Point Reyes National Seashore
General Management Plan Amendment

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

You Are Invited to Participate

The National Park Service (NPS) invites your input into an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a General Management Plan Amendment (GMP Amendment) for Point Reyes National Seashore and the north district of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The GMP Amendment and EIS will update management guidance for more than 28,000 acres of NPS lands, including all lands currently leased for ranching.

Publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register will initiate the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and begin a 30-day public scoping period. As part of the public scoping process, the NPS will host two open house meetings. You are invited to attend these meetings to learn more about the alternatives and activities in the planning area, ask NPS representatives questions, and provide comments. For additional information on the EIS process, the public meetings, and how to provide comments please visit http://parkplanning.nps.gov/POREGMPA.

Public Meeting Dates and Locations

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2018
5:00-7:00 pm
West Marin School Gymnasium
11550 State Route 1
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2018
5:00-7:00 PM
Bay Model Visitor Center
2100 Bridgeway
Sausalito, CA 95965

Photo by Susan Van Der Wal

Background

Point Reyes National Seashore (Point Reyes) was created on September 13, 1962, to "save and preserve for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration, a portion of the diminishing seashore of the United States that remains undeveloped" (Public Law 87-657, 16 USC §459c). Golden Gate National Recreation Area (Golden Gate) was created in 1972 "to preserve for public use and enjoyment certain areas . . . possessing outstanding natural, historic, scenic, and recreational values, and . . . to provide for the maintenance of needed recreational open space necessary to urban environment and planning." In the management of the recreation area, Congress instructed the NPS to "preserve the recreation area, as far as possible, in its natural setting, and protect it from development and uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area" (Public Law 92-589, 16 USC §460bb). In 1980, the NPS completed a General Management Plan for Point Reyes and Golden Gate. This GMP Amendment and EIS will amend the 1980 GMP for the planning area.

Ranching within the Point Reyes peninsula dates back to the mid-1800s and continues today. Following the establishment of Point Reyes and Golden Gate, the NPS purchased the land from ranching families who in many cases continued to ranch under time-limited reservations of use and occupancy. As the reservations expired, the NPS continued to authorize ranching and dairying with agricultural lease/special use permits (lease/permits), as is allowed in the two parks' legislation. Currently, 24 ranching operations are authorized for beef and dairy ranching under lease/permits which include terms and conditions for the protection of natural and cultural resources.

The park lands that remain in ranching contain extraordinary natural and cultural resource values. Archeological resources, reflecting over 2,500 years of history are distributed across the planning area. The significant role the ranches played within the history of the region has been formally recognized with the listing of the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches Historic District and the Olema Valley Dairy Ranches Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. More than 200 historic structures associated with the historic districts are located within the park ranches.

The planning area vegetation communities include freshwater and tidal wetlands, coastal dunes, extensive coastal prairie, California annual grassland, riparian and forested habitat. These communities support a rich diversity of native plant and animal species, including fifteen federally threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and over 40 rare plant species. Coastal prairie, the most diverse California grassland type, is a diminishing and particularly sensitive plant community with high conservation value.

- Agricultural lease/permits are used to authorize existing beef and dairy ranch operations on approximately 18,000 acres in Point Reyes and 10,000 acres in Golden Gate.
- Twenty-four families currently hold lease/permits or reservations of use and occupancy for dairy and beef operations, including 18 ranches with residential use.
- Most of the active beef cattle and dairy operations in the planning area are within the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches Historic District and the Olema Valley Dairy Ranches Historic District.
- Current authorizations allow approximately 6,000 cattle on a year-round basis.

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Purpose

The purpose of the EIS for the General Management Plan Amendment is to establish guidance for the preservation of natural and cultural resources and the management of infrastructure and visitor use within the planning area. The alternatives evaluated in the EIS will also address the future management of tule elk and leased ranch lands.

Need

Action is needed at this time to address the park's highest priority planning issues which include the management of approximately 28,000 acres of land currently leased for ranching. Action is also needed to comply with the terms of the Settlement Agreement which requires that the GMP Amendment and EIS be completed on or before July 14, 2021.

