



You Are Invited To Participate

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning the preparation of a Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment (Ranch CMP) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Public scoping is the first step to involve the public in the NEPA process. Scoping includes holding meetings, providing information, and asking the public for their comments so that their concerns are identified early and the analysis is focused on important issues. The NPS encourages comments on the draft purpose and need, and requests that the public identify topics and concerns that should be addressed in the Ranch CMP. Commenters are also encouraged to bring forward any new information the NPS may not be aware of that would be of use in preparing the Ranch CMP.

Background

In his November 29, 2012 memorandum, the Secretary of the Interior observed that ranching operations “have a long and important history on the Point Reyes peninsula” and directed the NPS director “to pursue extending permits for the ranchers within those pastoral lands to 20-year terms.”

- Broad planning with regard to management of lands under agricultural lease/permits has not been conducted since the 1980 General Management Plan. A comprehensive planning and compliance process is needed to evaluate reasonably foreseeable dairy and range management practices as well as park management actions on these lands over the next 20 years.
- The NEPA process will evaluate potential activities that may be authorized through the lease/permit program to ensure they are consistent with the protection of park resources. The plan will also consider park management actions that address wildlife, vegetation, and other resource issues specific to lands operated under agricultural leases/permits.
- Ranchers and the public have raised concerns related to tule elk and their impact on current ranch operations. Management strategies included in the Ranch CMP would augment tule elk management actions in other parts of the park not addressed in the 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan/EA.
- The planning process involves more than 28,000 acres of land and 24 ranching families. Each of these operations is unique and collectively represents a wide range of approaches, from traditional commodity production to organic and niche production.



Photo Credit: Bruce Farnsworth

Purpose and Need for Action

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

The purpose of this plan is to establish a comprehensive framework for the management of existing ranch lands administered by Point Reyes National Seashore under agricultural lease/special use permits (lease/permits), with terms up to 20 years.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Ranching has a long and important history on the Point Reyes peninsula and adjacent National Park Service lands. These working ranches are a vibrant part of Point Reyes National Seashore and represent an important contribution to the superlative natural and cultural resources of these NPS lands. Protection of these diverse and unique resources is an important responsibility shared by the NPS and park ranchers within the agricultural lease/permit areas. On November 29, 2012, the Secretary of the Interior issued a memorandum authorizing the NPS to pursue long-term lease/permits for dairy and beef ranching operations. The Secretary's memorandum demonstrates the support of the NPS and the Department of the Interior for the continued presence of dairy and beef ranching operations within these NPS lands.

A comprehensive management plan is needed:

- To articulate a clear vision for ranching on existing ranch lands administered by Point Reyes National Seashore.
- To implement the Secretary of the Interior's direction to pursue issuance of lease/permits with terms up to 20 years.
- To address concerns related to tule elk impacts to existing ranch operations.
- To provide clear guidance and streamline processes for park and regulatory review of proposed ranching activities, including best management practices that promote protection of park resources.



Plan Objectives

Objectives are what must be achieved to a large degree for the action to be considered a success. All of the alternatives selected for detailed analysis must meet the project objectives to a large degree and resolve the purpose of and need for action.

Consistent with NPS policies, the protection of park resources and the Secretary's Memorandum of November 29, 2012, the objectives of this planning process are to:

RANGE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

- Clarify NPS expectations and rancher commitments to ensure consistency of agricultural lease/permits;
- Identify and evaluate activities that provide operational flexibility to support long-term dairy and beef cattle operations in a manner consistent with the protection of park resources;
- Define best management practices to promote protection of park resources and streamline park and regulatory review and approvals of proposed ranching activities;
- Promote the health and safety of agricultural workers on ranch lands;
- Define a process for maintaining ranching if a ranch operator chooses not to continue operations;
- Support sustainable operational practices such as maintaining organic certification, promoting increased energy efficiency, and working towards carbon neutral operations; and
- Review and update permit structure to reflect decisions made through this plan.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- Coordinate and promote interpretation and education opportunities for visitors and the public to learn about historic and contemporary ranching operations; and
- Address visitor access and recreational opportunities on ranch lands to protect the interests of park and ranch facilities, while ensuring protection of ranch operations and their privacy.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Establish long-term management approach for tule elk affecting agricultural lease/permit areas;
- Evaluate management approaches that improve maintenance of ranch operations and protect native wildlife and vegetation populations; identify collaborative management opportunities that promote protection of sensitive and rare cultural and natural resources through adaptation of ranch management activities;
- Identify management and maintenance strategies for protecting historic ranch structures leased as part of park agricultural lease/permits and archeological sites; and
- Identify collaborative management opportunities that promote protection of Shafter era ranching Historic Districts including the Point Reyes Dairy District and the Olema Valley Historic District.



