



Coastal Camera Club

Digital Competition Rules

September 2026 - May 2027

Section 1: General Rules

- A.** The Competition Committee of no less than three members is responsible for conducting club competitions, and developing, interpreting, and enforcing the Competition Rules of the Coastal Camera Club (CCC).
- B.** The Club President appoints the Competition Chairperson. For the 2026-2027 Program year, Paul Sylvia is the Chairperson and may be contacted via email at competition@coastalcameraclub.com.
- C.** Monthly Competitions will be held from September through April. The Year End Competition will be held on the first Wednesday in May.
- D.** Members in good standing may enter CCC competitions.
- E.** The Competition Committee will place members into one of three levels (1, 2, or 3) for competitions. New club members will be placed in Level 1 unless additional information (e.g., professional photographers, PSA, acceptance in juried exhibits, other recognition, awards, and/or portfolio review) indicates placement in Level 2 or 3. The usual progression is Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3.
1. Progression to the next level will be determined at the completion of the competition year based upon the member having demonstrated the ability to compete at a more advanced level. In making this determination, factors such as average scores, awards, and number of entries will be considered.
 2. A member may request a return to their previous level from the Competition Committee.
- F.** Monthly competition type are digital competitions where the digital image submitted by the member is scored.
1. Digital Image refers to the jpg/jpeg images supplied for competitions no later than 11:59 pm EST on the Wednesday of the week prior to the scheduled competition.
- G.** The competition schedule for the entire program is published on the CCC website at least one month prior to the start of the competition program.
- H.** Each month a member may submit up to two images, with no more than one image per category for that month.
- I.** A photograph awarded in CCC competitions in any form may not form the basis of a new competition submission in the same or in a new form and may not be re-entered in a Monthly Competition. A different version of the same original photo may not be entered in the same

monthly competition. A digital image that has NOT placed may be re-entered in another competition.

J. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in digital competitions

1. AI may be used in post processing images in areas such as removal tools, masking tools, adaptive presets, lens blur, and denoise, generative fill, generative expand, sky replacement as per the rules in each category.
2. Any AI creations utilizing **user prompted requests** creating, replacing or fabricating pixels or image content is **prohibited**.

Section 2: Competition Categories

There are six (6) Competition Categories available each month. They are:

A. Open Color: The photograph is not monochromatic.

1. All elements need to be the photographer's own work.
2. HDR, stacking, stitching, and composite images are allowed.
3. Vignettes are allowed.
4. Borders/digital frames are not allowed except a thin white border may be added to separate the background of a dark image and the boundaries of an image from the black background of the competition software.
5. The resulting image must begin with an original image or series of images that were captured or made by the maker either digitally or on film.

B. Open Mono: The photograph is monochromatic: Limited to B&W, Sepia (colors of browns), or Cyanotype (bluish colors).

1. All elements need to be the photographer's own work.
2. HDR, stacking, stitching, and composite images are allowed.
3. Vignettes are allowed.
4. Borders/digital frames are not allowed except a thin white border may be added to separate the background of a dark image and the boundaries of an image from the black background of the competition software.
5. The resulting image must begin with an original image or series of images that were captured or made by the maker either digitally or on film.

C. Assigned Pictorial: (Color or Monochromatic): An Assigned Pictorial image expresses the "TOPIC" of the month.

1. All elements need to be the photographer's own work.
2. HDR, stacking, stitching, and composite images are allowed.
3. Vignettes are allowed.
4. Borders/digital frames are not allowed except a thin white border may be added to separate the background of a dark image and the boundaries of an image from the black background of the competition software.

5. The resulting image must begin with an original image or series of images that were captured or made by the maker either digitally or on film.

D. Open Wildlife: The purpose of this category is to celebrate the beauty, behavior, and diversity of wildlife while encouraging ethical wildlife photography. The welfare of the animal always takes priority over creating a photograph.

1. Eligible Subjects:

- a. Wildlife includes living mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, and other zoological organisms.
- b. Wildlife must be photographed living freely and unrestrained in a natural habitat, or in a habitat they have naturally adopted, where they are free to come and go on their own.

2. Wildlife That Is Not Eligible:

- a. Wildlife in captivity such as zoos, aquariums, aviaries, rehabilitation or rescue facilities, game farms, or similar enclosures where the animal is not free to leave.
- b. Wildlife captured, restrained, tethered, handled, anesthetized, chilled, or otherwise controlled for the purpose of photography.
- c. Domesticated wildlife, livestock, pets, feral, or human-created hybrid wildlife.

