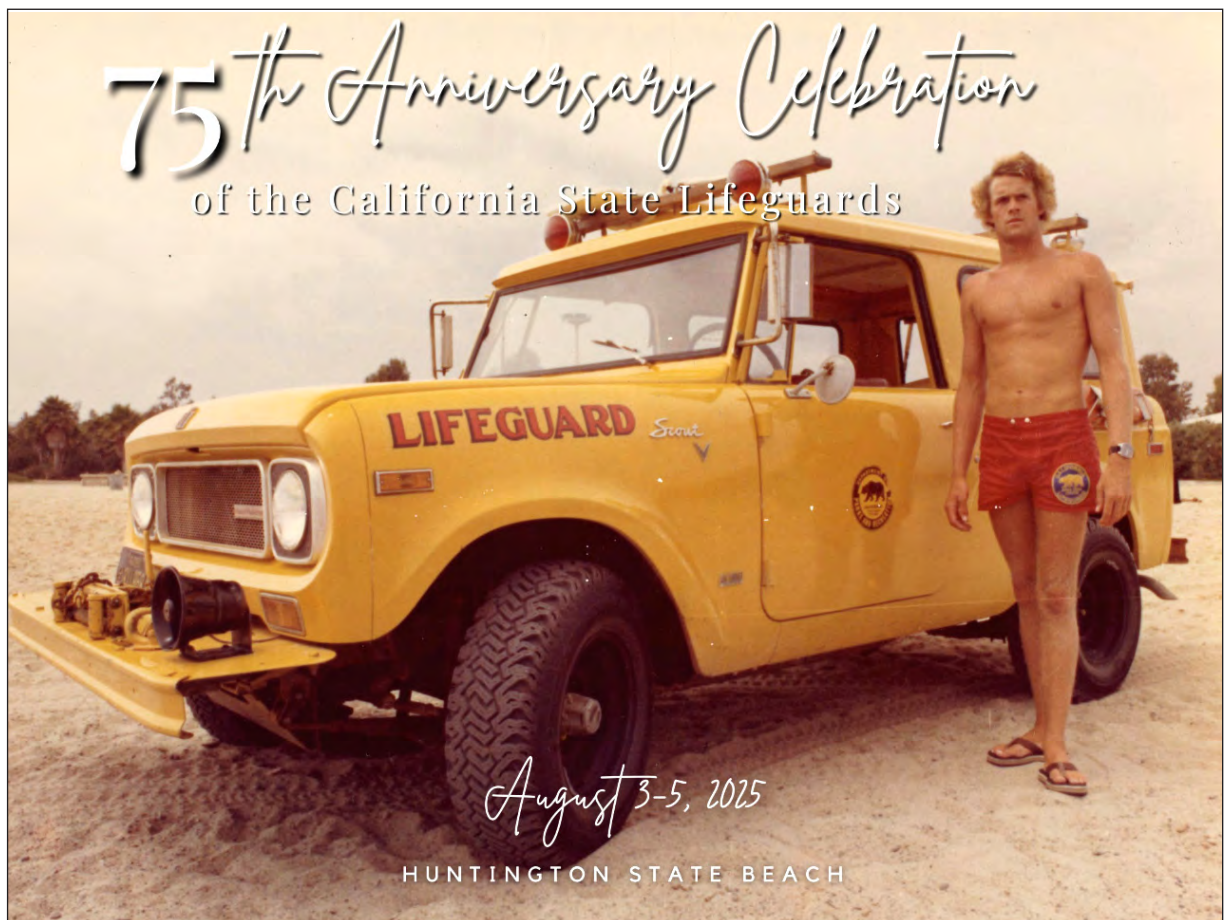


INSIGNIA OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS LIFEGUARD SERVICE

Michael Lynch

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This California State Lifeguard 75th Anniversary announcement features Lifeguard Mike Hollister at Doheny State Beach in 1978. The vehicle is a circa 1970 International Harvester Scout. The style of the patch on Mike's trunks was worn from 1972 to 1998. (Photograph by Steve White.)

Insignia of the California State Parks Lifeguard Service

By Michael Lynch

The California State Parks lifeguard service began on June 1, 1950, at Huntington State Beach with a handful of seasonal lifeguards led by the department's first Beach Lifeguard Supervisor Robert J. Isenor. Isenor was an experienced ocean lifeguard, who would be responsible for the development of the California State Parks aquatic safety program. He is recognized as the founder of the California State Parks Lifeguard Service. In 1953, he was promoted to District Lifeguard Supervisor responsible for lifeguard operations on all state beaches in Southern California. In 1957, he was responsible for establishing the permanent lifeguard classification series.

California State Parks now operates one of the largest professional lifeguard services in the world, with more than 600 seasonal and 70 full time lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors.