Are there other objectives the NPS should consider as part of this planning process?

Issues

An issue describes the relationship between actions and environmental (i.e., natural, cultural, and socioeconomic) resources. Issues are usually problems that either the “no action” alternative or current situation has caused or that any of the proposed alternatives might cause. They may be questions, concerns, problems, or other relationships, including beneficial ones.

Issues identified as a result of working and meeting with ranchers that the Ranch CMP would consider include:

RANCH OPERATIONS/ACTIVITIES

- Review of permit structure
- Operational flexibility
- Best management practices
- Grazing regime adaptation
- Manure management/compost opportunities
- Production of other domestic livestock
- Diversification (small scale row crop, value added operations within existing structures, etc.)
- Process for ranchers to request new activities

MANAGEMENT OF TULE ELK ON RANCHLANDS

- Long-term plan to manage tule elk impacting ranch operations within Seashore managed lands
- Impacts to high value pasture and damage to fences
- Evaluate potential actions within and adjacent to active ranch operations to manage tule elk

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, RIPARIAN AREAS

- Buffers for water quality protection
- Habitat enhancement

SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

- Management opportunities to promote protection of sensitive and rare plant and wildlife species

HEALTH and SAFETY

- Standards for operator and worker housing

VEGETATION

- Restoration of native prairie
- Dunes
- Non-native species management
- Brush management
- Pasture improvement/increased forage production/silage
- Fire regime

VISITOR USE/RECREATION

- Interpretive/education programs regarding historic and contemporary ranching operations
- Access
- Recreational opportunities
- Privacy protection for ranchers

PLANNING & PROTECTION OF RANCH COMPLEXES

- Define areas for ranch infrastructure improvements
- Define roles and responsibilities for maintenance of existing infrastructure

HISTORIC STRUCTURES

- Guidelines for standards for maintenance of existing historic structures
- Evaluate opportunities for development or placement of new structures in the context of cultural landscape

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

- Protection of Shafter era ranching Historic Districts

Are there other issues or concerns that should be considered as we develop the Ranch CMP?

Tule Elk

TULE ELK BACKGROUND

- Tule elk, the smallest subspecies of North American elk, only occurs in California. Tule elk were extirpated from Point Reyes by the 1860s. Consistent with Public Law 94-389, a total of 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 350 to 500 animals.
- The park's 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan/EA established the free-ranging herd with an interim management limit of 250-350 elk. The 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan/EA did not contemplate the expansion of tule elk into the pastoral lands.
- The free-ranging tule elk herd was established from 28 animals in 1999. There are two independent free-ranging herds.
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) manages most other tule elk herds in the state.

FREE RANGE HERD CURRENT STATUS

- D Ranch Herd – 76 total animals. The main herd is a generally cohesive group of approximately 60 elk consisting of females, juveniles, and a few males. The remaining males form one to two small bachelor groups that remain separate from the main herd except during the rut. The main herd and bachelor groups spend time on C Ranch, E Ranch, the former D Ranch, and in surrounding areas with no cattle grazing.
- Limantour Herd – 71 total animals. These elk are spread over a wide area from Coast Camp to as far north as the D. Rogers Ranch adjacent to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. The females, juveniles, and some males remain in the wilderness area. Approximately 25-30 males spend time on ranch lands along Estero Road through the Home Ranch area. Most activity is south of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard with only 6-8 tule elk to the north at any one time. The males return to the wilderness area during the rut.