Impact Topics

Based on discussions among the planning team, subject matter experts and the input received during the public comment period in the Fall of 2017, a preliminary list of impact topics has been developed that will be analyzed in detail in the EIS:

- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Cultural Landscapes, Historic Districts, and Historic Structures
- Federally Listed Species
- Socioeconomics
- Soil Processes, Erosion, and Compaction
- Tule Elk and Associated Habitat
- Vegetation (including communities of concern and non-native plant species)
- Visitor Use, Experience, and Access
- Water Quality
- Wildlife

Settlement Agreement Background

In February 2016, litigation was brought against the NPS related to an ongoing ranch planning process and the use of lands in the planning area for ranching and dairying. The plaintiffs and the NPS, together with the ranchers and the County of Marin, entered into settlement negotiations. The court approved a multi-party Settlement Agreement (Agreement) on July 14, 2017. Per the Agreement, the NPS agreed that in lieu of a Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan, it would prepare a GMP Amendment and EIS addressing the management of the lands currently leased for ranching in Point Reyes and the north district of Golden Gate.

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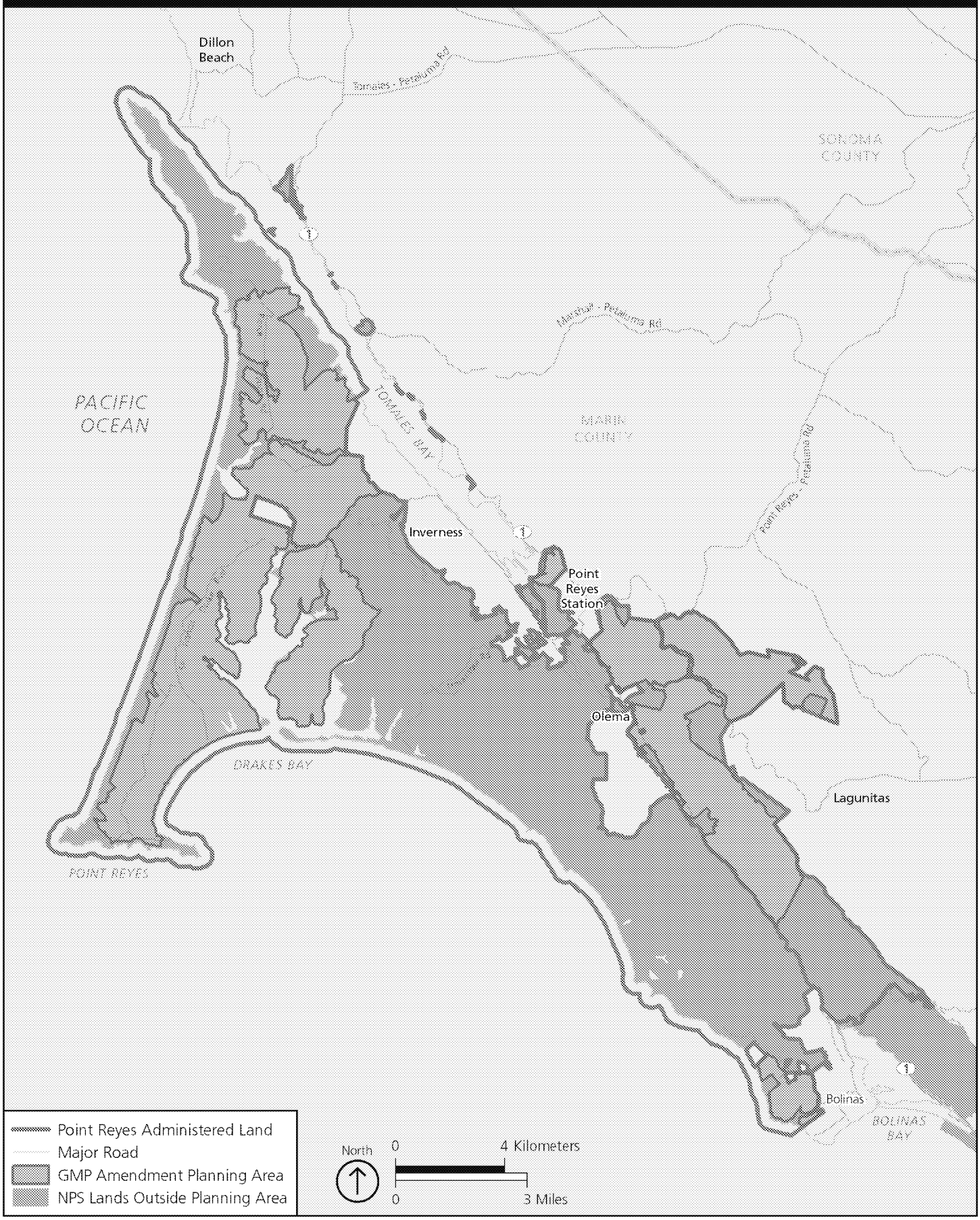
Point Reyes National Seashore
General Management Plan Amendment and
Environmental Impact Statement