Since 1967, state parks lifeguards have rescued over a quarter of a million people and thousands of water rescues are performed every year by state parks lifeguards. Lifeguards play a critical role in the Aquatic Safety Program within California State Parks, for the protection of millions of park visitors to state park beaches, lakes, and other areas.

2025 marks the 75-year anniversary of California State Parks Lifeguard Service and celebrates their history, contribution, and accomplishments.

From the earliest days of the lifeguard service, state park lifeguards have had a distinctive uniform and insignia, starting first with just simple red swimsuits (still worn today) with a patch attached and in some areas denim jackets and pants. Beginning around 1960, khaki uniforms were introduced. Isenor and other permanent lifeguards also wore a CPO style hat and a khaki dress shirt, typical of the uniformed lifeguard services of that era (including the Huntington Beach city lifeguards). Over the years many changes came to the lifeguard uniform and insignia.

This is a brief history of the patches and badges worn by state park lifeguards during their 75-year history. A special thanks to Mike Brousard and Ken Kramer, along with many others, who helped provide information for this history.



*Robert "Bob" Isenor, founder of
the state parks lifeguard service.*



This large 6" x 11" patch was reportedly worn on the navy blue lifeguard jumpsuits that were authorized for wear (locally) during the late 1980s-1990s along the Sonoma Coast and possibly in the Santa Cruz District.

Lifeguard Uniform Patches

The department did not produce and issue uniform patches. Patches were produced by various uniform stores and at any given time this could be more than a dozen stores throughout the state. Because of this, there is a lot of variations in each style of patch with slightly different font types and many different looks to the bear on the patch.



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1. 1950s on red trucks. 4" x 2".
2. 1950-1964 standard patch, 4" x 2".
3. 1960s tab patch worn on denim jackets at Huntington State Beach.
4. 1964-1970, 4" x 4.5".
5. 1971, 4" x 5", may be an early version or prototype.
6. 1971, 4" x 4.75".
7. 1972-1990, 4.25" x 4.3".
8. 1990-1998, 4" x 4.5", 3.25" x 3.75" & silk-screen version 2.75" x 3.25".
9. 1970s-1980s, metal thread bullion patch used on blue blazer jackets, 3" x 3.5".
10. 1998-2005s, 4" x 4.75", 3" x 3.5", & 2" x 2.5".
11. 2005-present, 4" x 5", 3.25" x 3.75", 2.75" x 3.5" & 2.25" x 2.5".
12. 2022-present, 4" x 5", for Lifeguard Training Instructors.
13. Unknown date, sometime after 1985, 3.25".
14. 2019, 3.25".
15. 2000, 3".
16. 2000, 3".

Speciality and Anniversary Lifeguard Insignia

In 2013, Supervising Lifeguards started wear supervisor chevron rank patches on shirts and jackets. Prior to this, starting in 2011, they had worn collar rank insignia of lieutenant bars.

The 50th Lifeguard anniversary was celebrated in 2000 and two anniversary patches and a uniform badge were produced. Similarly, in 2025 for the 75th Lifeguards Anniversary, three patches and a uniform badge were produced (badges pictured on a following page).

In 2022, the lifeguards working in state off-highway vehicle recreation parks in the desert (providing medical and rescue services) commission a "Desert Lifeguard" patch. Not to be outdone, in 2024, lifeguards working in the Santa Cruz District, both on the beaches and in the mountain parks, commissioned a "Mountain Lifeguard" patch. Both of these patches are unofficial (used on equipment, hats, etc.) and are not authorized uniform items.

Finally, in 2020, a "Pink Bear" lifeguard patch was produced as part of the California State Parks Breast Cancer Awareness program. These pink bear patches are authorized for wear during Breast Cancer Awareness month in October of each year.



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1. 2013, Chevron stripes rank patches for lifeguard supervisors, 3" x 3.5".

2. 2000, lifeguard 50th anniversary cloth badge, 3".

3. 2000, replica of 1950 patch produced as part of the lifeguard 50th anniversary, 2" x 3.75". A similar patch was produced in 2024 for the 75th lifeguard anniversary.

4. 2024, official 75th lifeguard anniversary (2025) patch authorized for wear on swimsuits. 2.75" x 4".

5. 2025, 2nd 75th lifeguard anniversary (2025) patch 3.5".

6. 2024. Official 75th lifeguard anniversary (2025) badge patch authorized for wear, 2.5" x 3".

7. 2023, unofficial Desert LG patch, 4.5" x 5.25".

8. 2023, unofficial hat-sized Desert LG patch, 2.5" x 2.75".

9. 2023, unofficial Mountain LG patch, 4" x 5".