3. Human Elements:

- a. Evidence of human activity may appear in an image when it is an authentic part of wildlife story. However, these elements should not dominate the image unless they are essential to telling the story.
- b. Wildlife may be photographed in habitats they have naturally adopted, even when those habitats include human-made structures. Examples include Ospreys nesting on nesting platforms, Peregrine Falcons nesting on buildings or bridges, swallows using barns, or hummingbirds feeding from naturally growing or cultivated flowers. These are considered normal behaviors in habitats the wildlife has freely chosen.

4. Ethical Wildlife Photography:

- a. Artificial lighting, including flash, is permitted provided it does not disturb or alter the animal's natural behavior, and the final image retains a natural appearance. Lighting may be operated or positioned by the photographer or an assistant under the photographer's direction.
- b. Staged wildlife photography scenes prepared by others, including arranged perches, backgrounds, lighting, or other photographic setups, are not permitted.
- c. Wildlife images must be created in a manner that does not endanger, stress, or alter the normal behavior of the animal.
- d. The following practices are not permitted:
 - Using live bait, live prey, dead wildlife, animal parts, food, or any other attractant to lure or influence wildlife for a photograph.
 - Disturbing nests, dens, burrows, roosts, or breeding sites.
 - Removing, relocating, restraining, or handling wildlife for photographic purposes.

- Intentionally causing an animal stress, fear, or flight for a photographic opportunity.
- Use of drones.

5. Permitted Editing

- A wildlife image should present a truthful representation of the scene. The animal's appearance, behavior, and surroundings should not be altered in a way that misrepresents what was photographed. Thus, standard photographic adjustments are permitted provided the final image retains a natural appearance. These include cropping, dodging/burning, vignettes, exposure and color correction, contrast, sharpening, noise reduction, focus stacking, exposure blending, panoramic stitching, dust spot removal, HDR, and full-color to full-monochromatic conversion to include Sepia (brownish), or Cyanotype (bluish). Techniques that manipulate the image background, such as darkening and blurring are allowed provided the adjustments appear natural.
- Borders/digital frames are not allowed except a thin white border may be added to separate the background of a dark image and the boundaries of an image from the black background of the competition software.

6. **Prohibited** Editing Techniques

- Editing that changes the content of the image is not allowed.
- Techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are not allowed.
- Creating composite wildlife scenes from separate photographs is not allowed.
- Using generative AI or other replacement techniques to create or replace image content is not allowed.
- Textures or substituted backgrounds are not allowed.

E. Creative Artistry: The intent of this category is to encourage artistic expression through the creative use of digital techniques and imaginative visual interpretation. This category recognizes images where post-processing becomes an integral part of the creative process rather than simply a method of enhancing a traditional photograph.

- A submitted image must be based on one or more photographs created by the member. The original photograph(s) must remain a significant component of the final image and serve as the primary foundation of artistic work.
- Creative techniques may include, but are not limited to:
 - Advanced filtering and stylization - applying artistic filters, effects, color transformations, or tonal modifications that significantly change the character of the original photograph.
 - Conceptual manipulation - altering reality, scale, perspective, or context to communicate an idea, emotion, story, or personal interpretation.
 - Compositing and Image blending - combining multiple photographs or visual elements to create a new scene, concept, or narrative. Compositing two or more images, such as a collage or diptych, does not automatically constitute Creative Artistry. The combined photographs should be artistically transformed through

creative processing, stylization, conceptual interpretation, or other artistic treatments consistent with the intent of this category.

- d. Digital painting and painterly transformations - using digital brushes, overlays, or painting techniques to alter the appearance and style of the photograph.
 - e. Layering and blending techniques - combining photographic, graphic, illustrative, or abstract elements to create a unified artistic composition.
 - f. Selective distortion and transformation - reshaping, warping, mirroring, or altering photographic elements to achieve an artistic effect.
 - g. Texture and surface treatments - incorporating textures, patterns, or layered elements to create mood, depth, or visual interest.
3. Additional photographic, graphic, illustrative, or digitally created elements not created by the member may be used to support the artistic vision. These elements should enhance the concept and contribute to the overall artistic expression rather than replace the member's original photographic contribution.
 4. Images will be evaluated on creativity and originality of the artistic concept; strength of artistic vision and personal interpretation; technical execution and craftsmanship; visual impact and emotional or conceptual engagement, and successful integration of all elements into a cohesive final work.
 5. Traditional photographic realism is not the objective of this category. Images whose primary impact relies on in-camera photographic techniques—such as intentional camera movement (ICM), very long or very short exposures, multiple exposure created entirely in-camera or by stacking, infrared photography, selective focus, lens effects, or conventional photographic editing alone—are generally more appropriate for other competition categories unless they have been substantially transformed through creative digital artistry consistent with the intent of this category.

