

University of California Natural Reserve System  
Merced Vernal Pools and Grassland Reserve  
**Reserve-Specific Guidelines, Access, and Visitor Use Policies**  
(Revised August 2021)

**Access to the Merced Vernal Pools and Grassland Reserve (Reserve) is by advance online reservation.**

**Submit an application for Reserve access in advance of each visit using the UC [Reserve Application Management System \(RAMS\)](#).** Prior to Reserve access, all first-time visitors are required to communicate directly with the Reserve Director on the policies listed below and any additional conditions or requirements specific to the approved use. A signed copy of this form documenting acknowledgment of the Reserve-Specific Guidelines, Access, and Visitor Use Policies is required prior to entering the Reserve. In addition, a signed waiver is needed for non-UC-affiliated groups or individuals, or for UC affiliated activities that are non-required, non-academic activities, such as a field trip that is not a required part of the course. Photo consent waivers are optional. For questions, contact the Reserve Director at MVPGR@ucmerced.edu or (209) 291-6897.

**All Reserve visitors are expected to adhere to the following  
Reserve-Specific Guidelines, Access, and Use Policies:**

### **ACCESS AND DRIVING INFORMATION**

- **Access to/from the Reserve is only permitted through the main gate**, located at the intersection of Ranchers Road and Ansel Adams Road on the UC Merced campus. All visitors are required to sign in and out in the visitor log located at the main gate to document visitor names and purpose of the visit. Limited requests to use other gates for egress must be arranged ahead of time with the Reserve Director.
- **Cell phones should be fully charged ahead of time** and contain the Reserve Director contact number. Note: users should not rely fully upon cell phones, as some areas have no coverage (e.g., eastern reserve).
- **Gates shall be left as they are found at all times** (lock, closed, or open). **Do not share the combination** to the gate padlock with others. You should receive an updated combination with your reservation confirmation ahead of your visit.
- **Vehicles entering the property must be approved** by the Reserve Director ahead of time. **No ATVs**, motorcycles, or bicycles are allowed unless authorized in writing in advance by the Reserve Director.
- **Vehicles must be washed ahead of time**, including washing tires and undercarriage before entering the Reserve, if vehicles were driven in areas where they may have accumulated non-native plant materials.
- **Footwear and field equipment must be free of seeds and dirt**. If bringing footwear and equipment used off-site, clean appropriately before Reserve access, and **follow Reserve disinfection protocols**.
- **Vehicle use may be temporarily prohibited during and after rain storm events** on the Reserve, to avoid damage to roads and the potential for getting vehicles stuck in mud, the university is not obligated to assist or repair private vehicles that may be damaged, break down, or need towing. Check with the Reserve Director prior to visiting the Reserve after heavy rains.
- **Speed limit is 15 mph or less** on the Reserve, as conditions dictate. To turn vehicles around, use areas near gates, avoid turning around in tall grass, which can disturb wildlife, create a fire hazard (see [map](#)).

### **LEAVE NO TRACE**

- **Wildlife, plant life, other natural resources shall not touched, harmed, or otherwise disturbed** unless proper permits are held and prior written permission is given from the Reserve Director, who will coordinate with users about proper decontamination protocols if handling of wildlife is approved.
- **Archaeological sites and objects must remain undisturbed** They are sensitive and protected by state and federal law (see [Archaeological Sensitive Area Alert Sheet](#) for examples). If any prehistoric/historic resources are found, note location, and notify the Reserve Director.

- **Inspect and clean clothing, footwear, tools, equipment, supplies, gear for seeds, soil prior to** entering the Reserve to avoid inadvertently transporting exotic species, which could harm species. **Follow Reserve disinfection protocols** to clean clothing, footwear, tools, and equipment beforehand.
- **Pack out all trash, equipment and belongings.** Always leave the Reserve cleaner than you found it.
- **Reserve infrastructure shall not be hampered with** (rangeland infrastructure, research equipt., etc).
- **Research equipment and installations MUST be removed** when is research projects are complete.

## SAFETY

### CODE OF CONDUCT:

- **The Code of Conduct for the Natural Reserve System (NRS) must be adhered to by all users.** Please read [NRS Code of Conduct](#) in its entirety, and agree to comply with it while on the Reserve.

### COMMUNICATION:

- **Each group is required to carry a charged cell phone.** In case of emergency, call 911 or the campus police at (209) 228-2677. For non-emergencies, call the Reserve Director at (209) 291-6897 or Campus Facilities Management at (209) 228-2986.