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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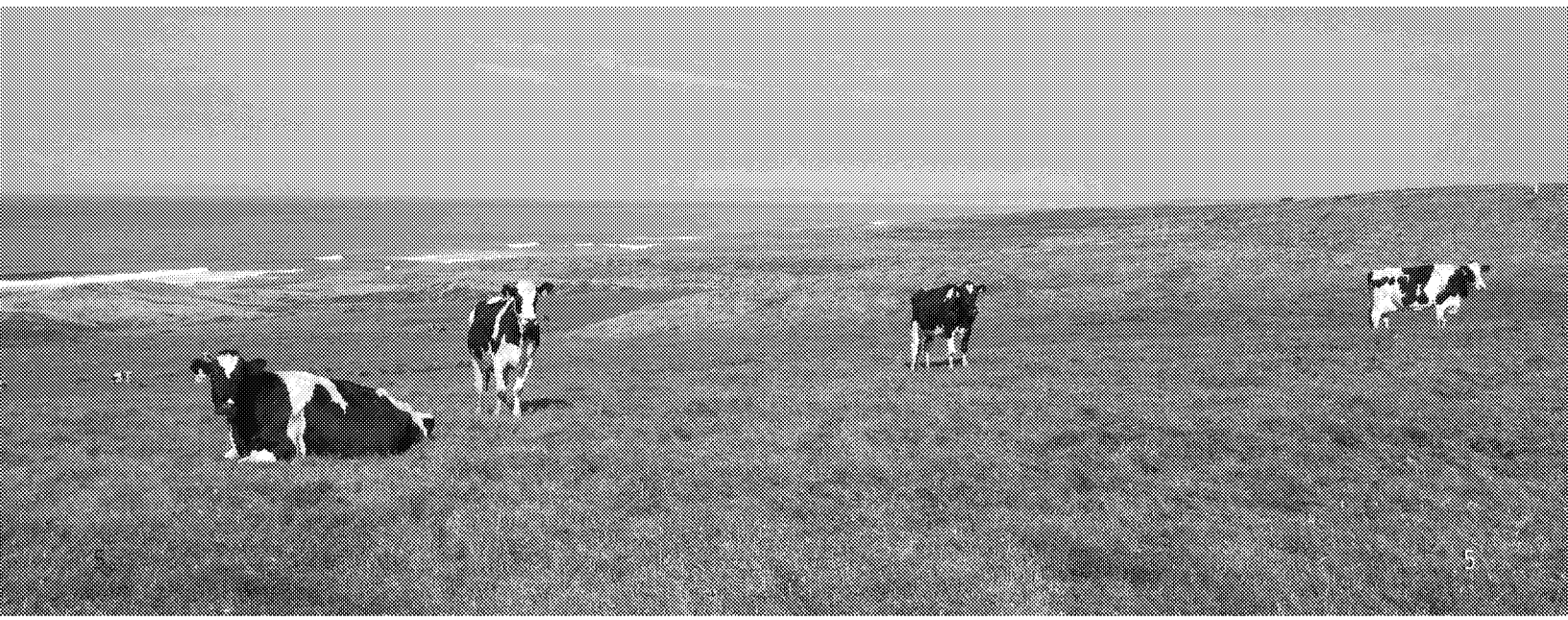
ALTERNATIVE A: CONTINUE CURRENT MANAGEMENT (NO ACTION)

This alternative is required by NEPA and would continue the issuance of short-term agricultural lease/permits for ongoing activities.

