

Point Reyes National Seashore General Management Plan Amendment

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Dear Interested Party,

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning the planning process 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 will update management guidance for more than 28,000 acres of NPS lands, including all lands currently leased for ranching.

As part of this process, we are initiating a 30-day comment period on a conceptual range of management alternatives. You are encouraged to share your observations, concerns, and ideas about the information presented in this newsletter to help us focus the GMP Amendment on significant issues in the planning area. The information obtained during this public comment period will be used to refine the conceptual range of alternatives, identify issues, and ensure that we have the information needed to move forward in the planning process.

The NPS will be hosting two open house meetings during this comment period. You are invited to attend these meetings to discuss your thoughts and ask NPS representatives any questions you may have.

More opportunities for public comment will be available during this planning process. Once we have refined the conceptual range of alternatives with public input and can analyze the potential impacts, we will begin the second phase of planning. At that time, we will publish a notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) and initiate the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

These lands host diverse natural and cultural resources, millions of visitors, layers of human history, and ongoing active agriculture. The interests and issues are broad and complex. We look forward to working with you to create a shared vision for the planning area.

Sincerely,

Cynthia MacLeod
Acting Superintendent



Photo by Burr Heneman

Public Meeting Dates and Locations

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2017

5:00-7:00 PM

West Marin School Gymnasium

11550 State Route 1

Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017

5:00-7:00 PM

Bay Model Visitor Center

2100 Bridgeway

Sausalito, CA 95965

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.

Agricultural lease/special use permits (lease/permits) are authorized under specific provisions of the enabling legislation for both Point Reyes and Golden Gate (see page 8 for more detail). Approximately 28,000 acres of NPS lands, including 18,000 acres in Point Reyes and 10,000 acres in the north district of Golden Gate, are currently used for beef and dairy ranching under agricultural lease/permits.

In spring 2014, the NPS began a Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan to address the management of the approximately 28,000 acres of active beef and dairy ranching on NPS lands in Point Reyes and the north district of Golden Gate. This included ranch lease duration, succession, operational flexibility, and diversification. The planning effort also addressed concerns related to the expansion of free-range tule elk on park lands under agricultural lease/permits.

In February 2016, litigation was brought against the NPS related to the ranch planning process and the ongoing 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 on July 14, 2017. Per the Settlement 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.

The GMP Amendment will update guidance for the preservation of natural and cultural resources, the management of infrastructure and visitor use in the planning area, and as appropriate, direct specific strategies for managing agricultural lease/permits and tule elk for lands in the planning area (see GMP Amendment planning area map).