### NAVIGATION:

- **Vehicles must remain on established dirt roads, and avoid vernal pools at all times (all year).** Visitors are encouraged to use [maps](#) available on Reserve's web page, including the georeferenced [Reserve safety map](#) using the [Avenza app](#), which allows users to view locations on the map in real time. **Permission is required in advance to travel off road**, including canal banks.
- **FIRE SEASON:**
  - **Visitors must carry a fire extinguisher in their vehicle during the dry season,** (May to November). Fire extinguishers can be borrowed from the campus Natural Reserve System office. Please contact the Reserve Director if an extinguisher is needed and for training in how to use it.
  - **Avoid parking in high grass and DO NOT idle in high grass at any time.** Take precautions to use vehicles or spark producing devices safely, which can produced sparks that present a fire hazard.
- **WILDLIFE:**
  - **Cattle seasonally graze on the Reserve and shall not be approached or otherwise bothered.** If cows are encountered on the road while driving, be sure to drive very slowly and they'll disperse.
  - **Do not leave vehicles and equipment unattended during grazing season (October to July).** Unattended vehicles may be subject to substantial vehicle damage by cattle that lick, nibble, and rub on bumpers, mirrors or doors, eat tires and crush antennae..
  - **Do not approach wild boar (individuals or herds), which could charge you, if provoked.** Boars have tusks, and can be aggressive. If concerned about boar interactions, bring an air horn with you.
  - **Do not touch any injured or deceased animals encountered on the Reserve.** Instead, please take a photo, mark the location, and report it to the Reserve Director immediately along with a description.

## RESTRICTIONS

- **No Pets Allowed:** Please note domestic animals are not allowed on any Reserve and exceptions require written staff approval. \* *Note: Herd dogs and service animals trained to perform specific tasks for their disabled companions, and properly tagged service dogs in training, are permitted with prior approval.*
- **No Firearms Allowed:** All firearms are prohibited on any University of California property of the Regents of UC at any time, pursuant to the California Penal Code, Sections 629.9 (h) and 629.9 (i).
- **No Smoking or Vaping Allowed:** This policy has been adopted by all UC owned or leased property to improve the health and safety of all students, staff, faculty, patients and visitors. The policy prohibits the use of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, snuff, snus, water pipes, pipes, hookahs, chew, unregulated electronic nicotine delivery system, and any other non-combustible tobacco product. Smoke-free means that smoking, the use of smokeless tobacco products, and the use of unregulated nicotine products (e.g., "e-cigarettes") will be strictly prohibited in indoor and outdoor spaces, including parking lots, private residential space (including inside your car). If you need to smoke please do so by traveling off UC property. [UCOP's Smoke and Tobacco Free policy \(pdf\)](#)

Please report any signs of unauthorized use to the Reserve Director. WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO DENY OR REVOKE RESERVE ACCESS TO ANYONE IN VIOLATIONS OF THESE POLICIES.

**ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS** (if applicable to your project)

- **Permits and Waivers. Provide copies of all required state and federal permits and sign waiver agreement** before entering the reserve. For some activities, proof of insurance may be needed.
- **Materials Policy.** Material(s), including resulting fragments, subunits, progeny, products, genetic material, mutants and derivatives, approved for collection by the NRS belongs to the University of California (UC). You and your institution/company will use the material(s) only in that scientific research activity described in this application and will not allow the material(s) to be transferred to any other party or use them for commercial purposes without the express written consent of the UC.

**DATA MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT** (if applicable to your project)

- **Publications.**  
**Provide two copies (paper or pdf) and full bibliographic citations of research study findings** within six months of publication (e.g., reports, theses, books, research papers, conference proceedings, other publications, note: only one bound copy of a thesis or dissertation is required). Include the reserve name as "key words" and acknowledge both the reserve and University of California in every manuscript. Please use specified language in the [NRS Acknowledgement Form](#).
- **Submission of Bibliographic Data.**  
**Provide full bibliographic citations to the online NRS Information Management System** (<http://www.ucnrs.org>) (e.g., for report, thesis, book, research paper, conference proceedings, etc.) within six months of publication for work utilizing wholly or in part an NRS reserve or its facilities.
- **Data Registration.**  
**Provide datasets, metadata, and data description to the NRS Information Management System** (<http://www.ucnrs.org>) for data sets based on work utilizing wholly or in part an NRS reserve or its facilities. *Note: completed registration of datasets will fulfill data registry requirements for NSF and the Ecological Society of America.* WARNING: If research on the Reserve produces scientific data valuable to the research community, failure to deposit both the bibliographic and metadata information as requested may lead to automatic denial of future Reserve Use Applications.

I agree to comply with all of the above rules.

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signed

\_\_\_\_\_   
date

\_\_\_\_\_   
print name