



NEPA:

What You Need to Know Now for The Point Reyes National Seashore General Management Plan Amendment and First (Pre-NEPA) Public Comment Opportunity

ACRONYMS and TERMS:

NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act

EIS = Environmental Impact Statement (there will be Draft and Final EISs)

NOI = Notice of Intent (to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement)

PROPOSED ACTION – Will be identified as part of the NOI.

A proposed action is the initial NPS proposal to address a purpose and need. A proposed action is one option (alternative) for addressing purpose and need.

SCOPING – Officially begins when the NOI is published; 30-day public comment period; key players are the public and cooperating/interested public agencies.

Scoping is “an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action.” The scoping process should be focused on determining the extent and nature of issues and alternatives that should be considered during a NEPA review.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT = Existing conditions or baseline.

ALTERNATIVES – “Heart” of the EIS; “reasonable range” must be considered; “No-Action” Alternative required; litigation settlement specifies 3 alternatives that must be analyzed; all must be analyzed at same level of detail. Intent is to give decision maker(s) an understanding of the range of environmental consequences that could occur under different scenarios.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE – Identified in Draft EIS; NPS is not required to identify this as its Preferred Alternative (see below).

The alternative “that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources.”

(NPS) PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE – May be identified in the Draft EIS; definitely in the Final. NPS is not required to provide a rationale in the EIS for its selected Preferred Alternative.

The alternative that “would best accomplish the purpose and need of the proposed action while fulfilling [the NPS] statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors.”

KEY POINTS FOR THIS AND FUTURE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS:

- **DON’T PANIC!** NPS is essentially giving everyone a “bonus” 30-day public comment opportunity prior to officially beginning the NEPA process. You will also, at minimum, have:
 - Another 30-day period to comment on the issues and alternatives that should be analyzed in the EIS (scoping) once the NOI is published.
 - A 45-day period to comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIS.
- “Everything is on the table” for the current comment opportunity. Comments submitted on the following are reasonable and encouraged (also refer to the questions on the last page of the NPS newsletter):
 - The adequacy of the range of alternatives proposed for analysis.

- Recommendations for additional alternatives.
- Recommendations for additional elements to be considered for any or all of the alternatives.
- Recommendations for specific management measures that should be evaluated.
- Recommendations for issues to be addressed in the environmental document.
- The more that comments are submitted by organizations that represent a larger constituency (of affected ranch owners, for example), the better. These can be supported by comment letters from individuals as well.
- It is reasonable and appropriate to ask for social and economic issues to be analyzed; to comment on social and economic impacts that may occur; and/or to use social and economic impacts to support your comments about alternatives or the impacts of specific elements of the alternatives.

TIPS FOR WRITING COMMENTS:

You are free to say just about anything you want to say. BUT, your comments need to be meaningful if they're going to have any influence on the process. To make sure your comments don't end up in the "graveyard for public comments," keep the following in mind:

- Just saying you like or don't like something is simply expressing a personal preference. This is not a popularity contest.
- Comments should be directly relevant to the affected environment, alternatives, and issues of the GMP Amendment, and the environmental, social, and economic consequences of the proposed action and alternatives being considered.
- Remember, the NPS has the flexibility to remove, add to, or modify the alternatives if it makes sense to do so. If you think such actions are appropriate, you need to provide the "it makes sense" reasoning.
- Try to avoid conclusory statements. A conclusory statement is one "consisting of or relating to a conclusion or assertion for which no supporting evidence is offered." Unsupported (conclusory) claims of inadequacy, inaccuracy, faulty reasoning, etc. go nowhere!
- Be specific in formulating comments as much as possible and, whatever opinions you express or actions you request, be sure to explain why. Brand the word "because" into your brain. For example, "*Alternative 5 includes the introduction of wild gooby birds from Sumatra to control bullfrog populations at PRNS. This would likely result in the death of all dairy cows on the Point Reyes Peninsula because For this reason, that element of Alternative 5 should be eliminated or replaced with a more reasonable management option.*" If you can't finish the part of your comment that comes after "because . . ." with adequate evidence, facts, expert opinion, etc., then your comment will likely end up in that part of the "public comment graveyard" labeled "Unsubstantiated Opinion."
- Facts! Facts! Facts! – YES!! Support your points with facts as much as possible. Facts provide evidence that what you are saying is credible.
- Cite outside sources as appropriate. (Examples: NPS NEPA Handbook, research papers, NPS "purpose and need" statement, economic reports/data, NEPA itself, etc.) Attach copies (and/or links to) of these reports as appropriate.
- Explain how your (request, comment, etc.) is good for the environment, good for the economy, helps NPS fulfill its mission for management of PRNS, GGNRA, etc. (See "it makes sense" comment in earlier bullet point.)
- Try to be constructive and keep emotions in check.



CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING (ADMITTEDLY EXTREME) EXAMPLE

Version 1 of comment on Alternative X:

Alternative X is ridiculous and shouldn't be given any further consideration in the EIS and GMP Amendment because it will drive all the dairy ranchers out of business.

Version 2 of comment on Alternative X:

We believe that Alternative X could have significant impacts to the ongoing viability of dairy ranching in the areas where the free-ranging _____ elk herd has been allowed to continue. Dairy ranchers at Point Reyes experience a much higher overhead compared to areas outside of the PRNS because of the more restrictive regulations placed on them. Additionally, the industry as a whole is greatly affected by other outside market factors, further putting a strain on the smaller operations at PRNS. (These factors are described more fully in the attached _____, which looked at the typical costs and profitability of both dairy and cattle ranching operations in GGNRA.) Ranchers in this area also typically have higher maintenance and other costs because of problems caused by the elk herd. Examples of higher operating costs incurred by ranchers as a direct result of this elk herd include _____. If this herd were to be eliminated or relocated, we believe that the long-term viability of the affected ranching operations would be greatly improved, and the costs to the public of managing the herd could be substantially reduced. We ask that this issue be thoroughly evaluated in terms of its environmental and economic impacts in the Draft EIS, and that the NPS give careful consideration to making elimination/relocation of the _____ elk herd a high priority in whatever GMP Amendment is ultimately approved. We believe this would be in keeping with the NPS's stated mission for managing lands and resources at PRNS because

REFERENCES

A Citizens Guide to the NEPA

https://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/nepa_documents/RedDont/G-CEQ-CitizensGuide.pdf

NPS NEPA Handbook 2015 (Final)

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nepa/upload/NPS_NEPAHandbook_Final_508.pdf

NPS Newsletter re the PRNS General Management Plan Amendment

https://www.nps.gov/pore/getinvolved/upload/planning_gmp_amendment_newsletter_171016.pdf

BONUS: EXAMPLES OF ACTUAL COMMENTS FROM DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTS/STATEMENTS (You decide -- Meaningful? What do you think the likely response to each of these might have been? Note: Blank spaces are used to protect the innocent and the guilty)

- Big dairy, big mess. I was here first and I DON'T WANT IT!
- It does not appear that the draft EIS for the ___ projected development addresses the issues of mitigation of sewage disposal problems adequately. Nor does it address the serious and nonmitigatable loss of open space, greenbelt dividers and scenic vistas. Nor does it address the already vastly frustrating issues of traffic congestion.
- Under the headings Wildlife and Habitat I notice that the mitigation measures are absurd and will not work.
- Each morning I ride my bicycle along ___ Avenue, often before sunrise. ___ Mountain is visible from this quiet avenue, and when the sun is about to shine upon another new day, the rosy skies spread gracefully out toward the sleepy streets and meadows. May they remain blessed with peaceful mornings, not crowded housing units that only serve to further congest our neighborhoods. The small creek that runs by reminds me that even in a big city, wildlife continues. Please help prevent such a valuable piece of nature from being overrun by tractors seeking to carve out more sidewalk space and paved parking lots.
- The project description, as presented in the EIR, appears to be confusing and contradictory. The project is presented as “wholesale sales only,” yet the site plan identifies an area for “customer parking.” Also, the hours of operation are described as 5 AM to 7 PM, 7 days per week. These do not seem to be hours of operation that would typically be associated with “wholesale sales only,” but would more likely be associated with retail sales. These discrepancies could be confusing to reviewers and could lead to misunderstandings of the true nature of the project. In addition, some of the technical studies done for the EIR may be inaccurate as well. For example, the traffic and air quality studies accounted for “employee vehicle trips” in their calculations, but do not even mention “customer vehicle trips,” so this raises doubt as to whether the traffic and air quality technical studies are accurate. This, in turn, could influence the validity of the impact conclusions and mitigation measures.
- The cumulative impacts of ___'s contribution of anticipated sediment load in combination with ___'s contribution have not been adequately analyzed, and any conclusions with respect to the significance of the sediment loading is not supported by substantial evidence in the record.
- This section contains information that is outdated. CDF is now Cal Fire.
- The roadway design information should be more fully developed, presented, and addressed in this EIR due to the potential significance of impacts.

**Tips for writing
GMP Amendment First Phase Public Comments**

“I prefer alternative ___ because...”

“I recommend a different alternative that includes _____ because...”

How can Point Reyes protect and manage the diverse and important natural and cultural resources in the planning area? Are there opportunities that could enhance future stewardship in the planning area?

