How to Stake and File a Mining Claim in California

To stake and file a mining claim in California, you post a location notice on a monument at your discovery, mark the corners, record the notice with the county recorder, and file with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). You have 90 days from the day you post the notice to record with both. A new lode claim costs $274 in BLM fees, plus the county's recording fee.

California allows only three kinds of monuments, and it wants a county affidavit every year by September 30, so follow each step closely.

Last checked November 9, 2026. This is a plain-words summary of California and federal law, not legal advice. Fees and rules change, so confirm dates and costs with your county recorder or BLM before you rely on them. The newest version of our California staking guide is at goldmapsonline.com/how-to-stake-a-mining-claim-in-california.html. Check it before you file, since fees and rules can change after you download your maps.

The steps at a glance

Step	Where	Deadline	Cost
1. Post your location notice	A monument at your discovery	This starts the clock	No fee
2. Mark the corners	On the claim	Lode, 60 days after posting; placer, before you record	Your posts or stones
3. Record the notice	County recorder	90 days after posting	$90 for one page in Sierra County; ask yours
4. File with BLM	Online in MLRS, or BLM in Sacramento	90 days after posting	$274 for a lode claim
Keep it each year	BLM	September 1	$200 per lode claim or per 20 acres of placer
Record each year	County recorder	September 30	The county's recording fee

Start with your map

A filled closed box on your California map means that section has no active claims today, which makes it a good place to start looking. Its pop-up gives you what the paperwork asks for: the county, the township, range and section, and the BLM code.

One example from the November 2026 map is a closed placer box in Siskiyou County at T47N R7W Sec 12, Mount Diablo Meridian, with the BLM code 21 0470N 0070W 012. A box covers a section of about 640 acres and

doesn't show a claim's exact edges, so the map tells you where to look and your own checks tell you whether you can stake there.

Check the ground first

1. **Look it up in BLM's records.** Go to reports.blm.gov/reports/MLRS, choose Mining Claims – Geographic Report, enter the BLM code, and tick Active and Filed. Our step-by-step MLRS guide walks through each screen.
2. **Check that the land is open to mining.** BLM's Master Title Plats, on the GLO Records website, show what's open. You can't stake in national parks, national monuments, wilderness areas, Indian reservations or military land, and private land is off limits.
3. **Watch for California state land.** Federal mining claims don't apply there. The State Lands Commission uses prospecting permits and mineral leases instead.
4. **Walk the ground.** A new claim can take up to 90 days to reach BLM's records, so look for fresh posts and notices before you put up your own.
5. **Make a discovery.** Every claim needs a discovery of a valuable mineral. BLM's test is whether a sensible person would spend more time and money trying to develop a mine there, and recording a claim and paying the fees won't make it valid without one.

Lode or placer

A lode claim covers gold in solid rock, like a quartz vein, and can be up to 1,500 feet long and 600 feet wide. A placer claim covers loose gold in sand and gravel, and can be 20 acres per person, up to 160 acres for a group of eight or more. The notices and fees differ, so pick the type that fits what you found.

Step 1: Post your location notice

The day you post the notice is your location date, and every deadline counts from it. At the point of discovery, put up a monument of a kind listed in Step 2, and post your notice in or on it.

The notice has to give all of these:

- The name of the claim
- Your name and your current mailing or home address
- The date of location, which is the day you post the notice
- A description of the claim tied to a natural object or permanent monument, so the claim can be found
- **Lode:** the feet you claim along the vein each way from the discovery, the width on each side of the claim's center, the general course of the vein, and the kind of monuments you used for the discovery and corners
- **Placer:** the number of feet or acres you claim

California's law says a lode location that misses a required step is void, unless an amended notice can fix it. Get each item right the first time.

Step 2: Mark the corners

- **Lode claim:** within 60 days of posting, put a monument at each corner.
- **Placer claim:** put a monument at each corner, or at the nearest spot you can reach. California sets no day count for placer claims, so finish before you record.