- Existing ranching operations would be maintained and management of park resources and visitor use would generally continue at current levels.
- The NPS would maintain the existing park boundary.
- Ranching would be authorized under 5 and 10 year permits. Approximately 27,000 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. The following activities would continue under the park's current range program:
  - » Monitor resource conditions, including vegetation, water quality, and ranch infrastructure.
  - » Work with ranchers to implement best management practices to protect sensitive resources, including water quality and rare and endangered species.
  - » Work with ranchers to monitor and manage invasive non-native vegetation.
  - » Conduct residual dry matter monitoring each fall to assess levels of grazing use.
  - » Work with ranchers to adjust timing and duration of grazing as necessary to meet management goals and objectives.
  - » Issue authorizations for individual management actions and improvements by ranch operators not covered under lease/permits, such as fence construction and water developments on a case by case basis.
- Consistent with current practices, management of free-range tule elk affecting park ranch lands would be limited. The NPS would continue efforts that prevent or mitigate elk damage to ranches. To date, most actions have been taken in the Drakes Beach area where the largest number of elk occur on ranches. Current actions that could be carried into the future include: fence repairs and construction of elk crossings, habitat enhancements, pasture offsets and hazing.
- Current monitoring of the elk herds in the pastoral zone, the Limantour area, and on Tomales Point would continue and would be modified as necessary to better understand the population dynamics of the herds. The NPS would continue to perform testing for Johne's disease and chronic wasting disease.



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ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

A number of recommendations are common to all action alternatives.

- The EIS would identify broad management strategies that would be undertaken to preserve park resources, as well as indicators and standards to guide visitor carrying capacities.
- The NPS would strive to improve hiking, biking, and equestrian access in the planning area. The planning area is generally open to public access, including active grazing areas in applicable alternatives, but additional route designation and promotion would help visitors better enjoy and experience the area.
- Trail opportunities would focus on loop routes, connectivity with adjacent public lands, and facilitation of north-south connectivity across the landscape. Potential routes would primarily use abandoned or administrative roads (including ranching roads); new trail construction would be very limited. Most routes would be minimally maintained and would have a rural, backcountry character.
- The NPS would expand interpretation of historic districts and current ranching in the park, and as appropriate, would collaborate with ranchers and other partners to interpret the story of ranching in the park.

- The NPS would look for opportunities to expand day use facilities such as picnic areas and overnight accommodations in the planning area. These activities would be focused in previously disturbed areas, such as former ranch complexes, and may take advantage of adaptive reuse of historic buildings where possible. Implementation of any of the options would depend on availability of an appropriate location as well as the operational capacity of the NPS and/or ability to work with partners to support the operation.
- The NPS would explore additional or expanded shuttle use as a tool to manage visitor use and facilitate transportation in the park.
- The NPS would maintain the existing park boundary.

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ALTERNATIVE B: CONTINUED RANCHING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DRAKES BEACH TULE ELK HERD (NPS PROPOSED ACTION)

Based on the purpose and need for action, the NPS proposed action includes the following elements:

- Issue agricultural lease/permits with up to 20-year terms to existing ranch families to continue beef and dairy operations on approximately 27,000 acres within the planning area.
- Explore opportunities for ranch operational flexibility and diversification, establish approximately 900 acres of resource protection buffers, and provide a programmatic review of best management practices.
- Implement a conservation framework (see page 10) on ranch lands allowing for different intensities of land use depending on the land management unit (ranch core, pasture, and range).
- Minimize elk-related impacts to ranch operations through hazing, fence repair and modification, water development, habitat improvement, and other measures as appropriate. The Drakes Beach free-range tule elk herd would be managed at a level compatible with authorized ranching operations. Population thresholds for this herd would be a minimum of 100 animals, following guidance from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Draft Elk Conservation and Management Plan (2017), and a preliminary maximum of 160 animals. The NPS would manage within that range using translocation outside of the park if practicable, or agency-managed lethal removal methods. Additionally, the NPS would evaluate management of tule elk from the Limantour free-range herd if they affect ranchlands. No additional herds would be allowed to establish in the planning area.
- The NPS would implement a strategy prioritizing maintenance of historic buildings on ranches in collaboration with park ranchers. Prioritization would take into account historic preservation goals and the needs of ranch operations. In some cases, adaptive reuse of historic buildings would be considered to support diversification activities within the ranch core.
- Strategies for the management of historic ranch complexes within the planning area but not part of ranch operations would be identified including: prioritization of specific buildings, structures, and landscapes for preservation based on their importance to the overall integrity of the historic districts and opportunities for adaptive reuse. As appropriate, the park would evaluate potential for decommissioning/deconstruction of low priority or substantially degraded structures/complexes as part of this plan.

