percent of all North American bird species have been observed in San Elijo Lagoon, and winter, combined with King Tides, is a great way to see some of these birds in action.”

The best places to enjoy the visual effects of King Tides will be from the county-operated San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center, open daily to the public from 9 am-5 pm, at 2710 Manchester Avenue in Cardiff-by-the Sea. A ¼-mile ADA-compliant trail leads visitors on a stroll through salt marsh, tidal mud flats, and riparian habitats. Trail guides to other coastal vistas are found online at www.sanelijo.org/trails or inside the Visitors Center.

Another coastal vantage point is along the Gateway property, land that was recently acquired by San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, launching The Campaign for Gateway Park, in an effort to save views and habitat from commercial development. The 3.44-acre Gateway property is at the southern end of San Elijo Lagoon, between Cardiff and Solana Beach. There is no public parking, but the land is accessed north of the Solana Beach Rail Trail.

San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve is one of San Diego's largest remaining coastal wetlands. This county and state regional park protects nearly 1,000 acres of habitat that hosts more than 700 species of plants and animals, many of them sensitive or Endangered. San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, San Diego County Parks and Recreation, and California Department of Fish & Game manage the reserve. For more information, visit the Conservancy's website at www.SanElijo.org, or call (760) 436-3944.

NOTE: Doug Gibson, Executive Director & Principal Scientist of San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy is available for phone and camera interviews at (760) 436-3944 x 707 or cell (760) 803-4824.