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THE MONROE NEWS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 2026 | MONROENEWS.COM

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Body found on CA coast identified as triathlete

Thao Nguyen
USA TODAY

A body recovered off California’s Central Coast has been identified as a local 55-year-old triathlete who was reported missing in a suspected shark attack.

Erica Fox’s body was recovered Dec. 27 from the ocean south of Davenport Beach, the Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Office confirmed Dec. 29. The discovery came after Fox disappeared while swimming with more than a dozen people on Dec. 21.

Fox’s father, James Fox, told KSBW-TV that his daughter was recovered on a “remote pocket beach” and was identified by the clothing she was wearing.

Erica Fox’s husband, Jean-Francois Vanreusel, told The San Jose Mercury News that Fox was still in her wetsuit and wearing a Garmin watch and a “shark band” – designed to deter attacks – that was attached to her ankle.

“She didn’t want to live in fear,” Vanreusel told the newspaper. “She lived her life fully.”

At around noon on Dec. 21, the Pacific Grove Police Department and Monterey Fire Department responded to a report of a missing swimmer who had been with swimming with more than a dozen people off Lovers Point, a city near Monterey about 115 miles south of San Francisco.

Two witnesses reported that the “swimmer may have encountered a shark while swimming offshore near Lovers Point,” officials said. The Coast Guard later identified the missing swimmer as Fox.

Pacific Grove Police Cmdr. Brian Anderson confirmed to USA TODAY on Dec. 23 that investigators believe a “shark was involved.”

Authorities launched a search-and-rescue operation, which was suspended after 15 hours after crews covered more than 84 square nautical miles, the Coast Guard said. Anderson said detectives will continue to investigate the circumstances surrounding Fox’s death.

On Dec. 27, a body was found about 30 miles north of where Fox went missing, according to the Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Office.

Fox was the co-founder of the Kelp Krawlers, an open-water swim group, according to The Mercury News. KSBW-TV reported that the group swims at Lovers Point every Sunday and Fox went missing during their weekly swim.

“The only comfort I find is that every Sunday, Erica was excited to go in the water,” Vanreusel told The Mercury News.

Marine biologists say shark encounters in California remain rare, reported the Palm Beach Desert Sun, part of the USA TODAY Network. Experts also stressed that while shark attacks make headlines, the risk remains extremely low compared to other ocean hazards.

Since 1993, six human fatalities have been attributed to white sharks in California waters, according to state and international shark attack data. Nationwide, the International Shark Attack File reports an average of 65 documented shark attacks annually, with 47 unprovoked bites recorded globally in 2024.

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