RECENT TULE ELK MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Ongoing monitoring since fall 2010
- Ongoing elk crossing and cattle fence repairs since 2011
- D Ranch water project completed in 2013
- Hazing to push main herd off of active ranch lands since 2012

UPCOMING TULE ELK MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Johne's Disease Testing

- Johne's disease (paratuberculosis) is a widespread disease which can occur in most ruminants and is known to occur in the tule elk at Point Reyes. Due to concerns about disease transmission to uninfected elk herds, Johne's disease remains a concern for any alternatives considering relocation of tule elk.
- The NPS will implement a Johne's disease testing program with University of Wisconsin – Johne's Testing Center in spring/summer 2014.

Experimental Relocation within the Park

- The NPS intends to capture and relocate 3-4 younger elk from D Ranch back into the wilderness area to see what the response is by the elk. The response, such as integrate with Limantour herd or return to D Ranch, will help to inform the potential management solutions for this planning process.
- Potential relocation timeline could be after the rut in fall 2014.
- Johne's disease risk must be evaluated prior to any relocation.
- CDFW has observed that moving adults is not a viable approach because they will quickly return to their capture locations.

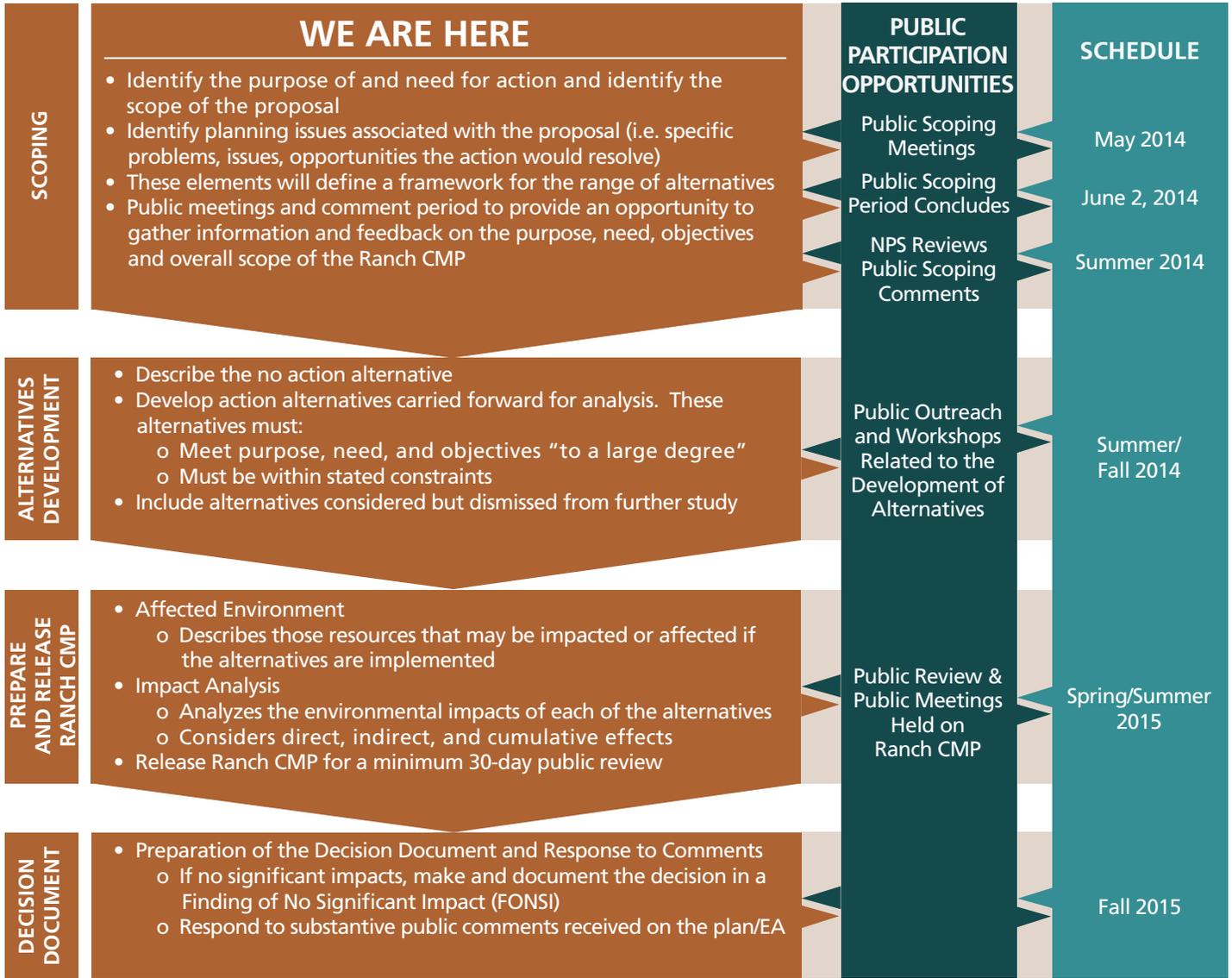
Tule Elk Impacts to Ranching Operations

Ranch operators have reported a number of impacts and concerns to their operations associated with tule elk including:

- Loss of forage due to direct consumption by elk
- Inability to rest pastures and allow forage to grow to maximum levels
- Damage to fences and other infrastructure
- Difficulty keeping cattle in desired pastures due to fence damage
- Concerns that organic standards may not be met due to loss of available forage to elk
- Consumption of water for livestock
- Concerns of disease transmission from elk to cattle, specifically Johne's disease

The NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a legal requirement for federal agencies, but is better described as an environmental planning process. The following describes the major steps in the process.



Best Management Practices

Proposed ranching activities identified as Best Management Practices that may be considered as part of this planning process include:

- Repair and Maintenance of Primary Access Roads
- Establishment of Livestock Walkways and Feed and Water Trough Locations
- Critical Area Planting
- Filter Strip
- Fish Passage
- Grade Stabilization/Headcut Repair Structure
- Grassed Waterway
- Lined Waterway
- Pipeline
- Sediment Basin
- Spring/Well Development
- Streambank Protection
- Stream Channel Stabilization
- Stream Habitat Improvement