What types of visitor experiences, activities, and facilities should be available in the planning area?

What types of specific strategies can/should be considered for managing agricultural lease/permits?

What types of specific strategies can/should be considered for managing tule elk?

Point Reyes National Seashore and North District of Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Management Alternatives Comment Period

Alternatives Required By The Settlement Agreement			Additional Preliminary Conceptual Alternatives Under Consideration		
No Ranching and Limited Management of Tule Elk	No Dairy Ranching and Management of Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd	Reduced Ranching and Management of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd	Continued Ranching and Management of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd (NPS Initial Proposal)	Continued Ranching and Removal of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd	Continue Current Management (No Action)
<p>Under this alternative, ranching in all areas of Point Reyes and the north district of Golden Gate would cease.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the exception of the two locations with life-estates, ranching operations would be phased out over a 5-year period. No agricultural activities would be permitted after the life estates expire. • The NPS anticipates many of the areas and their associated facilities would be converted and offered for public not-for-profit education, research, outdoor experiential activities, and other public recreation and visitor opportunities. The NPS may coordinate prescriptive grazing in high priority areas to maintain native and rare plant communities. • The free-range tule elk herd would continue to expand with limited to no population management. • The NPS would identify broad management strategies to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities. • The NPS would identify additional compatible opportunities to improve visitor experience in the planning area (e.g., enhanced trail connections, improved signage, and new interpretive waysides). 	<p>Under this alternative, all beef cattle ranching operations would continue. The six active dairies within Point Reyes would cease operations. Dairy operators would be eligible to convert dairy operations to beef cattle grazing over a period of 5 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For areas remaining in beef cattle ranching, agricultural lease/permits with 20-year terms would be issued. Lease/permits would identify authorized measures for operational flexibility and diversification and establish programmatic approaches for streamlined implementation of best management practices. • The Drakes Beach tule elk population would be managed at a level compatible with authorized beef cattle ranching operations. Minimum and maximum population thresholds for the Drakes Beach herd would be established and the NPS would manage within that range using methods defined through this process. The NPS could implement actions to manage tule elk from the Limantour-Estero Road herd on the ranchlands. • The NPS would identify broad management strategies to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities. • The NPS would also identify additional compatible opportunities to improve the visitor experience in the planning area (e.g. enhanced trail connections, improved signage, and new interpretive waysides). • Approximately 27,000 acres of beef cattle ranching would operate under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 1,200 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources. 	<p>Under this alternative, ranching operations would cease to occur on approximately 7,500 acres in the planning area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The areas identified for closure of ranch operations would minimize the overall impact on the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches and Olema Valley Dairy Ranches Historic Districts, both of which are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. • Most of the areas identified for closure do not have developed complexes or permitted residential uses. • For areas remaining in agricultural use, agricultural lease/permits with 20-year terms would be issued. Lease/permits would identify authorized measures for operational flexibility and diversification and establish programmatic approaches for streamlined implementation of best management practices. • The Drakes Beach tule elk population would be managed at a level compatible with authorized ranching operations. Minimum and maximum population thresholds for the Drakes Beach herd would be established, and the NPS would manage within that range using methods defined through this process. The NPS could implement actions to manage tule elk from the Limantour-Estero Road herd on the ranch lands. • The NPS would identify broad management strategies to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities. • The NPS would identify additional compatible opportunities to improve the visitor experience in the planning area (e.g., enhanced trail connections, improved signage, and new interpretive waysides). • Approximately 20,000 acres of beef cattle and dairy ranching would operate under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 750 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources. 	<p>Under this alternative, existing ranch families would be authorized to continue beef cattle and dairy ranching operations under agricultural lease/permits with 20-year terms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lease/permits would identify authorized measures for operational flexibility and diversification and establish programmatic approaches for streamlined implementation of best management practices. • The Drakes Beach tule elk population would be managed at a level compatible with authorized ranching operations. Minimum and maximum population thresholds for the Drakes Beach herd would be established, and the NPS would manage within that range using methods defined through this process. Additionally, the NPS could implement actions to manage tule elk from the Limantour-Estero Road herd on the ranchlands. • The NPS would identify broad management strategies to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities. • The NPS would also identify additional compatible opportunities to improve the visitor experience in the planning area (e.g., enhanced trail connections, improved signage, and new interpretive waysides). • Approximately 27,000 acres of beef cattle and dairy ranching would operate under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 1,200 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources. 	<p>Under this alternative, existing ranch families would be authorized to continue beef cattle and dairy ranching operations under agricultural lease/permits with 20-year terms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lease/permits would identify authorized measures for operational flexibility and diversification and establish programmatic approaches for streamlined implementation of best management practices. • The Drakes Beach tule elk herd would be removed using methods established through this planning process. The NPS could implement actions to manage tule elk from the Limantour-Estero Road herd on the ranchlands. • The NPS would identify broad management strategies to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities. • The NPS would also identify additional compatible opportunities to improve the visitor experience in the planning area (e.g., enhanced trail connections, improved signage, and new interpretive waysides). • Approximately 27,000 acres of beef cattle and dairy ranching would operate under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 1,200 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources. 	<p>Under this alternative, the NPS would continue to issue short-term agricultural lease/permits (5 to 10 years) for ongoing activities on Point Reyes and the north district of Golden Gate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent with current management, management of tule elk affecting Point Reyes ranch lands would be limited. • Existing park operations would be maintained and management of park resources and visitor use would generally continue at current levels. • Approximately 28,000 acres of ranching operations would occur under lease/permits within the planning area. Resource protection buffers would be established on a case-by-case basis.

