

For Immediate Release

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Conservationists, Ranchers, Park Service Agree on Plan to Address Point Reyes Ranching, Elk Issues

OAKLAND, *Calif.*— Conservation groups, the National Park Service, Point Reyes ranchers and Marin County filed a settlement agreement today that resolves litigation over cattle ranching at Point Reyes National Seashore and Marin County portions of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

As the plaintiffs requested in their lawsuit, the Park Service will decide future uses of the public lands that are currently leased for cattle grazing by amending the National Seashore's General Management Plan within four years. The Park Service will consider a full range of alternatives, including ending or reducing beef and dairy cattle ranching in the park, and will conduct a public environmental review process.

"This settlement is a victory for the public and Point Reyes National Seashore, and sets a precedent for protecting our national heritage by guaranteeing citizens a voice in how their public lands are managed," said Deborah Moskowitz with the Marin-based Resource Renewal Institute. "Past generations fought to create the Seashore — this settlement helps safeguard this precious public asset for future generations."

"The taxpayers spent millions of dollars to buy private lands and create a National Seashore where recreation and natural beauty take precedence," said Erik Molvar of Western Watersheds Project. "The public deserves the opportunity to provide input on a range of options, including prioritizing public benefit over commercial livestock interests. Thanks to the settlement, everyone will now have that chance."

"This is a win for those of us who don't want to see tule elk evicted from the park and for anyone concerned about damage to wetlands, streams and wildlife habitats from cattle grazing," said Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The public will get its long-overdue opportunity to weigh in on where native wildlife and public access should trump commercial cattle ranching on Point Reyes park lands."

During the upcoming planning process, cattle ranching will continue under the status quo of current grazing leases. The Park Service will also abandon a controversial ranching plan that was being developed to extend ranching leases for the next 20 years, and contemplated evicting or fencing out tule elk from ranch lease areas. Until the management plan amendment is completed, the Park Service will preserve tule elk at the Seashore and strive to use nonlethal means to control the park's free-roaming elk, instead of prioritizing lethal force as some ranchers have been demanding.

Background

In 2016 the Resource Renewal Institute, Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project filed a federal lawsuit against the National Park Service for failing to update the park's badly outdated general management plan before attempting to extend cattle grazing leases in the Point Reyes National Seashore. The grazing leases violated the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service Organic Act and the Point Reyes National Seashore Enabling Act. Approximately 15 private ranching enterprises currently graze beef and dairy cattle on 24 lease units within the National Seashore, which make up more than 18,000 of the park's 71,000 acres.

For decades the Park Service authorized year-round livestock ranching on publicly owned parklands without ever preparing an environmental analysis on the impacts of beef and dairy ranching or obtaining public input on whether these grazing leases should be continued. The Park Service and other federal agencies documented that cattle harm threatened and endangered species and their habitat, cause soil erosion, pollute waterways, interfere with tule elk habitat and food, and emit the vast majority of the park's greenhouse gases.

The pending settlement is subject to approval by Judge Armstrong of the Northern District of California.

The conservation groups are represented by San Francisco attorneys Jeffrey Chanin and David Rizk of Keeker Van Nest & Peters and Laird Lucas and Lizzy Potter with Advocates for the West, a public-interest environmental law firm. The parties and their attorneys are grateful for Magistrate Judge Donna Ryu's assistance in helping to resolve this matter.

Read a copy of the [settlement agreement](#) and the [February 2016 lawsuit](#).

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