

Summary of Giacomini Land Exchange

In February 2000, the Park Service acquired the 563-acre Giacomini Ranch at fair-market value for the purpose of restoring the historic coastal marsh at the confluence of Lagunitas Creek with Tomales Bay. At the time of the purchase, the Giacomini family only offered certain parcels to the Park Service for potential sale, as they wished to retain many of the parcels adjacent to the town of Point Reyes Station. As part of the final negotiated agreement, the Giacomini family retained some "lowland" parcels that are contiguous with the pastures on the West Pasture (near Inverness Park), and the Park Service retained a portion of the Dairy Facility on the higher elevation Point Reyes Mesa that fronts C Street in Point Reyes Station.

The purpose of this land exchange at this time is to: a) establish federal ownership in 9.61 acres of environmentally sensitive wetlands, owned by Giacomini, that are contiguous to existing Federal holdings near the Towns of Inverness and Pt. Reyes Station; and b) convey a total of 5.38 acres to the Giacomini family on their federally-owned lands adjacent to existing Giacomini holdings in the Town of Point Reyes Station, and convey an improved property near the Town of Inverness. In the appraisal, demolition of farm buildings was considered a liability, and thus used to reduce the value of lands adjacent to C Street.

Completion of a land exchange that results in conveyance of the lowland areas to the Park Service is essential to the implementation of the Giacomini Wetland Restoration. The Park Service is currently in the final stages of planning and compliance for this project. As part of the planning process, the Park Service has conducted extensive surveys and planning associated with the restoration of natural hydrologic and ecological process to the Restoration Project Area and has determined that this land exchange would significantly further the goals of the restoration project. Listed below are some of the reasons that the Park Service believes that this exchange is crucial to the restoration project:

1. The exchange would transfer the remaining "lowland" parcels to the Seashore in exchange for parcels up on the bluff. These "lowland" parcels have inherently high hydrologic and biological values because most of these either contain creeks or seeps that are important for wetland habitat diversity and maintenance.
2. The lands on the bluff have been intensively altered and impacted by the operations of the dairy, and are not ecologically connected to, nor essential to the restoration project. While upland is important, the proximity of these parcels to town lowers its value as refugia for wildlife, which is one of the most important values of uplands adjacent to wetlands.
3. As part of the planning process, if the land exchange is not completed, it would result in additional design constraints that would limit the restoration potential associated with the project. As a result, the NPS would have to either scale back the restoration efforts in both the West and East Pastures or construct unsightly berms to protect the private property from increases in flooding once the Lagunitas Creek levees are removed. Levees are part of the very infrastructure that this project was intended to remove.
4. West Pasture lands that the NPS would acquire contain reaches of Fish Hatchery Creek and an associated 0.5 cfs appropriative water right. Fish Hatchery Creek supports steelhead and California red-legged frog, as well as possibly tidewater goby. Without transfer, we would likely need to redesign the West Pasture restoration to include a berm, which would likely exacerbate existing Fish Hatchery Creek flooding problems. Ultimately, protection of private property would result in the reduction of the scale of the restoration project.