The boundaries have to be easy to trace on the ground. Mark each corner monument with which corner it is and the name of the claim. California allows only these three kinds of monuments, and each one has to stick up at least 2 feet above the ground:

- A wooden post at least 1.5 inches across
- A mound of stone
- A metal post that's capped and has no holes, or a solid metal rod, at least 1 inch across

If steep ground or your mining work makes the true spot unsafe or impractical, put a witness monument as close as the ground allows and mark it to show where the true spot is. BLM doesn't allow perforated or uncapped pipe as markers, because of wildlife deaths.

Step 3: Record with the county recorder

Within 90 days of posting, record a true copy of your notice with the recorder in the county where the claim sits. Attach your own statement of how you marked the boundaries and what the markers are, and include the section, township, range and meridian.

A notice of location can be recorded without a notary. California law doesn't ask for a map at the county, but some county forms, like Sierra County's, ask you to attach one. Putting something false on the notice or statement on purpose is a crime, with a fine of up to $200, up to six months in jail, or both.

California's recording law sets these basics for anything you record:

- A title at the top of the first page that says what it is, like Notice of Location
- Original signatures, with each signer's name typed or printed beside or below
- Pages 8.5 by 11 inches, or no bigger than 8.5 by 14
- Paper and print that will copy clearly

Leave the top 2.5 inches of the first page blank for the recorder, except the left 3.5 inches of that strip. There, write who asked for the recording and the name and address to mail it back to. Leave at least a half-inch margin on the left and right sides.

State law sets the base fee at $10 for the first page and $3 for each added page, rising to $15 and $4 on January 1, 2027. Counties can add a few dollars, and a $75 state housing fee applies to documents about real property, with no exception in the law for mining claims. Sierra County, for example, charges $90 for a one-page notice, so ask your recorder for the total before you mail anything.

Step 4: File with BLM

BLM needs its own filing by the 90th day, and it advises recording with the county first. Send BLM a copy of the recorded notice, a map of the claim and the fees. You can file online in MLRS at mlrs.blm.gov with a login.gov account, or by mail to BLM's California State Office in Sacramento.

Claim	Fees	Total
Lode	$25 + $49 + $200	$274
Placer, up to 20 acres	$25 + $49 + $200	$274
Placer, 21 to 40 acres	$25 + $49 + $400	$474

The three fees are the processing fee, the location fee and the first maintenance fee, for claims located on or after September 1, 2026. Each added 20 acres of placer, or part of 20 acres, adds $200.

A claim that isn't recorded with BLM and the county by the 90th day is abandoned and void under federal law, even if the ground is good. BLM says it refunds the location and maintenance fees in that case, after the appeal period.

Re-staking a closed claim

Re-staking a closed claim means making a brand-new claim, and none of the old owner's rights carry over. California's law says a relocation is made the same way as any other location, so all four steps apply, and California doesn't require any digging for it.

Don't count on the old markers. The old owner had to remove every monument within 180 days of losing the claim, and anything you use has to be one of the three kinds in Step 2.

Keeping your claim each year

On or before September 1 each year, pay BLM $200 per lode claim, or $200 for each 20 acres of a placer claim, or the claim is forfeited. If you stake before September 1 but file with BLM after it, you'll owe two maintenance fees at once, one for each year, unless you qualify for the small miner waiver and file it when you record the claim.

California also requires a county filing every year, whether you pay BLM's fee or do the work. Its law says to record an affidavit with the county within 30 days after the fee or the work is due, so record it by September 30. The law doesn't say whether the first fee you pay with a new claim counts, so to be safe, record one within 30 days of that payment too. If you skip it, the law presumes you meant to abandon the claim, and in any dispute it's up to you to prove you paid or did the work. The affidavit gives all of these:

- The claim's name and BLM serial number, and the book and page or document number of your recorded notice
- The section, township, range and meridian
- The fee you paid or will pay, with the amount and date, or the work you did, what each item was worth, when you did it, and the name and address of whoever did it
- Your name and mailing address, and the owner's
- A statement that the claim is held for the valuable mineral in it
- A statement that every required monument and notice was in place on a date in that year, with the date, and that each corner monument was marked with its corner and the claim name

A county can require proof that the claim's taxes are paid before it records the affidavit. Sierra County's form has a box for the tax collector to sign, so ask your recorder what it needs.

