

Project Summary

The Coastal Watershed Restoration – Geomorphic Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) examines alternative means to restore natural hydrologic function at these locations and assesses the potential environmental effects of the implementation of each strategy. Following public and agency review and comment, the conclusions of the potential environmental effect in the EA will be used to inform the NPS planning process. This EA addresses topics required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is intended for adoption by California State agencies to meet their CEQA permitting requirements.

This EA addresses two water impoundments and one road crossing site within the Drakes Estero Watershed. These sites are included as part of the Coastal Watershed Restoration Project, a National Park Service (NPS) Line-Item Construction Program funded project scheduled to be obligated in FY2005. Project areas include the Glenbrook Road Crossing, a non-conforming structure in the Philip Burton Wilderness, Muddy Hollow Dam and Limantour Beach Pond Dam, both constructed across portions of Estero de Limantour.

The proposed project area is located on land adjacent to and within the Philip Burton Wilderness Area of the Seashore. Treatment proposed at these locations is intended to reduce or eliminate the long-term maintenance requirements associated with the existing earthen fill structures. A summary of project needs are identified below.

- The project is intended to restore natural conditions and increase estuarine habitat at Point Reyes. At each of these sites, construction across stream or estuarine habitat impedes natural process and is not consistent with long-term park and NPS management objectives. These sites impede or block access to watersheds that support, or have the potential to support federally threatened coastal California steelhead and coho salmon. Muddy Hollow Dam and Limantour Beach dam restrict tidal action from more than five acres of coastal marsh habitat. The Glenbrook crossing is a non-conforming structure within the Philip Burton Wilderness and is a barrier to fish passage.
- The project is needed to reduce the maintenance demands at Point Reyes. The project addresses facilities within the Drakes Estero watershed that are in need of maintenance, but not considered integral to current park management objectives.

These facilities are in need of major maintenance to stabilize structures, and in the long-term, would require regular maintenance. For example, the Bureau of Reclamation identified the Muddy Hollow Dam to be in “seriously deficient condition and consideration should be given to deactivating the dam and restoring the tidal pool area” (USBR 2001). With numerous high priority maintenance needs, it is likely the facilities would continue to deteriorate. This project is proposed to address long-term maintenance issues at this site, and includes alternatives that would reduce the overall operations and maintenance requirements for these facilities.

- The project is needed to eliminate the risk of catastrophic failure. Maintenance activities are necessary to prevent catastrophic failure at Glenbrook Crossing and Muddy Hollow Pond. The culvert at Glenbrook Crossing (within the Philip Burton Wilderness Area) is eroded and bowed, with water piping around the metal culvert. The outfall of the culvert is 11 feet above the bed of the creek, and is a total barrier to aquatic movement. Catastrophic failure is likely, and could result in large volumes of sediment entering the stream system and result in effects to natural resources. At Muddy Hollow Pond, more than 30 acre-feet of water are stored behind the dam facility. Catastrophic failure would result in loss of pond, estuarine, and upstream wetland habitat.
- The project is needed to increase sustainability, both operationally and ecologically within these small coastal watersheds. These facilities were constructed prior to park establishment and not sustainable, requiring maintenance actions in order that they remain a part of the environment. The project would remove these facilities in a controlled manner thereby improving natural process and sustainability of the park systems.

The current PRNS General Management Plan (NPS 1980) and Statement for Management (NPS 1990) identify objectives for the management of natural and cultural resources. The PRNS Statement for Management sets the primary resource management objectives for PRNS as the identification, protection, perpetuation, and restoration of significant cultural and historic resources and of the diversity of natural ecosystems representative of the California coast (NPS 1993).

The objectives of the Coastal Watershed Restoration - Geomorphic Restoration Project are:

- To reduce or remove the long term operations and maintenance requirements associated with each of these park facilities.
- To increase ecological sustainability through the removal of structures that impede or restrict natural hydrologic, estuarine, and shoreline process within the Drakes Estero/Estero de Limantour watershed.
- To address the non-conforming Glenbrook road crossing structure located within the Philip Burton Wilderness and create a sustainable wilderness trail to maintain visitor access through the site.
- To address deficiencies and impacts to natural hydrologic and estuarine process associated with the Muddy Hollow Dam within Estero de Limantour, and create a sustainable visitor access through the site.

- To replace the Limantour Beach Pond Dam and associated fill with a structure that remains a gateway to Limantour Beach, while allowing for the restoration of natural hydrologic and shoreline process within Estero de Limantour.

Environmental impacts of an additional six road crossing sites, also part of the Coastal Watershed Restoration, are evaluated in a separate compliance document titled the Coastal Watershed Restoration – Drakes Estero Road Crossings Improvement Project Environmental Assessment.

This EA evaluates the potential environmental consequences of 3 alternative strategies for implementing the Coastal Watershed Restoration – Geomorphic Restoration Project. Descriptions of the No Action and the 2 Action Alternatives are discussed in Chapter 2.

The proposed project alternatives include:

Alternative 1 – Full-Build Alternative,

Alternative 2 – Partial Build Alternative, and

Alternative 3 - No Action Alternative

This Environmental Assessment analyzes the potential for direct impact, cumulative impact, and impairment to Visual Resources, Wilderness, Air Quality, Geology, Geohazards, and Soils; Hydrology, Hydraulics, and Water Quality; Vegetation and Wildlife; Wetland Resources; Special Status Species, Critical Habitat, and Essential Fish Habitat; Cultural Resources; Public Health and Safety; Recreational Use, and Transportation and Traffic. Special status species, including California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*, *Federally Threatened*), steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*; *Federally Threatened*), Myrtle’s silverspot butterfly (*Speyeria zerene myrtleae*; *Federally Threatened*), California Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis californicus*; *Federally Endangered*), and Western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*; *Federally Threatened*). As well, impacts to a number of Federal Species of Concern are also evaluated as part of this document.

Table 2-7 summarizes the impacts associated with each of the proposed alternatives. It should be noted that in the impact topics discussion (Section 4), site specific impact descriptions, as well as tables summarizing impacts at each of the sites, under each of the alternatives are included. Cumulative impacts are analyzed in the same manner, by impact topic and Alternative, with a general summary included as part of Section 5.

The NPS has identified a preferred alternative that includes treatments for Muddy Hollow and Limantour Beach Pond described under Alternative 1, and treatment for Glenbrook Crossing described under Alternative 2. These treatments have been selected to best accomplish the objectives of the project. The preferred alternative meets all of the project criteria regarding restoration of natural hydrologic and estuarine process, reduces long-term operations and maintenance requirements, and to increase ecological and operational sustainability associated with these restoration sites.

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