



# National Seashore News

## Historic Lifeboat Station Railway to be Rehabilitated this Summer

Point Reyes National Seashore has received \$1.885 million in federal funding this year to rehabilitate the historic Lifeboat Station railway system on Drakes Bay. The National Park Service proposes to begin rehabilitation in June of 2005 and complete the project in November of 2005. Superintendent Don Neubacher stated, "Since 1890 at Point Reyes, the Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard have conducted their critical mission of protecting lives and property at sea and onshore. This project helps to tell their story of public service, hard work, dedication, and heroism."

The Drakes Bay facility is the last remaining example of a lifeboat station with an intact marine railway for launching rescue boats directly into the Pacific Coast. The Lifeboat Station, attached railway system, captain's house and outbuildings were designated a National Historic Landmark in January 1990; one of only 2000 structures that have been nominated and approved for landmark status in the United States.

The Lifeboat Marine Railway was constructed in 1927 and was used by the U.S. Coast Guard for emergency sea rescues until 1968. The Boathouse and crew were involved in many dramatic shipwrecks at the Point Reyes Headlands including the Hartwood (1929), Richfield (1930), and Munleon (1931). Because the design of the Lifeboat Railway did not meet the launch needs for the new Coast Guard boat designs, the property was transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1969. The last time the steel railway was replaced was in 1946. The NPS completed temporary emergency repairs to the launch way in both 1975 and 1988. A condition assessment



Point Reyes Lifeboat Station and Railway in Drakes Bay. The Lifeboat Station is a National Historic Landmark.

was performed in February 2002 and concluded the Lifeboat railway system is no longer structurally sound and was in danger of collapse. Repairs will ensure the rail system would survive future severe wind and wave conditions, typical in this location. The NPS proposes to rehabilitate the Lifeboat Railway to the historical glory and configuration. The boat launching railway system and winch will be made operable by repairing structural members and installing a new track.

The Lifeboat Station Marine Railway is located on the Point Reyes Headlands and receives an annual visitation of approximately 300,000 visitors. The Lifeboat Station is used for interpretive programs and also provides overnight lodging for educational groups.

### Upcoming Park Events

**On Shaky Ground** – Saturdays at 2 pm  
Enjoy a walk along the San Andreas Fault. Meet at the Bear Valley Visitor Center. One hour.

**Kule Loklo Walk** – Sundays at 2 pm  
This leisurely walk is a wonderful introduction to the culture and history of the Coast Miwok People. Meet at the Bear Valley Visitor Center. One hour.

**Illuminating the Point Reyes Light** –  
First and Third Saturdays. Sunset.  
Experience the Lighthouse as keepers have over the years. Call (415) 669-1534 that day for exact times and reservations. One hour.

## Giacomini Wetland Restoration Planning Underway

Since holding a series of public workshops in 2004, the Seashore has been moving forward with refining alternatives for the Giacomini Wetland Restoration Project. The National Park Service purchased the Giacomini Ranch (in Point Reyes Station) in 2000 for the purpose of restoring wetlands and wetland functions to the 563-acre dairy operation, which was intertidal wetland and open water habitat prior to diking in the 1940s.

In 2004, the Park Service conducted a number of workshops with adjacent landowners, regulatory agencies, local and state agencies and organizations, the general public and wetland restoration experts. The objective of these workshops was to gather feedback from these various groups on the preliminary restoration and public access concepts and to use this feedback to refine alternatives prior to inclusion and analysis in the environmental document.

At this point, the Seashore has finalized the restoration components for the Giacomini Ranch, but is still collecting information regarding technical feasibility and land use/noise impacts that will better enable the Park Service to refine the public access component. In addition, we are hoping to refine the restoration design for the Olema Marsh component to maximize success of restoration systems in this system. Two of the alternatives include restoration of Olema Marsh, a 63-acre freshwater marsh that is jointly owned by the Park Service and the non-profit organization, Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR).

Once wetland restoration and public access components have been refined, the Seashore will move forward with preparation of the environmental document, scheduled to begin in spring 2005. A draft document is anticipated for release in 2005. After release, the Seashore will hold a public meeting at the time to gather additional input that will be used to further refine the alternatives and environmental analysis for inclusion in the final document. Due to construction timing constraints, restoration will probably be phased over a three-year period, with restoration on the 100 acres already managed by the Park Service planned for 2006.

## Elephant Seal Population Expanding

*The northern elephant seal colony at Point Reyes Headland is the northern most established breeding colony in the world for this species and continues to grow at an average annual rate of around 8% per year.*

The Drakes Beach sub-colony, which has ample beach space, grew from around 83 pups born last year to 110 this year (32% increase), whereas the main colony which has limited beach space, did not.

Because of the mild weather in January and February, the mortality of pups was low this year at all sites. Indeed, the weather was unseasonably warm resulting in some females retreating to the water with their pups for relief, a very unusual behavior for elephant seals. Nevertheless, there was some mortality at the main colony because of a landslide that buried

several seals, including three adult females. Three seals arrived with plastic strapping material wrapped around their necks and cutting into their skin. A veterinarian from the Marine Mammal Center successfully released two of the seals (one female with pup and an immature) from further injury or death.

This year, biologists identified 8 breeding age seals by their flipper tags that had been born at Point Reyes; four (50%) were born at Point Reyes in 2000 making them five-year olds in 2005. By analyzing age structure of a population we can determine if the population is growing or stable. This small group of five year-old breeding animals, suggest that the population is young and still growing. By mid-March most of the adult seals will have gone back to sea to feed but many weaned pups will remain on the beaches into mid-April as they learn to swim and feed.