With 10 or fewer claims nationwide, you can do at least $100 of work on each claim instead of paying. File the free waiver form with BLM by September 1, on paper because it can't be filed online, then file an affidavit of the work with BLM by December 30 at $15 per claim. The county affidavit is still due by September 30.

A claim doesn't give you a free hand on the surface. Work beyond casual use can need a notice or a plan of operations, so talk to the local BLM field office or Forest Service ranger district first.

Suction dredging is banned in every river, stream and lake in California for now, and the law has no exception for claim owners. The ban covers any motorized or mechanized setup that removes or processes material from a stream's bed, bank or channel to get minerals. Panning and other mining without a motor aren't banned.

Who to ask

- **BLM California State Office:** Call 916-978-4400. The office is at 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825, open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

- **California Department of Fish and Wildlife:** The suction dredge rules, at wildlife.ca.gov. We found no state office that answers staking questions, so ask the county recorder or BLM.

Where these rules come from

- California Public Resources Code 3900 to 3924: location notices, monuments, recording, relocation and yearly affidavits
- California Government Code 27201 to 27399 and AB 2224 (2026): page rules, signatures, the notary exception and county fees
- California Fish and Game Code 5653.1: the suction dredge ban
- BLM's California State Office and mining claim fees
- 43 U.S.C. 1744 and 30 U.S.C. 28f: the yearly filing and the maintenance fee

California county recorders

A claim is recorded in the county where the ground is. Call before you mail anything, since offices move and hours change. A star marks an office we couldn't fully confirm on the county's own website, so check its phone number first.

County	Recorder's address	Phone
Alameda	1106 Madison Street, Oakland, CA 94607	(510) 272-6362
Alpine	99 Water Street, Markleeville, CA 96120 Mail: PO Box 155	530-694-2283
Amador *	810 Court Street, Jackson, CA 95642	(209) 223-6468
Butte	155 Nelson Avenue, Oroville, CA 95965	530-552-3400, Option 2
Calaveras	891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249	(209) 754-6372
Colusa	546 Jay Street Suite 200, Colusa, CA 95932	(530) 458-0500
Contra Costa *	555 Escobar Street, Martinez, CA 94553	(925) 335-7900
Del Norte	981 H Street, Suite 160, Crescent City, CA 95531	(707) 464-7216
El Dorado *	360 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA 95667	(530) 621-5490
Fresno	1250 Van Ness Ave, Fresno, CA 93721 Mail: P.O. Box 766, Fresno, CA 93712	(559) 600-3471
Glenn *	516 West Sycamore Street, Willows, CA 95988	(530) 934-6412
Humboldt	825 5th Street, 5th Floor, Eureka, CA 95501	(707) 445-7593
Imperial	940 W. Main Street, Suite 202, El Centro, CA 92243	(442) 265-1075
Inyo	168 N. Edwards Street, Independence, CA 93526 Mail: PO Box F	760-878-0224
Kern *	1655 Chester Avenue, Bakersfield, CA 93301	(661) 868-6400
Kings *	1400 West Lacey Boulevard, Hanford, CA 93230	(559) 582-3211 ext. 2470
Lake	255 N Forbes Street, Lakeport, CA 95453	707-263-2293
Lassen *	220 S. Lassen Street, Suite 5, Susanville, CA 96130	(530) 251-8234
Los Angeles *	12400 East Imperial Highway, Room 1002, Norwalk, CA 90650 Mail: P.O. Box 1250, Norwalk, CA 90651-1250	(800) 201-8999
Madera *	200 West 4th Street, Madera, CA 93637	(559) 675-7724
Marin *	3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 234, San Rafael, CA 94903	(415) 473-6094