10. 2020, Breast Cancer Awareness Pink Bear, 4" x 5" & 3" x 3.5".

11. 1970s, hat patch for the crew of the Surf Watch LG rescue boat.

12. 2000s, direct embroidery patch on a hats, 2.25" x 3.25".

Almost all uniform lifeguard ball caps had the patch current at the time on them.

Lifeguard Badges

Most permanent state park field personal were issued badges starting in 1928 and in the 1950s and 1960s this included permanent lifeguards. Bob Isenor was the first permanent lifeguard to be appointed a state park peace officer in 1954. Since that time, permanent lifeguards have been trained and appointed as peace officers. They have worn standard state park badges that were issued to rangers and other peace officers in the department. One unique lifeguard badge was the eagle top hat badge worn on the CPO style hat in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1985, the department authorized personal purchase badges with an employees title. Lifeguard versions of the badge have been produced and worn since that time and are pictured below.

Finally, three lifeguard titled anniversary badges have been authorized since 2000.



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1. 1950s-1960s, 3", worn on CPO style hats of permanent lifeguards.
2. 1953-1961, 1.75" x 2", standard issue to most permanent staff, including lifeguards.
3. 1961-1972, 1.75" x 2", standard issue to most permanent staff, including lifeguards.
4. 1972-1985, 2.8", standard issue to peace officer staff, including permanent lifeguards.
5. 1985-current, 3", standard issue to peace officer staff, including permanent lifeguards.
6. 1985-current, 3", personal purchase option with a Lifeguard title available to permanent lifeguards peace officer staff.
7. 1985-current, 3", personal purchase option with Lifeguard Supv. title, available to lifeguard peace officer staff.
8. 2000, 3", authorized for wear during the Lifeguard 50th Anniversary in 2000. Personal purchase option.
9. 2000, 3", authorized for wear during the state 150th anniversary in 2000. Personal purchase option.
10. 2025, 3", authorized for wear during the Lifeguard 75th Anniversary in 2025. Personal purchase option.

Junior Lifeguard Patches

The California State Parks Junior Lifeguard program was started in 1968, when a Los Angeles County Lifeguard named Alex Nordholm had moved north to Carpinteria State Beach. Using knowledge from a recent trip to Australia where he observed the “Nipper” junior guard programs, he started a Junior Lifeguard program. He and fellow Carpinteria State Lifeguard John Kuizenga, started the program at Carpinteria State Beach with 25 participants in the first year. By 1970, the program had doubled in size. From this start, the Junior Lifeguard program is now operating in 24 beach and lake state park units.

It's not known exactly when the first Junior Lifeguard patch was produced but it was probably in the early 1970s and might be the round red patch below.



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1. Unknown date, but probably 1970s, estimated 3".
2. Unknown date, but from 1970-1990, 3.75" x 4.5". Maybe a prototype.
3. 1970s-1990s 3" x 3.5".
4. 2005, 3" x 3".
5. 2000s, 3" x 3".
6. 2000, 2.5" x 4", direct embroidered on a hat.
7. 2018 to present, 3.5" x 5".
8. 2018 to present, 3" x 2.5". Worn on trunks.
9. 2022, 2.5" x 3".
10. 2015, 3.75".
11. 2000s, 3.5" x 3.5". Refugio SB.
12. 2000s, Santa Cruz District, 3.5" x 3.5".
13. 2000s. 2" x 2.25", Carlsbad SB, direct embroidered on a hat.

Proposed and Reproduction Lifeguard Patches



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Over the years there have been several lifeguard patch designs officially proposed but not adopted. Some of these “could have been” patch designs are pictured here.

There are also a few unauthorized or reproduction patches sold online. Four of these are made by a company in the Philippines and can be easily distinguished from the original as the stitching is cruder and they do not have a plastic back. Surprisingly, most of these online reproductions sell for more than an original patch. A few examples of these unauthorized or reproduction patches are pictured here.

1. Proposed in 1963.
2. Proposed in 1963.
3. Proposed in 1996.
4. Proposed in 1996.
5. Proposed in 2006.
6. 2020, Unauthorized Huntington State Beach Lifeguard Association (HSBLA) patch made in the Philippines and sold on eBay, 3.25”x 3.5”and tab .75” x 2.75”.
7. 2020, 3”x 4”, reproduction made in the Philippines and sold on eBay.
8. 2024, 3.25”x 3.75”, reproduction made in the Philippines and sold on eBay,
9. 2020, 3.5”x 4.75”, reproduction made in the Philippines and sold on eBay. It is slightly smaller than the original and not quite square in shape.
10. 2023, 4”x 5”, unauthorized reproduction made in the Philippines and sold on eBay.
11. 2025, 4”x 5”, unauthorized reproduction sold online at Etsy.



