



Prisoners Harbor Coastal Wetland Restoration Project Final Environment Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report Released



The National Park Service (NPS) has released the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Final EIS/EIR) for the Prisoners Harbor Coastal Wetland Restoration Project. The Final EIS/EIR was developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Prisoners Harbor Coastal Wetland Restoration Project proposes to restore a functional ecosystem at a coastal wetland site and associated stream channel in lower Cañada del Puerto Creek on Santa Cruz Island. The project also controls invasive plant species, protects significant cultural and historic resources, and improves the visitor experience.

Prisoners Harbor Site Conditions

Prisoners Harbor on Santa Cruz Island sits at the mouth of Cañada del Puerto, a seasonal creek. Historically, the Prisoners area was once the largest coastal wetland on the Channel Islands. This rare habitat, comprised of a fresh water stream, coastal lagoon/wetland, and riparian woodland, provided respite from the long dry summers for a diverse array of species including the island fox. The wetland most likely served as a resting and feeding stop for migratory birds and nesting habitat for resident waterfowl.

Prisoners Harbor has an extensive legacy of human occupation including Chumash habitation, fishing and ranching. In the late 1800s island owners rerouted and channelized the creeks, filled in the adjacent wetland with gravels from the surrounding hills and creek bed. These actions reduced the ecological value and biological diversity of the coastal wetland system. It resulted in diminished habitat quality for island species, such as the Santa Cruz Island silver lotus, Santa Cruz Island fox, island scrub jay, and migratory waterfowl.

Protecting Natural and Cultural Values

In 2007, the NPS began preparing a Draft EIS/EIR to evaluate options for protecting the biological and cultural values of Prisoners Harbor. The Final EIS/EIR identifies Alternative B as the agency and environmentally preferred alternative. This alternative includes: 1) removal of about 17,000 yds³ fill, removal of 8 historic cattle corrals; 2) relocation of a scale house; 3) removal of eucalyptus from 20 acres in the lower Cañada del Puerto; 4) control of invasive fennel and kikuyu grass; 5) removal of 250 feet of berm to reconnect the creek with its floodplain; 6) construction of a protective barrier around a portion of a sensitive archeological site; and 7) improvements to the visitor experience.

The NPS evaluated a No Action alternative and an alternative that restores one third of the wetland (Alternative C). Alternative C would remove 11,000 yds of fill, retain 2 cattle corrals, and retain the scale house in its current location.

The Draft EIS/EIR circulated for public review and comment for 60 days, ending July 13, 2009. Responses to comments submitted to the NPS by agencies, organizations, and individuals during the public comment period are included in Chapter 5 of the Final EIS/EIR.

Interested parties may review the Final EIS/EIR at the main library in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Oxnard, and Thousand Oaks. A digital copy of the Final EIS/EIR may be obtained by contacting the park at:

Channel Islands National Park
1901 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, CA 93001
www.nps.gov/chis

After considering all public and agency comments reviewing Final EIS/EIR, the Regional Director, NPS Pacific West Region will make the final decision on the proposed plan. The Regional Director will sign a Record of Decision no sooner than 30 days after the publication of the notice of filing of the Final EIS/EIR in the Federal Register. Notice of the final decision will also be posted in the Federal Register and on the park's web site. The NPS official responsible for project implementation will be the Superintendent, Channel Islands National Park.