F. Multi-Scapes: Landscape photography involves capturing an image that embodies the spirit and the beauty of the outdoors. Multi-Scapes broadens the traditional definition of landscape photography to include images of the sea, sky, skylines and much more. Multi-Scape photography can include but not be limited to the following topics.

1. Multi-Scape Examples:
 - a. Cityscape/Urban - images that capture scenes within a city or town.
 - b. Architectural - images capturing photographs of the exterior of buildings and similar architectural structures.
 - c. Seascapes - images depicting the sea, ocean or other waterway as the main subject of the photograph.
 - d. Nightscapes - images containing large swaths of the sky
 - e. Star Trails - images that focus on the path starlight creates in the night sky over a time.
 - f. Intimate Landscapes - images that show a smaller selection of a larger scene, for instance, a waterfall, or a single tree in the midst of a forest.

- g. Sunset and Sunrise - images that capture the beauty and drama of the sky and landscape.
 - h. Natural or grand landscapes - while these landscapes may have people, animals or architecture present in the photos, the primary focus of the photograph is natural scenery.
2. Multi-Scape Image Requirements:
- a. Images can be color or monochromatic.
 - b. Hand of Man is allowed. For instance, photographs can include roads, utility poles, wires, and structures such as barns, stables, or homes among the landscape. Architectural or cityscape/urban photography will prominently feature man-made objects such as buildings, roads or bridges.
 - c. Photographs can include humans and animals as incidental to the image, such as cattle in a distant pasture in a farmland landscape, or a human in the scene to illustrate scale.
 - d. HDR, stacking, stitching, and panorama's, are allowed.
 - e. Composites are allowed.
 - f. Infrared images are allowed.
 - g. Vignettes are allowed.
 - h. All elements need to be the photographer's own work.
 - i. Borders/digital frames are not allowed except a thin white border may be added to separate the background of a dark image and the boundaries of an image from the black background of the competition software.
 - j. The resulting image must begin with an original image or series of images that were captured or made by the maker either digitally or on film.

Section 3: Digital Submissions

- A.** Digital images must conform to the following requirements:
- 1. Maximum image size may not exceed 2880 pixels on the horizontal or 1920 pixels on the vertical. The minimum size may not be less than 800 pixels on the longest side.
 - 2. Size of image: Maximum of 3 mb
 - 3. Color Space: sRGB
 - 4. File name should be the title of the image.
 - 5. Image title should not contain any special characters.
 - 6. File Format: All files must be in JPEG format, with either a .jpg or a .jpeg file extension.
 - 7. Submission deadline of digital images for all competitions: NOT later than 11:59 pm EST on the Wednesday of the week prior to the scheduled competition.
- B.** Image Review:
- 1. A panel of Competition Committee members will review the images uploaded to the monthly contests within 24 hours after the contest deadline. The photo analysis team will report to the Committee Chairperson any possible non-conformance with a category rule for further research and review by the Committee Chairperson or his/her designee.

2. The photo analysis team upon review of submitted competition images may request a copy of the photographer's original image should the need arise to compare the original to the submitted image for verification and acceptance in any submitted categories.
3. Once the submittal page closes and the images have been reviewed, members found to have non-conforming images will be notified and given the opportunity until 6:00 PM the Friday prior to the competition date to withdraw the image or enter the image in an appropriate category, if available. The Competition Chair will proceed with necessary action(s) when the contributing member fails to respond. Changes to the contest page can only be performed by the competition Committee Chairperson or his/her designee. If an image is withdrawn for whatever reason, the image may be used in a future competition provided it meets the category requirements.

Section 4: Scoring and Judging Competitions

A. There will be three judges for monthly competitions, comprised of member judges and at times an appetence judge team acting as the third judge.

B. In case of ties when two or more images receive identical scores, duplicate awards (multiple first through third place) will be assigned, except for the Year End Competition, in which case ties for first place will be broken.

C. Three external and independent judges will judge the Year End Competition.

D. The following minimum points will be used when determining placement, regardless of the number of entries submitted for a category:

1. 1st Place 22 points
2. 2nd Place 20 points
3. 3rd Place 18 points

E. Members who are judging will not submit images in that month's competition.

F. Judges will not be told or shown the identity of the photographer. If the judge is positive he or she knows the photographer of an entry he or she is judging, the judge will score the entry 0. In that case, the other two scores will be averaged for the third score.

G. After the competition there will be an opportunity for the judges to make comments. Also, there will be a time for members to ask questions and request an evaluation of their images from the judges.

Section 5: Grievances

A. Any competition-related grievances, such as for procedural issues or an image believed to be inappropriate for the category, MUST be made to the Competition Committee Chairperson within seven days after the competition.