- Structure for Water Control
- Underground Outlet
- Water and Sediment Control Basin
- Fencing
- Pond Maintenance (de-silting ponds, maintaining berms, etc.)



Cattle Crossing/Livestock Walkway



Fencing/Stream Habitat Improvement



Water Trough

Potential Impact Topics

Potential impact topics address those resources or values that are currently affected or could be affected by proposed actions. The NPS has identified the following list of impact topics for detailed analysis in the Ranch CMP:

- Geologic Resources
- Water Quality and Quantity
- Floodplains, Wetlands, and Riparian Areas
- Vegetation
- Fish and Wildlife and Associated Habitat
- Species of Special Concern
- Visitor Experience and Recreation
- Cultural Resources including Historic Ranching Districts; Cultural Landscapes; Prehistoric/Historic Structures
- Socioeconomics
- Health and Safety
- Park Operations

How to Comment

There are several ways to submit comments on this plan/EA:

1. Via the internet through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment site at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/pore> (preferred method)
2. In-person at the open house meetings, either recorded at the comment stations or submitted on comment sheets provided at the meeting
3. Mail or hand-deliver to park headquarters:
Point Reyes Ranch CMP/EA
Superintendent
Point Reyes National Seashore
1 Bear Valley Road
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

The public comment period will close on June 2, 2014.

Below are some scoping questions you may consider as you are reviewing the draft purpose, need and objectives of the proposed project:

- What do you think the NPS should be considering as it develops this Ranch CMP?
- What are the most important issues regarding the lands under agricultural lease/permits that you believe need to be addressed in this plan?
- What are reasonably foreseeable future ranching activities that should be considered and reviewed as part of this plan?
- What are reasonably foreseeable actions related to the management of tule elk affecting park ranch operations that should be considered as part of this plan?
- What are potential park actions related to the management of cultural and natural resources on ranch lands that should be considered as part of this plan?
- What do you, as a member of the public, need from NPS to be meaningfully engaged in the planning process?

Comments will not be accepted by FAX, e-mail, or in 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. You should be aware that your entire comment—including personal identifying information, such as your address, phone number, and e-mail address—may be made public at any time. While you can ask in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, the National Park Service cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so.