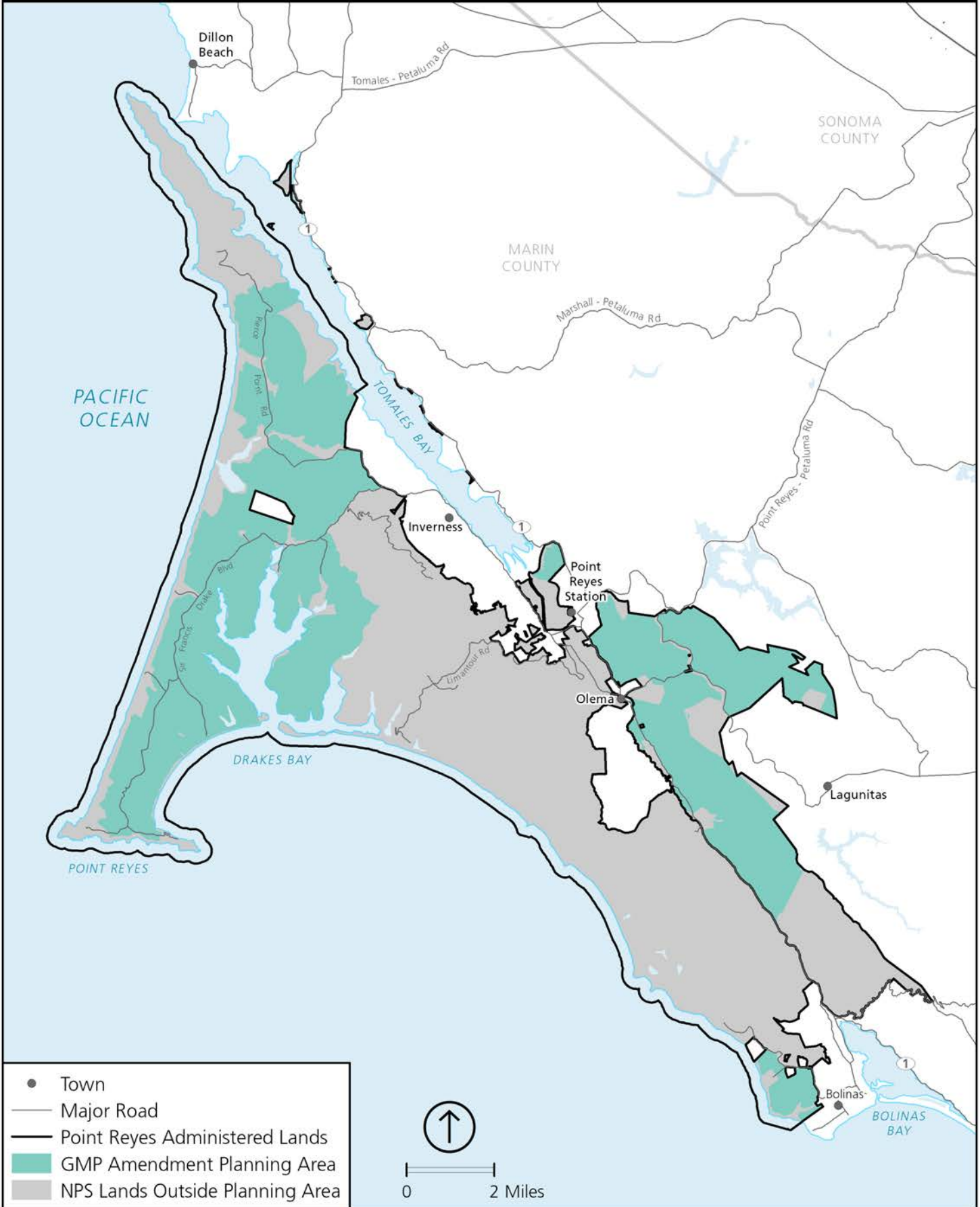


What is a General Management Plan Amendment?

NPS policies allow for amending an existing GMP, rather than undertaking a new GMP, to address particular locations or issues. This GMP Amendment will update management guidance and meet the statutory requirements of a GMP within the planning area as shown on page 3.

Point Reyes National Seashore GMP Amendment Planning Area

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Conceptual Range of Preliminary Draft Alternatives

The July 2017 Settlement Agreement requires the NPS to give full consideration to and disclose the impacts of three alternatives in the EIS: no ranching, no dairy ranching, and reduced ranching. These alternatives must not be conditioned on the discretionary termination of lease/permits by ranchers. The Settlement Agreement expressly preserves the NPS's right to give full consideration to other potential action alternatives. It also allows the NPS to consider agricultural diversification, increased operational flexibility, the promotion of sustainable operational practices, succession planning, and similar ranch management practices as part of any action alternative except the no ranching alternative.

Six conceptual alternatives are described below, from 20-year agricultural lease/permits with diversification and increased operational flexibility, to reduced ranching, no dairy ranching, and no ranching. The conceptual alternatives include the management of tule elk in the planning area, from elimination, to active management, to expansion of the free-range tule elk. Each of the conceptual action alternatives addresses the four statutorily required elements for GMPs, to the extent applicable. These elements are: (1) measures to preserve park resources, (2) guidance regarding the types and levels of public use and development, (3) discussion of visitor carrying capacities, and (4) potential external boundary modifications. The NPS has already conducted an initial boundary analysis and does not expect to propose any external boundary modifications.

ALTERNATIVES REQUIRED BY THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

No Ranching and Limited Management of Tule Elk

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 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).

No Dairy Ranching and Management of Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd

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, 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.

Reduced Ranching and Management of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd

Under this alternative, ranching operations would cease to occur on approximately 7,500 acres in the planning area.

- 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 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 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.



ADDITIONAL PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION

Continued Ranching and Management of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd (NPS Initial Proposal)

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.

- 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.

Continued Ranching and Removal of the Drakes Beach Tule Elk Herd

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.

- 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.



Continue Current Management (No Action)

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.

- 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.



The conceptual range of alternatives and management tools under consideration may change based on public input throughout the development of the GMP Amendment and EIS. After the NPS refines the initial proposal and conceptual range of alternatives with public input and when the NPS can effectively and efficiently analyze the potential impacts, the second phase of planning will begin with a NOI to prepare an EIS (see Planning Process section on page 12 for more information).