- B.** During the investigative phase, the Competition Chairperson or her/his designee (in the case of an extended absence) will review the grievance and, if another member is involved, that member will be given an opportunity to respond.
- C.** During the decision phase, the Competition Committee will review the grievance, responses and other relevant documents and then decide on the matter. The Competition Committee Chairperson will report back to the member initiating the grievance and other members, if any, who were impacted in the case of score/award changes.
- D.** Except in unusual circumstances, grievances will be resolved within two weeks from the date the grievance is received.
- E.** The decision of the Competition Committee is final. No further grievance can be filed during the competition year regarding the challenged image unless new information becomes known that was not known at the time of the original challenge.
- F.** Grievances are not permitted against member judges or outside judges.
- G.** The Competition Committee has the mission and authority to conduct a competition following CCC rules and may try to resolve complaints informally before it reaches the final stage of the grievance process.
- H.** Due to the potentially sensitive and confidential nature of grievances, and to protect the identity of members submitting the grievance and being involved directly or peripherally, all communications regarding the grievance **MUST** be channeled through the Competition Committee Chairperson or her/his designee. The person(s) raising the grievance and the member against whom the grievance is filed shall not be identified to the membership.
- I.** A report on all grievances filed, and actions taken will be made by the Competition Chairperson at the next monthly Board of Directors meeting following the competition.

Section 6: Year End Awards and Recognition

- A.** The Year End Competition will be comprised of images from the eight monthly competitions, organized by competition levels (1, 2, and 3) and each of the six competition categories Assigned Pictorial, Nature, Multi-Scapes, Open Color, Open Mono, and Creative Artistry. Awards will be given for First, Second, and Third Place. Selection of images for the Year End Competition will be based on the following criteria in each level (1,2, and 3): All images awarded 1st Place, level 3 images scoring 25.0 Points or greater, level 2 images scoring 24.5 Points or greater, and level 1 images scoring 24.0 Points or greater.
- B.** All ties will be broken by the judges for the Year End awards.
- C.** In a closed scoring session after the general meeting, three judges will choose “Photographs of the Year” from among the End of Year First-Place category winners for each Level 1, 2, and 3.
- D.** The Competition Committee will determine three “Photographers of the Year,” one each from Level 1, 2, and 3, based entirely on total accumulated points of images having placed (First, Second, or Third) in all monthly competitions for the program year.

- E. The Competition Committee will make “Excellence Awards” based on an average score of 22.0 or higher and submission of 16 digital Competition Images. Image submission for judges will be credited.
- F. Photographers will receive a “Versatile Photographer” award if they have placed first in at least one category, and first, second, or third in five out of the six categories.
- G. Additional awards and recognitions may be made at the discretion of the Competition Committee.
- H. In order to offset any disadvantage to a member who served as a judge for a monthly competition and was therefore not able to compete, the average of the judge’s total accumulated points during the year will be multiplied by the proportion of images in which the member placed, and that number will be added to the judge’s total accumulated points for images that placed. If the judge regularly submits two entries per competition, this number will be added twice to arrive at an estimate of the accumulated points the member would have earned had he or she entered the competition. Example: A member enters two images in each of seven competitions and judges one competition (and therefore cannot submit two images that night). Example: A judge has a total accumulated point value for images that placed first, second, or third, of 232. The average of points received for the 14 submitted images is 23.2. Of the 14 images entered during monthly competitions, 10 placed first, second, or third (71.4%). So, the estimate of the accumulated points the member would have earned equals $232 + ((0.714) * (23.2)(2))$, which equals 33.1 judge credit points. Judge credit points are applied to all award calculations.
- I. Awards will be announced at the Annual Awards meeting and/or CCC Bulletins may be utilized in place of an awards banquet, if deemed necessary.

Section 7: Exclusion from Competition

- A. A person may be precluded from entering competitions, for all or some period, if he or she violates the competition rules in a manner that goes against the integrity of the process. The decision to recommend that a person be precluded from competing will be made by a majority vote of the Competition Committee and presented to the Board of Directors for final decision.

Section 8: Submittals by the Competition Chairperson and Photo Analysis Team

- A. The competition chairperson and the photo analysis team members will be required to enter their submitted images prior to the general membership. They will be given 72 hours from Friday –Sunday ending at 11:59 pm on Sunday. The time date stamp will start on the following Friday after the completion of the prior competition to enter next month’s competition. A time date stamp will be required to verify the submitted images were entered within the allotted time. If an image or images are found to be entered after the allotted time, it will not be accepted. This will be verified during the monthly review by the competition chairperson and the photo analysis team members.

- B. Allowing the above rule will maintain the integrity of the competition, giving no one an advantage over anyone else.
- C. A bulletin will be sent out notifying the general membership when the monthly competition is open for their submitted photographs.

Rev. 08/9/2026