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Photos of Lifeguard Insignia & Uniforms



Huntington State Beach lifeguard staff in 1964, wearing khaki uniforms and Beaches and Parks patches.



1960s at Huntington Beach. Seasonal guards are wearing blue denim jackets and have pith-style helmets, authorize starting in 1958. Note the Beaches and Parks door decal authorized starting in the 1950s.



In this close up of the driver and you can just make out the lifeguard tab patch below the Beaches and Parks patch.

Photos of Lifeguard Insignia & Uniforms



Bob Isenor and Jack Buck with two seasonal lifeguards about 1964 at Huntington State Beach.



Close-up of Jack Buck in khaki uniform, CPO style hat with lifeguard hat badge, and the brown System patch, about 1964.



Kirby Temple wearing brown and gold patch on a white shirt. About 1970.



Chuck Chase, about 1971 with blue System oval patch, blue jacket and white shirt.

Photos of Lifeguard Insignia & Uniforms



Mike Silvestri wearing the first dress uniform, consisting of a dark blue blazer jacket, white shirt, blue tie, silver pants, and a metal thread bullion patch over the left chest pocket.



MaryAnn Lughermo in 1996 at Huntington State Beach wearing the gold & blue System patch, dark blue pants and light blue shirt (Class B field uniform).



Chip Bockman and Dan Perry, wearing the lifeguard dress uniform in the early 2000s at Natural Bridges State Beach.



Terry Murphy, 2009 in dark blue Class B field uniform and wearing supervisor Lt. collar rank insignia.

Photos of Lifeguard Insignia & Uniforms



Huntington State Beach Lifeguard staff in 1967. Still wearing khaki uniforms but sporting the relatively new brown bear round patch with a Lifeguard rocker, adopted in 1964.



Orange Coast lifeguards wearing the first dress uniform, consisting of blazer, white shirt, silver pants, and a metal thread bullion patch, photo about 1981.



The Crystal Cove lifeguard staff in 1987, wearing light blue shirts for permanent lifeguards and white T-shirts, dark blue pants and blue shorts all around.



Caleb Howard and Joslyn Young wearing the LG-75 anniversary patch at San Diego Coast, 2025.

Time Line of Lifeguard Patches & Uniforms

- 1950s – Patch: Poppy design worn only on trunks. Uniform: red trunks and white T-shirt. During the 1950s, blue denim pants and jackets were worn at Huntington State Beach and in other locations.
- **Note:** Red trunks/swimsuits have continued in use for both seasonal and permanent lifeguards to the present time.
- **Another Note:** When new patches or uniform items were approved, there was always a wear-out period when the older items could continue to be worn. In most cases this wear-out period was for at least a year, but the wear-out period could be two years or more for some items like patches and dress uniforms.
- 1960-1968 – Patch: Gold and black Beaches & Parks (until 1964). Uniform: khaki pants, shirts and jackets. Some denim jackets and pants are still being worn.
- 1964 – Patch: Brown bear and lettering round State Park System patch with a separate lifeguard lettered rocker patch attached, is introduced. Uniform: Khaki pants, shirts and jackets.
- 1968 – Patch: Round brown bear and lettering “State Park System” patch with a separate lifeguard lettered rocker patch attached. Uniform: white shirt and dark blue pants and jacket.
- 1970-71 – Patch: Blue and gold oval State Park System patch with Lifeguard lettering incorporated into the patch is introduced. Uniform: White shirts and dark blue pants and jacket.
- 1970s - The white button-down lifeguard Class B field uniform shirt was still being worn through 1983.
- 1972-1998 – Patch: Light blue, golden lettered, State Park System patch. Uniform: starting in about 1984, a light blue shirt with dark blue pants and dark blue jacket.
- 1972-1980s – Patch: Metal thread bullion-style blazer patch is introduced. Class-A uniform: Dark blue blazer jacket, white shirt, blue tie and silver pants.
- 1998–2005 – Patch: Gold and dark blue State Parks oval patch. Uniform: In the early 2000s a dress uniform was adopted with dark blue shirt, pants, jacket and blue smokey-style hat.
- 2005-present – Patch: State Parks logo patch with Lifeguard lettering below is introduced. Uniform: Dress was a dark blue shirt, pants, jacket and blue smokey-style Stetson hat. About 2005, a blue T-shirt with the patch emblazoned on the left breast was introduced.
- About 2015 - Uniform: Blue T-shirt and jackets had lettering added on the backside reading “State Parks lifeguard”.



The Huntington State Beach lifeguard staff wearing dark blue shirts and jackets lettered “State Parks Lifeguard”.

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Produced as part of the 75th Anniversary of the California State Lifeguards

