

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Point Reyes National Seashore

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Point Reyes National Seashore Tule Elk Management Plan
and Environmental Assessment**

The U.S. National Park Service (Service) has completed the *Point Reyes National Seashore Tule Elk Management Plan and Environmental Assessment*. The Environmental Assessment evaluates the effects of managing tule elk (*Cervus elaphus nannodes*) using scientific techniques and relocation of tule elk in order to produce a free-ranging herd (preferred alternative). The Environmental Assessment describes the Service's proposal and the affected environment, and evaluates the effects of the proposed action and alternatives on the environment.

The preferred alternative was selected for implementation because it best meets the Service's goals to maintain viable populations of tule elk, use minimal intrusion to regulate population size where necessary, provide for a free-ranging herd, research and monitor the elk and their habitat, and provide the public with information on tule elk. The no action alternative would not meet the Service's plan to protect and manage the elk. The other two alternatives presented, eliminating restricted ranges and reducing elk to a small remnant population, would require substantial changes in land use and policies and could not be implemented without substantial time and money invested.

The possible impacts from these actions are addressed in the mitigation matrix that follows. In particular, issues of special concern to reviewers were the effects of the elk on the carrying capacity of their environment, the effect of elk on adjacent landowners, ranchers, and threatened and endangered species, and the need to continually monitor potential impacts. These issues were given close attention in the environmental analysis. Mitigations to minimize these potential effects include a cooperating partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game as defined in the Memorandum of Understanding of February 29, 1998, and cooperation and regular communication with numerous groups and organizations interested in Point Reyes tule elk. Additional mitigations planned include conducting an annual monitoring program, combined with ongoing research, to assess and track the effects of management actions on elk and their environment. Working with park partners, the Seashore intends to be ready to respond as necessary to tule elk that stray outside the Seashore or otherwise impact neighbors. Through continuing use of scientific consultants and panels of experts, the Seashore will pursue the best advice on its scientific and management objectives and adjust its strategies consistent with its goal of adaptive management of tule elk.

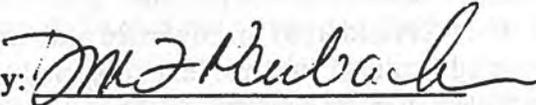
Impacts	Mitigation	Responsible Party
Overpopulation and its effect on habitat, T&E species, neighbors, and visitors	Monitor elk populations and their environment annually and analyze data to detect negative trends	Point Reyes National Seashore
Overpopulation and its effect on habitat, T&E species, neighbors, and visitors	Act in a timely fashion to control elk population size as necessary to ensure conditions of herd and environment remain within acceptable range	Point Reyes National Seashore and State of California
Effect of management and population control on health of elk	Conduct research to improve basis for decision making and better understand the ecosystem and interactions between elk and park resources	Point Reyes National Seashore and USGS/BRD Scientists
Effect of scientific and management actions on public visitation	Close areas when necessary, conduct capture or helicopter operations during periods of low visitation such as weekdays	Point Reyes National Seashore
Potential for harm to park resources by elk	Maintain capability to take corrective actions as necessary including revegetation and soil stabilization, and capture and/or culling of elk	Point Reyes National Seashore
Potential for misunderstanding of scientific and management actions by interested organizations and public. Impacts on neighbors	Work to establish partnerships with organizations interested in the protection and interpretation of tule elk. Investigate the feasibility of funding any potential depredations to private property with private contributions	Point Reyes National Seashore and cooperating partners
Possibility of impacts on archeological sites by tule elk	Develop capability through partnerships to restabilize any damaged archeological sites or potentially excavate those in danger of being lost	Point Reyes National Seashore and cooperating agencies and partners
Potential for misunderstanding of procedures by public	Prepare educational materials on tule elk to increase public awareness and provide safety information	Point Reyes National Seashore
Effect of tule elk on T&E species.	Monitor threatened and endangered species in contact with tule elk with potential for effects	Point Reyes National Seashore
Effect of removing or altering artificial water sources on other resources	Conduct assessment of impacts before altering existing water impoundments on Tomales Point	Point Reyes National Seashore

The public was notified of the Service's proposal and included in the decision-making process. The Service distributed the *Point Reyes National Seashore Tule Elk Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* to government agencies, interested citizens, community and environmental groups, and landowners in October 1997. A public meeting was held in Point Reyes Station, California, on October 25, 1997 to discuss the Tule Elk Management Plan. As part of the public notice and review process, the *Point Reyes National Seashore Tule Elk Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* was available for a 45-day review and comment period from October 25th to December 12th, 1997. Point Reyes National Seashore received 73 letters commenting on the plan, 22 before the deadline and 51 after the deadline. Comments received before the deadline, 19 letters endorsed the preferred alternative A. Two other letters endorsed the plan with some qualifications, and one letter objected to the relocation component of alternative A. Of those received after the deadline, all 51 endorsed alternative A. As a result of assessing all comments, the Service corrected minor omissions and errors of fact, and printed a revised Environmental Assessment. None of the comments substantially affected the outcome of analysis of alternatives or mitigations.

The following is a summary of effects of the preferred alternative on the environment:

1. The maintenance and conservation of tule elk in Point Reyes National Seashore would contribute towards ecosystem restoration of native fauna; would be compatible with protecting habitats for several endangered, threatened, and rare species; would assist in preventing impacts from overpopulation that could threaten biological diversity in native habitats.
2. Relocation of tule elk in other natural areas of the Seashore would not create any new zoning, land-use regulations, or changes to permitted uses. The relocation of tule elk and their subsequent dispersal would not impact private landowners or Seashore visitors. Local jurisdictions would be under no Service requirement to amend their land-use plans to conform with the project. Relocation of tule elk to other areas of the state would be conducted in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game, per subsequent CEQA process to be conducted by the State.
3. Managing elk using relocations and scientific techniques would not result in the displacement of ranching activities with the Seashore. Existing conditions would continue within the Seashore as a result of the ability to manage elk on the restricted Tomales Point elk range.
4. The proposed action would require the limited use of motorized equipment in wilderness under the minimum tool concept. The localized use of helicopters or motor vehicles for short duration may have effects on wilderness users. Such transitory effects are deemed negligible and are clearly outweighed by the long term enhancement of this key attribute of the Seashore's wilderness.

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment, capacity of the mitigation to reduce or avoid potential impacts, and with consideration of public comment, the National Park Service has determined that managing tule elk at Point Reyes National Seashore using relocations and scientific techniques is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. There are no cumulative impacts nor is precedent established by these actions. Accordingly, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and the proposed action may be implemented immediately by Point Reyes National Seashore.

Recommended By: 
Superintendent, Point Reyes NS

7/14/98
Date

Approved By: 
Regional Director, Pacific West

7/17/98
Date