The proposed action represents one alternative that will be considered during the EIS process, and it will be further developed and refined throughout the process.

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ALTERNATIVE C: CONTINUED RANCHING AND REMOVAL OF THE DRAKES BEACH TULE ELK HERD

Under this alternative, the park would authorize existing ranch families to continue beef cattle and dairy ranching operations under agricultural lease/permits; and address the management of historic structures as described in the proposed action.

- The Drakes Beach tule elk herd would be removed using translocation outside of the park if practicable and agency-managed lethal removal methods. The NPS would continue to manage the Limantour herd in the Estero Road area as described in the proposed action. No new herds would be allowed to establish in the planning area.
- Approximately 27,000 acres of beef cattle and dairy operations would be authorized under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 900 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources.

ALTERNATIVE D: REDUCED RANCHING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DRAKES BEACH TULE ELK HERD

A reduced ranching alternative is required by the Agreement. Under this alternative, ranching operations would cease to occur on approximately 7,500 acres in the planning area.

- The areas identified for closure to grazing would minimize the overall impact to the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches Historic District and Olema Valley Dairy Ranches Historic District by maintaining operations with residential units.
- For areas remaining in agricultural use, the park would authorize the continuation of beef cattle and dairy ranching operations under agricultural lease/permits and address the management of historic structures as described in the proposed action.
- Tule elk would be managed consistent with the actions described in the proposed action but under population targets commensurate with the level of ranching operations in this alternative. In the event that additional herds form, they would be allowed.
- Approximately 19,500 acres of beef cattle and dairy operations would be authorized under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 600 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources.

ALTERNATIVE E: NO DAIRY RANCHING AND LIMITED MANAGEMENT OF DRAKES BEACH TULE ELK HERD

A no dairy ranching alternative is required by the Agreement. 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.

- For areas remaining in beef cattle ranching, the park would authorize the operations under agricultural lease/permits and address the management of historic structures as described in the proposed action. For dairy ranches converted to beef cattle operations, adaptive reuse of historic buildings would be considered to support this change in operational activities within the ranch core.
- The NPS would take no action to limit elk population growth and limited action to manage the geographic extent of all free-range tule elk, but only where management is needed to support other resource protection and park goals. In the event that additional herds form, they would be allowed.
- Approximately 27,000 acres of beef cattle operations would be authorized under lease/permits in the planning area. Approximately 900 acres of resource protection buffers would be established to protect sensitive resources.

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ALTERNATIVE F: NO RANCHING AND EXPANSION OF TULE ELK IN THE PLANNING AREA

A no ranching alternative is required by the Agreement. Under this alternative, ranching in all areas of Point Reyes and the north district of Golden Gate would cease.

- With the exception of the two locations with life-estates, ranching operations with developed complexes would be phased out over a 5-year period and grazing-only operations would be phased out over a 1-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 EIS will evaluate these actions at the programmatic level.
- The NPS would also consider trail linkages that connect new visitor opportunities located in former ranch complexes. The exact locations of additional linkages would depend on the future uses of the ranch complexes and which ones are public-facing.
- The NPS would interpret the history of ranching in the park using a range of techniques, potentially including exhibits in historic structures.
- Prescriptive grazing may take place in priority areas to address resource management goals, such as the maintenance of native and rare plant communities.
- The NPS would take no action to limit elk population growth and limited action to manage the geographic extent of free-ranging tule elk, but only where management is needed to support other resource protection and park goals.
- The NPS would implement a strategy to minimize impacts to the Point Reyes Peninsula Dairy Ranches Historic District and the Olema Valley Dairy Ranches Historic District by prioritizing specific ranch buildings, structures, and landscapes for preservation based on their relative historic significance, and identifying opportunities for adaptive reuse. As appropriate, the park would evaluate potential for decommissioning/deconstruction of low priority or substantially degraded structures/ complexes.

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A Conservation Framework

In order to ensure protection of natural and cultural resources, streamline the permitting process, and provide consistent guidance to ranch operators, a zoning framework of ranch core, pasture and range will be applied to all action alternatives that include ranching. This framework, described as Land Management Units (LMUs) is based on resource sensitivity and will guide both park staff and ranchers when considering various ranch-related activities. Because certain practices or activities would be authorized for specific LMUs, the framework accommodates greater operational flexibility for the park ranchers while protecting park resources.