Ranching Background

Ranching within the Point Reyes peninsula dates back to the mid-1800s. Point Reyes and Golden Gate legislation addresses acquisition and leasing authority for agricultural lands. Enacted in 1978, Public Law 95-625 provided standardized legislative language for the leasing of land for agricultural purposes within these NPS units (16 U.S.C. §§ 459c-5 and 16 §§ 460bb-2(j)). NPS managers have authorized ranching and dairying operations through agricultural lease/special use permits (lease/permits) issued to ranchers. The lease/permits include terms and conditions that ensure the protection of natural and cultural resources. In a November 29, 2012, memorandum, the Secretary of the Interior directed the NPS to pursue the issuance of lease/permits for terms up to 20 years.

- Agricultural lease/permits have been used to authorize existing beef and dairy ranch operations on approximately 18,000 acres in Point Reyes and 10,000 acres in the north district of 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.
- The active beef cattle and dairy operations that occur in the Point Reyes Peninsula Ranches Dairy District and the Olema Valley Historic District have been determined eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Consistent with the Settlement Agreement, Point Reyes has issued interim leases to signatories of the Settlement Agreement. These interim leases extend current terms and conditions through July 14, 2022.
- Current authorizations allow approximately 6,000 cattle on a year-round basis.

Range Management Program Activities

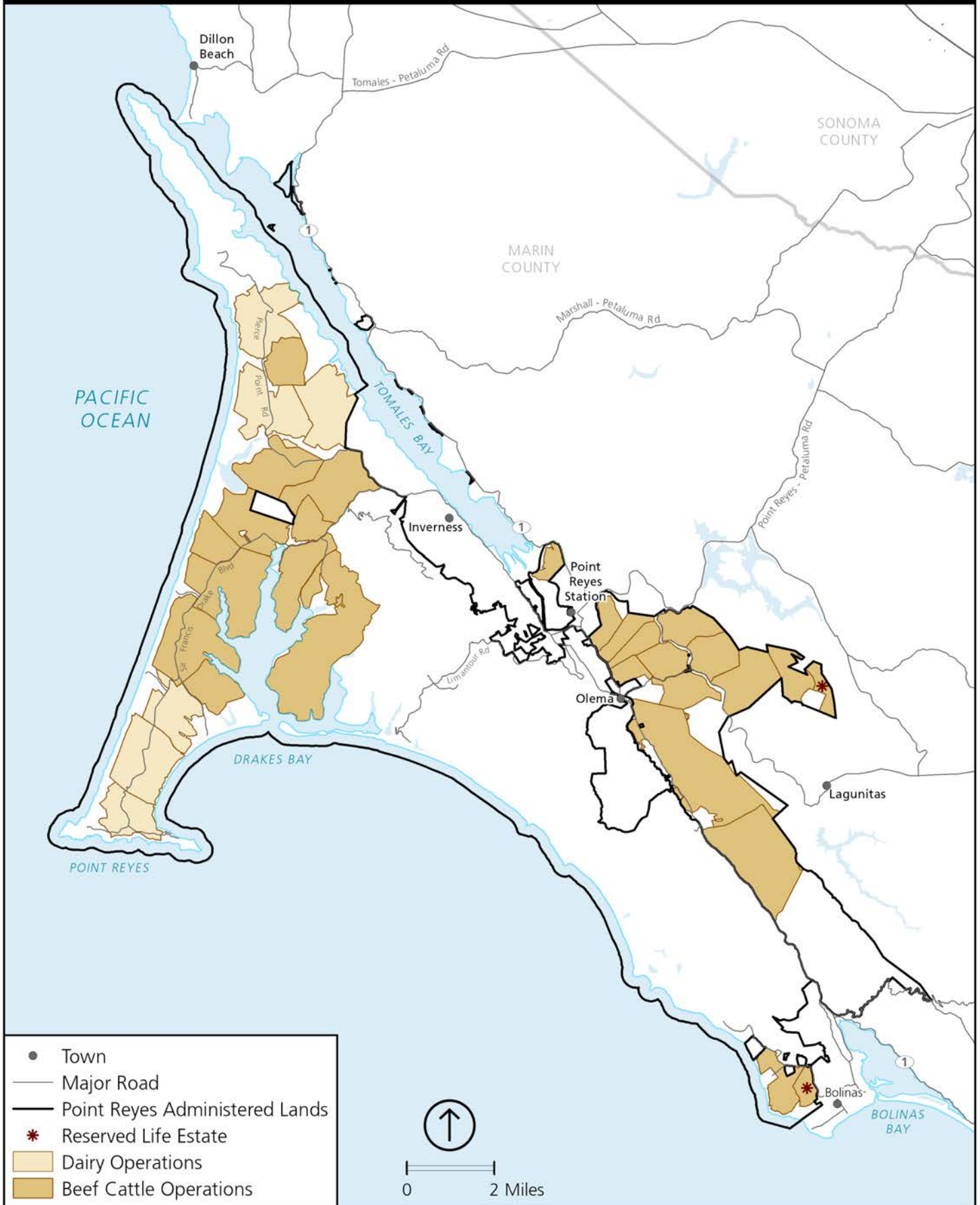
To adhere to various regulatory requirements and NPS mandates, the range program:

- Monitors various attributes, including vegetation, water quality, and ranch infrastructure.
- Works with ranchers to implement best management practices to protect sensitive resources, including water quality and rare and endangered species.
- Conducts residual dry matter monitoring each fall to assess the amount of plant material left at the end of the grazing season.
- Works with ranchers to monitor and manage invasive nonnative vegetation.
- Conducts permitting for individual management actions and improvements by ranch operators not covered under lease/permits, such as fence construction and water developments.

Point Reyes National Seashore

Lands Currently Leased for Ranching

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Tule Elk Background

Tule elk, the smallest subspecies of North American elk, live only in California. Tule elk were extirpated from Point Reyes by the 1860s. Consistent with Public Law 94-389, 10 tule elk were successfully reintroduced to a 2,600-acre fenced wilderness reserve on Tomales Point in 1978. This enclosed herd has grown to one of the largest in California, comprising more than 300 animals.

In 1998, the NPS completed the Point Reyes National Seashore Tule Elk Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (Tule Elk Management Plan/EA). The Tule Elk Management Plan/EA established a free-ranging herd outside the reserve from 28 animals in 1999 with an interim management limit of 250 to 350 elk. There are now two independent free-ranging herds, one near Drakes Beach and one near Limantour that extends onto ranch lands in the Estero Road area. The 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan/EA did not contemplate the expansion of tule elk into the ranchlands. Point Reyes is the only unit of the national park system where tule elk reside. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife manages all other tule elk herds in the state.

Current Tule Elk Status on Ranchlands (see Tule Elk Herd Locations map)

- Drakes Beach Herd – 110 estimated total animals. The main herd (consisting of females, juveniles, and a few males), and male bachelor groups, spend time on A Ranch, B Ranch, C Ranch, E Ranch, the former D Ranch, and in surrounding areas with no cattle grazing.
- Limantour-Estero Road Herd – 130 estimated total animals. Female, juvenile, and some male tule elk remain in the wilderness area. Approximately 35 to 40 males spend time on ranch lands through the Home Ranch area along Estero Road and to ranches across Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. The males return to the wilderness area during the rut.
- Final 2017 tule elk census numbers will be available in fall/winter 2017.
- Since 2011, Point Reyes staff have repaired elk crossings and cattle fences to mitigate damage caused by elk.
- A water project at D Ranch was completed in 2013 and is ongoing to provide reliable water sources for elk away from ranches.
- Since 2012, Point Reyes staff have conducted hazing to push the main herd off active ranch lands to reduce time spent and forage consumed on ranches by elk.
- In March 2015, two male elk and one female were relocated to Limantour as part of an experiment to understand relocation response. All three animals returned to Drakes Beach over the next year. In February 2017, two female elk were relocated to the Tomales Point Elk Reserve. One female remains, but the other left the fenced reserve and returned to Drakes Beach in July 2017.

