Message

From: Munson, James [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=D57D7D58B5794F03B3B900C4B232F757-JMUNSON]
Sent: 11/15/2018 5:30:33 PM
To: Keydel, Susan [Keydel.Susan@epa.gov]
CC: Goforth, Kathleen [Goforth.Kathleen@epa.gov]
Subject: Fwd: FYI - Point Reyes ranchers shouldn't be favored over wildlife

Interesting article written buy a previous NPS Point Rey's employee...

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Begin forwarded message:

From: "Capilla, Morgan" <capilla.morgan@epa.gov>
Date: November 14, 2018 at 7:10:06 AM PST
To: "Munson, James" <MUNSON.JAMES@EPA.GOV>
Subject: FYI - Point Reyes ranchers shouldn't be favored over wildlife

Hey! I saw this in the R9 newsclips and thought you'd be interested in reading it.

OPINION // OPEN FORUM

Point Reyes ranchers shouldn't be favored over wildlife

By Barbara J. Moritsch Nov. 12, 2018 Updated: Nov. 12, 2018 10:05 a.m.

The first time I drove to the Point Reyes Lighthouse, I was horrified to see large cattle ranching operations on National Park Service lands.

The adverse impacts of ranching on soils, water quality, vegetation, wildlife and visitor experience were undeniable: piles of manure, muddy trails, accelerated erosion, weed-infested pastures and gigantic heaps of rotting vegetation called silage (pasture plants are mowed and then fermented to feed livestock when there is no grass available). During the four years I worked at Point Reyes, I never drove past the ranches without shaking my head.

The ranched lands at Point Reyes are largely coastal prairie, which historically occurred from northern Los Angeles County into Oregon. More than 90 percent of this plant community has been disturbed or lost to development. In other words, the coastal prairie, as well as the plants and wildlife it supports, is rare and deserves full protection and restoration.

My co-workers understood that the ranches were "grandfathered" in under the national seashore's enabling legislation. The government had purchased the ranches, and was to allow ranch operations to continue under leases for 25 years, or until the death of the ranch owner or his or her spouse.

I was not the only employee who believed the ranches had unacceptable environmental and social impacts, but for many years the Park Service could not, or simply chose not to, address the issue head-on — not until they were sued over those impacts.

In July 2017, the plaintiffs, ranchers and the National Park Service reached a settlement — the Park Service could extend grazing leases for five years and was to complete a comprehensive environmental assessment of the ranches and subsequent general management plan within four years. This agreement was considered a win-win by all.

Then, suddenly, out of left (or, in this case, right) field, U.S. Reps. Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, and Rob Bishop, R-Utah, quickly pushed a bill (HR6687) through the House of Representatives that attempted an end run around the settlement process, basically ordering the National Park Service to issue 20-year leases to the ranchers, and expressly putting the needs of ranches above the needs of natural resources and native wildlife (e.g., tule elk).

Why did Huffman and Bishop try to force the Park Service to change the national seashore's enabling legislation ahead of the environmental assessment of the impacts of the ranches? Perhaps because they knew at least some of the impacts of ranching on the environment at Point Reyes National Seashore would be, per the National Environmental Policy Act, "significant."

Rather than allowing the National Park Service to conduct a thorough impact analysis and decide, with full public input, the fate of these private enterprises on public land, these politicians are trying to impose their will in favor of the ranchers. It appears that under an administration that clearly favors the economy over all else, and seems intent on privatizing as much of our public land as possible, Huffman and Bishop saw their chance to curry favor in Washington, at the expense of the integrity of Point Reyes National Seashore.

When considering HR6687, I urge our senators to do the right thing, to consider the needs and desires of all U.S. citizens — all of whom have a stake in Point Reyes National Seashore — as well as the needs of the land itself and the wildlife it supports. HR6687 should not be passed. Instead, allow the legal processes of environmental review and planning to go forward, and do not allow private interests to run roughshod over both the processes and the incomparable beauty and richness of Point Reyes National Seashore.

Let the National Park Service conduct its comprehensive analysis, and, based on the data, (1) determine whether or not ranching can continue without harming the environment or the experience of the millions of people who visit the national seashore every year, and (2)if any of the ranches should be phased out or have their operations modified. To preempt this process in favor of private interests would be a breach of the public trust.

Barbara J. Moritsch worked as a plant ecologist for the National Park Service at Point Reyes National Seashore from 1998 to 2002.

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