Range (nearly 70% of planning area)

Grazed or potentially grazed land that supports native vegetation, managed as a natural ecosystem.

- Includes documented sensitive resource areas, including rare plants, wetlands, riparian/stream/pond habitats, forested areas, critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, and archeological sites.
- Includes nearly all areas with slopes greater than 20%.
- Authorized activities limited to regular grazing; generally, no pasture management or diversification activities.

Pasture (nearly 30% of planning area)

Grazed lands outside of Range LMU used primarily for the production of livestock, comprised of introduced or domesticated native forage species.

- A suite of pasture management activities, including seeding, mowing, and nutrient management would be evaluated for compatibility with resource goals.
- Manure management on dairies would be authorized.
- Activities would be subject to conservation practice standards, operational constraints, and maintenance requirements as necessary.
- Pasture LMU may be refined further under individual ranch plans.
- Under some alternatives, certain livestock diversification activities and silage could occur in the pasture LMU.

Ranch Core (approximately 1% of planning area)

The developed complex of buildings and structures on each individual ranch.

- Under some alternatives, up to 2.5 additional acres of disturbed land immediately adjacent to the developed complex would be available for diversification activities such as row crops and other livestock.
- Ranches without a developed complex or rancher occupied buildings would not include a Ranch Core area.
- Geographic or resource protection constraints could limit ranch core options on individual ranches.

RESOURCE INFORMATION USED TO IDENTIFY RANGE LMU

Biological Resources
- Threatened and endangered species
- Rare plants
- Native grasslands
- Forest

Cultural Resources
- Archeological sites (locations not shown)

Hydrological Resources
- Ponds
- Streams
- Wetlands

Topography
- Slopes >20%

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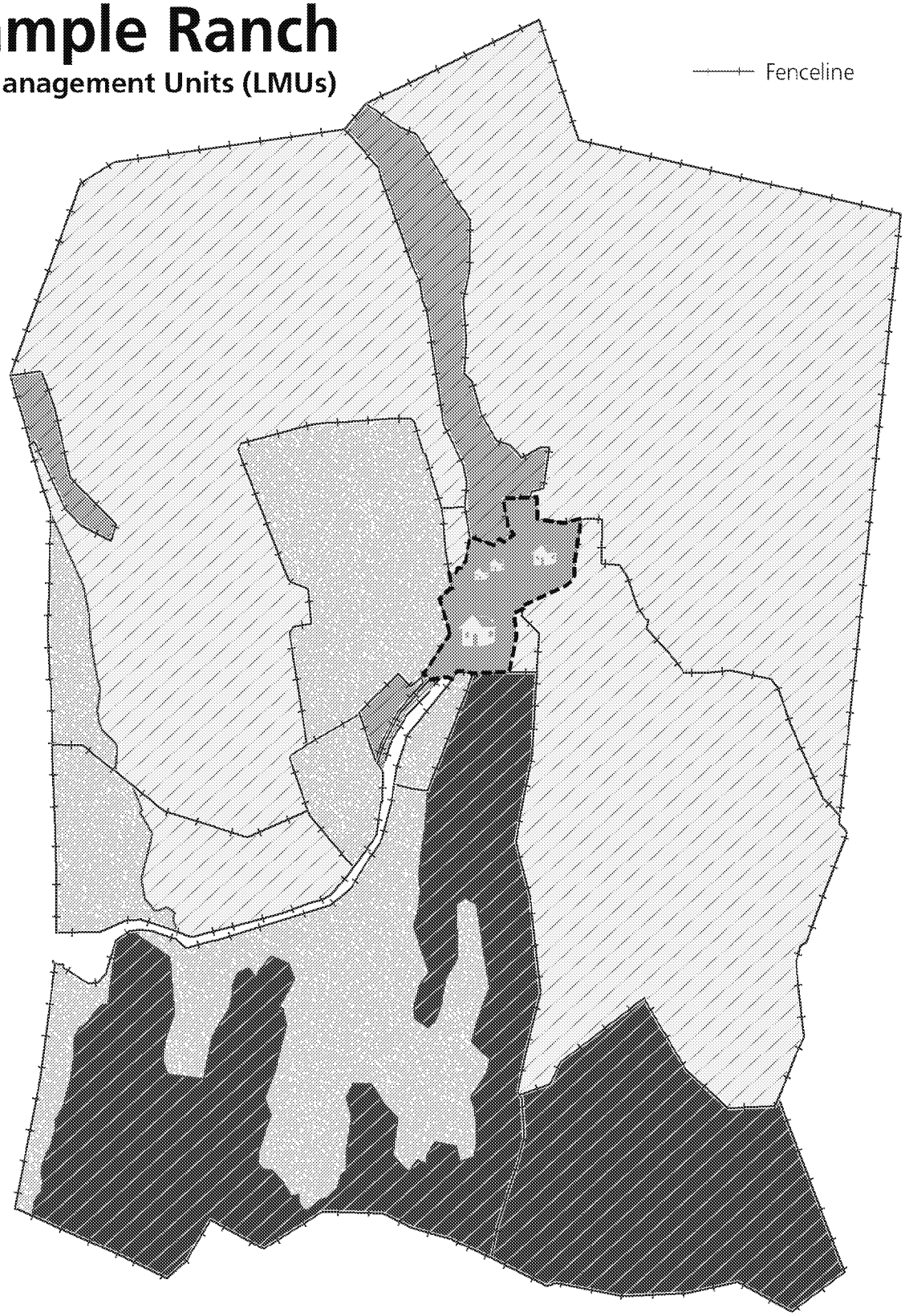
Example Ranch