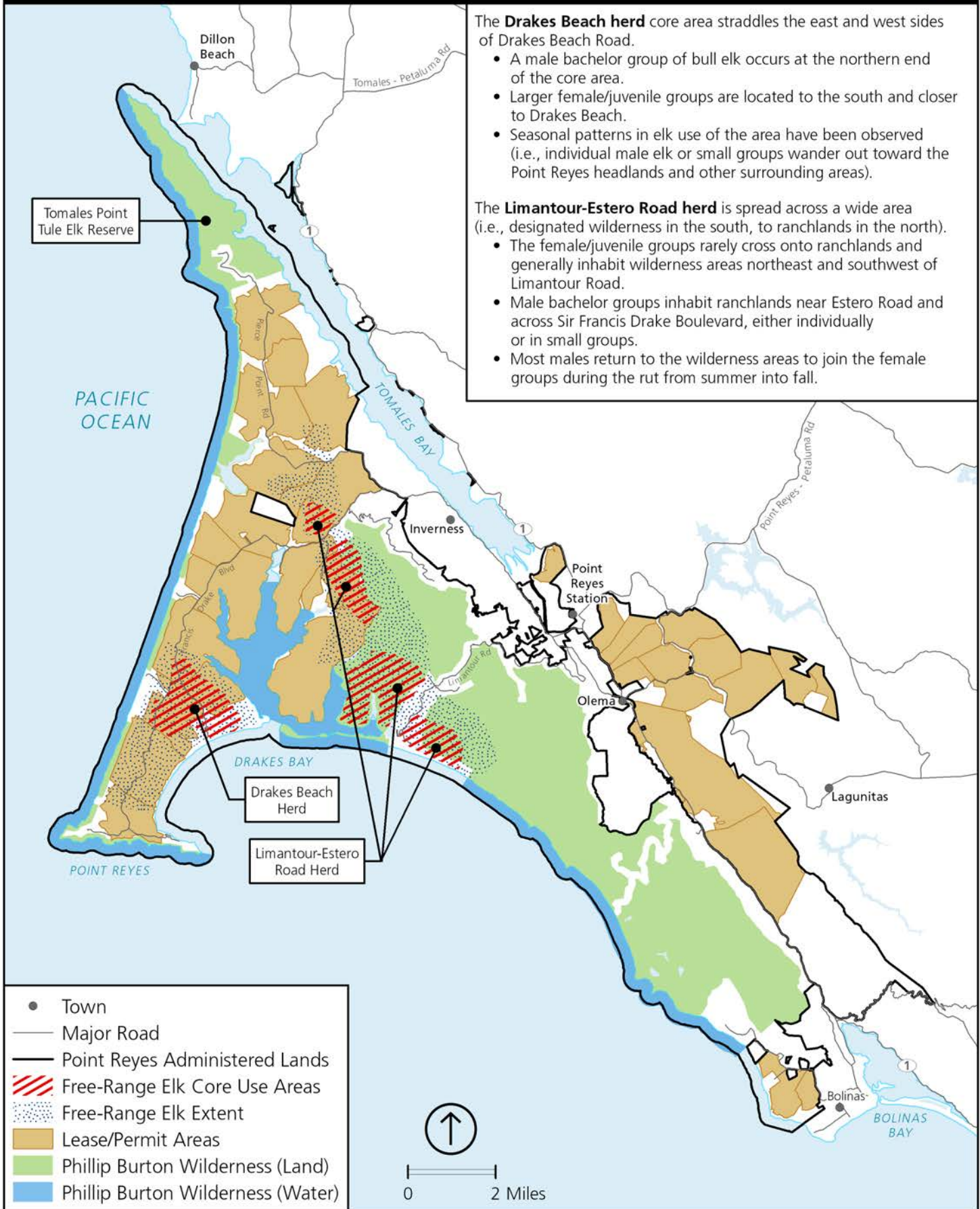
Tule Elk Management Activities

- Since fall 2010, Point Reyes staff conduct ongoing monitoring to document numbers and locations of tule elk in the pastoral zone.
- To better account for time that elk from the Drakes Beach herd spend on ranches versus other areas, four GPS collars were deployed in October 2012 on two males and two females. Three GPS collars were deployed on females in winter 2017. In fall 2017, one GPS collar was placed on a male.
- NPS implemented a Johne's testing program for the free-range elk in May 2014 with the Johne's Testing Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Johne's disease has been confirmed in the Drakes Beach herd.

Point Reyes National Seashore

Tule Elk Herd Locations

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



How to Comment

There are several ways to submit your comments:

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

Point Reyes GMP Amendment
Superintendent
Point Reyes National Seashore
1 Bear Valley Road
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

Below are some questions for your consideration as you prepare your comments:

- 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?

The public comment period will close on Wednesday,
November 15, 2017.

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.

The Planning Process

First phase: Begin GMP Amendment planning

- **30-day public comment period and public meetings**
- NPS refines conceptual range of alternatives and initial proposal
- NPS gathers necessary information to meaningfully evaluate the impacts of conceptual alternatives

Second phase: Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the GMP Amendment

- NOI to prepare an EIS, **30-day public comment period with public meetings**
- NPS develops a Draft EIS for the GMP Amendment
- Draft EIS released to the public for a minimum **45-day review and public comment and public meetings**
- NPS develops Final EIS for the GMP Amendment
- Final EIS released to public; minimum 30-day waiting period
- GMP Amendment Record of Decision (ROD) signed by July 14, 2021, to meet requirements of the court order