**An initial list of Resources and References
for the PRNS/GGNRA General Management Plan Amendment
November 2017**

Administrative History of Point Reyes National Seashore -

https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/pore/admin.pdf

An Island In Time: 50 Years at the Point Reyes National Seashore -

<https://www.amazon.com/Island-Time-Years-National-Seashore/dp/096078909X>

Alternative Livestock Production in Marin - <http://ucanr.edu/sites/uccemarin/files/30484.pdf>,
http://ucanr.edu/sites/grown_in_marin/newsletters/alternate_livestock_markets_research_stage_iii_preliminary_results_marin_july_200632144.pdf

Bay Nature articles on public lands grazing - <https://baynature.org/article/pro-public-lands-need-cattle-to-meet-conservation-goals/>, <https://baynature.org/article/con-cattle-grazing-is-incompatible-with-conservation/>

California Healthy Soils Initiative - <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysouils/>

Changing Role of Ranching in the Point Reyes National Seashore -

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/uccemarin/files/31000.pdf>

Conditional Waiver for Waste Discharge Requirements on Grazing Lands -

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/TMDLs/grazing/tomal_esbay_grazing.shtml

Conditional Waiver for Waste Discharge Requirements on Dairies -

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/TMDLs/agriculture/CAF/Conditional%20Waiver%20Resolution_061615.pdf

Conservation Effects Assessment Project for Rangelands -

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/nra/ceap/?cid=stelprdb1045811>

Dairy methane reduction legislation - <http://cdrf.org/2017/05/01/implementing-californias-new-dairy-methane-reduction-efforts/>

Drawdown Marin - <https://www.marincounty.org/depts/cd/divisions/sustainability/climate-and-adaptation/drawdown-marin>

Elk Management Plan 1998 -

https://www.nps.gov/pore/learn/management/upload/planning_tule_elk_mp_ea_1998.pdf

General Order for Waste Discharge Requirements on Animal Feeding Operations -

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/TMDLs/agriculture/CAF/CAF%20General%20WDRs%20Order%20R2-2016-0031%20\(Complete%20with%20attachments\).pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/TMDLs/agriculture/CAF/CAF%20General%20WDRs%20Order%20R2-2016-0031%20(Complete%20with%20attachments).pdf)

Marin Carbon Project and Carbon Farm Plans - <http://www.marincarbonproject.org/>,

<http://www.marincarbonproject.org/carbon-farming/carbon-farm-plans>

Marin Climate Action Plan -

https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/cd/planning/sustainability/climate-and-adaptation/execsummarymarincapupdate_final_20150731.pdf?la=en

Marin Crop Report 2016 - <https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/ag/crop-reports/2016.pdf?la=en>

Marin Countywide Plan, Natural Systems and Agriculture Element -

https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/cd/planning/currentplanning/publications/county-wide-plan/cwp_2015_update_r.pdf?la=en

Marin Economic Forum Targeted Industries Study -

http://www.marineconomicforum.org/report/2004/Marin%20Targeted%20Industries%20Cluster%20Targets_1.6.2004.pdf

National Park Service NEPA Handbook and Supplemental Guidance -

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nepa/upload/NPS_NEPAHandbook_Final_508.pdf,
<http://www.nps.gov/subjects/nepa/policy.htm>

The Paradox of Preservation: Wilderness and Working Landscapes at Point Reyes National Seashore - <https://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520277076>

Point Reyes National Seashore Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan Settlement -

https://www.nps.gov/pore/getinvolved/upload/planning_ranch_cmp_settlement_agreement_final_170714.pdf

Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve, <https://www.nps.gov/goga/what-makes-gqnr-special.htm>

USDA 2012 Agricultural Census - <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/>