Land Management Units (LMUs)



Ranch Core LMU

Pasture LMU

Range LMU

Biological

Hydrological

Slope >20%

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The EIS Process

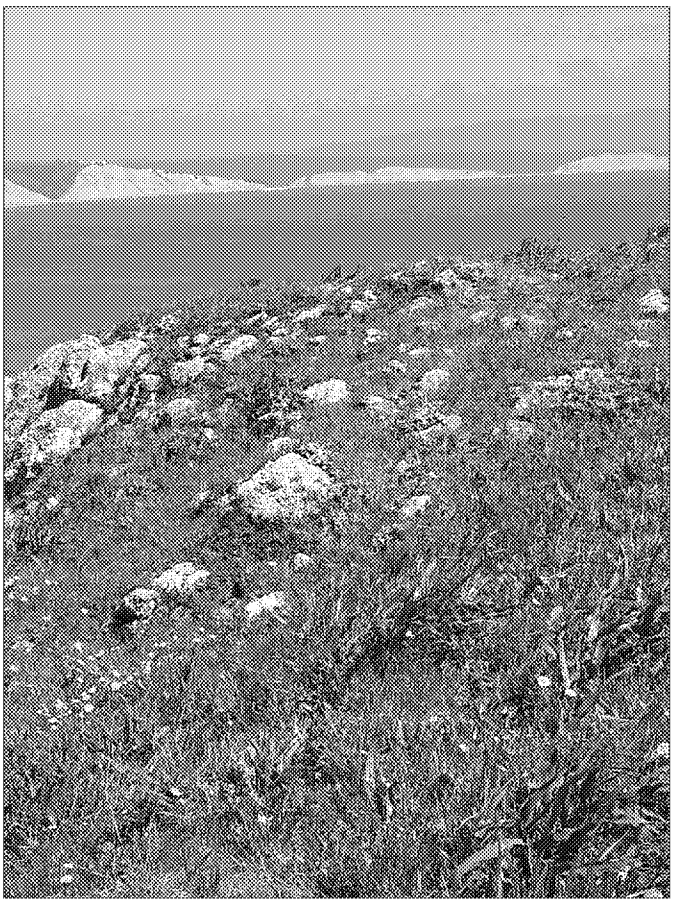
1. Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS published in the Federal Register; 30-day public scoping period, including public meetings
2. NPS develops a Draft EIS for the GMP Amendment
3. Draft EIS released to the public for a 45-day review and public comment period, including public meetings (anticipated Summer 2019)
4. NPS develops a Final EIS for the GMP Amendment
5. Final EIS released to the public; 30-day waiting period (anticipated Winter 2019/2020)
6. Record of Decision (ROD) signed by the NPS Pacific West Regional Director (anticipated early 2020)

The public scoping period will close on
FRIDAY,
NOVEMBER 30, 2018.

Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

How to Comment

There are several ways to submit your comments:

1. Submit comment electronically at: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/POREGMPA.
2. Submit written comments at an in-person public meeting.
3. Mail or hand-deliver written comments to park headquarters:

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