County	Recorder's address	Phone
Mariposa	4982 10th Street, Mariposa, CA 95338 Mail: P.O. Box 35	209-966-2332
Mendocino *	501 Low Gap Road, No.1020, Ukiah, CA 95482	(707) 463-4376
Merced *	2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340	(209) 385-7627
Modoc	204 S Court Street Suite 106, Alturas, CA 96101	530-233-6217
Mono	74 N School Street Annex I, Bridgeport, CA 93517 Mail: PO Box 237	760-932-5530
Monterey *	168 West Alisal Street, First Floor, Salinas, CA 93901 Mail: P.O. Box 29, Salinas, CA 93902-0029	(831) 755-5041
Napa *	900 Coombs Street, Room 116, Napa, CA 94559 Mail: P.O. Box 298, Napa, CA 94559-0298	(707) 253-4105
Nevada	950 Maidu Avenue, Nevada City, CA 95959	530-265-1221
Orange	601 N. Ross Street, Santa Ana, CA 92701 Mail: P. O. Box 238, Santa Ana, CA 92702-0238	(714) 834-2500
Placer *	3715 Atherton Road, Rocklin, CA 95765	(530) 886-5600
Plumas	520 Main Street Room 102, Quincy, CA 95971	(530) 283-6128
Riverside	2724 Gateway Dr., Riverside, CA 92507 Mail: P.O. Box 751, Riverside, CA 92502-0751	(951) 486-7000
Sacramento	3636 American River Drive, Suite 110, Sacramento, CA 95864	(916) 874-6334
San Benito *	1601 Lana Way, Hollister, CA 95023	(831) 636-4046
San Bernardino	222 W. Hospitality Lane, San Bernardino, CA 92415	909.387.8306
San Diego	1600 Pacific Highway, Room 260, San Diego, CA 92101 Mail: P.O. Box 121750, San Diego, CA 92112-1750	(619) 237-0502
San Joaquin	44 N. San Joaquin Street, Suite 260, Stockton, CA 95202 Mail: P.O. Box 1968, Stockton, CA 95201-1968	(209) 468-3939
San Luis Obispo	1055 Monterey Street Suite D120, San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	(805) 781-5080
Santa Barbara *	1100 Anacapa Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101 Mail: P. O. Box 159, Santa Barbara, CA 93102-0159	(805) 568-2250
Santa Clara *	110 W. Tasman Drive, First Floor, San Jose, CA 95134	(408) 299-5688
Santa Cruz	701 Ocean St., Room 230, Santa Cruz, CA 95060	(831) 454-2800
Shasta *	1450 Court Street, Suite 208, Redding, CA 96001-1679	(530) 225-5678
Sierra	100 Courthouse Sq. Rm 11, Downieville, CA 95936 Mail: P.O. Drawer D	530-289-3295
Siskiyou	311 Fourth Street, Room 108, Yreka, CA 96097	530-842-8065
Solano	675 Texas Street, Ste 2700, Fairfield, CA 94533	(707) 784-6294
Sonoma	585 Fiscal Drive Room 103, Santa Rosa, CA 95403	(707) 565-3800
Stanislaus	1021 I Street, Suite 101, Modesto, CA 95354 Mail: P.O. Box 1670, Modesto, CA 95353	(209) 525-5250
Sutter *	433 Second Street, Yuba City, CA 95991	(530) 822-7134
Tehama	633 Washington Street – Room 11, Red Bluff, CA 96080 Mail: PO Box 250	(530) 527-3350
Trinity	11 Court Street, Weaverville, CA 96093 Mail: P.O. Box 1215	530-623-1215
Tulare *	221 S. Mooney Blvd., Room 103, Visalia, CA 93291-4593	(559) 636-5050
Tuolumne *	2 South Green Street, Sonora, CA 95370	(209) 533-5531

County	Recorder's address	Phone
Ventura *	800 South Victoria Avenue, LN 1260, Ventura, CA 93009	(805) 654-2295
Yolo	625 Court Street, Room B01, Woodland, CA 95695 Mail: P.O. Box 1130	530-666-8130
Yuba	915 8th Street, Suite 107, Marysville, CA 95901	(530) 749-7851