**New elephant seal weaners at Point Reyes.**

# Tomales Bay Biodiversity Inventory Reaches 2000

Following the lead of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, The Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center (PCSLC) at Point Reyes National Seashore began an All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory of Tomales Bay in 2002. This collaborative (universities, museums, non-profits, stakeholders and agencies) project is cataloging all the forms of life in the bay to help guide conservation and management decisions initiated by NPS and other stakeholders.



Sampling on Tomales Bay by NPS staff and volunteers.

After two years of lab and fieldwork, scientists and data managers have incorporated 2015 confirmed species records into the database that can be accessed online at

[www.tomalesbaylife.org](http://www.tomalesbaylife.org). Of these records, 477 species had not been documented in the bay by previous studies, and one species is a crustacean completely new to science! The discovery of this new species underscores the importance of protecting native habitats such as eelgrass beds to support previously unknown species of life that exist there.

While Tomales Bay is still one of the most pristine, beautiful and biologically diverse

begins to dominate the ecosystem.

Unfortunately, at least 28 of the species recently documented in the database are non-natives, of which at least 5 are deemed to be a serious threat to ecosystem health and native species. The information on their occurrence and distribution provided by the inventory will enable much more effective management and mitigation plans.

estuaries on the California Coast (it has been designated a wetland of international importance under the RAMSAR convention), past and present human uses of the Bay and its watershed have had significant cumulative impacts on water quality, habitats, and species, resulting in a need for comprehensive watershed management. The biodiversity inventory work has already uncovered several new management concerns. Detection of the invasive tunicate *Didemnum lahillei* in the bay is leading to mapping and removal efforts before the species

*Tomales Bay has recently been designated a wetlands of international importance. One of only two in California.*



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Point Reyes National Seashore manages over 90,000 acres of coastal resources. Created in 1962, the park contains phenomenal natural and cultural resources and serves over 2.0 million visitors annually. The park's resources are part of the Central California Biosphere Reserve and one of the top 25 most biologically rich, but threatened areas of the world.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Major Study on Tule Elk Underway

Last January, in the Tomales Point Elk Reserve and Phillip Burton Wilderness area, 32 female tule elk were captured. The restrained elk were then handled by a team of volunteers, university scientists, and NPS biologists and veterinarians. Biological samples and measurements were taken, pregnancy was diagnosed by ultrasound and radio transmitter collars were applied.

Data collected during the capture and over the next 3 years will give biologists important information on this rare California subspecies of elk, which once numbered over 500,000 and are now limited to 3,700 animals in 22 populations. Important information on survival and reproduction of adult females will inform scientists and park managers about the factors that control the herd, such as copper deficiency and forage limitations.

## Park Site of National Climate Change Study

Between March and September 2005, marine stratus clouds and coastal drizzle are the subject of a national climate research project at Point Reyes. Researchers from the U.S. Department of Energy Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Program are conducting the research.

Marine stratus clouds exert a large-scale cooling effect on the ocean surface, representing an important component of the earth's total energy budget. However, these clouds are known to be susceptible to the aerosol byproducts of fossil fuel consumption, but a thorough understanding of the cloud processes leading to this susceptibility requires that they be observed in a range of aerosol conditions. Despite their known importance to the earth-ocean-atmosphere system, relatively few detailed and comprehensive data sets of marine stratus clouds are available. This work will help to understand impacts of fossil fuel consumption on cloud cover and climatic change.



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## Seashore Receives Electric Vehicles from Toyota



One of six new Toyota RAV4 Electric Vehicles in front of the Bear Valley Visitor Center.

The Seashore is striving to become more environmentally sustainable by using both hybrid and electric technologies for vehicles. Recently, the Seashore received a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to purchase a Toyota Prius. This hybrid vehicle uses both a gasoline and electric motor. Hybrid vehicles do not need to be plugged in and have nearly zero emissions.

Additionally, the park received six Toyota RAV4-EVs (Electric Vehicles) which produce no emissions but need electricity to charge the batteries. However, with 5 photovoltaic systems in place, the park is harnessing the energy from the sun to charge the electric vehicles, ensuring that the cycle is truly “zero emissions.”

All of the vehicles have been decorated with photographic wraps depicting different scenes around the Seashore. Be sure to watch for them as they go driving by.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

This newsletter is published several times each year to ensure the greater community has up-to-date information about park projects and events. Point Reyes National Seashore is one of 388 units of the National Park System.

**Point Reyes National Seashore**  
*A Natural Sanctuary,  
A Human Haven*

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## New Exhibits Installed at Earthquake Trail *100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Planned in 2006*

Point Reyes National Seashore staff installed new up-to-date wayside exhibits on the Earthquake Trail at Bear Valley. Eleven new educational panels provide insights about earthquakes, the San Andreas Fault Zone, and plate tectonics. Located near the park visitor center, the Earthquake Trail is a ½ mile walk that brings visitors to the site where the 1906 earthquake created a massive split in the earth’s crust.

The upgrade of the exhibits on the trail is a part of the National Seashore’s upcoming celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earthquake of 1906. In 2006, several events and other activities will be planned at the park to illustrate the power of earthquakes and their effects on our lives and the landscapes we live in.

## Quick Updates and Facts

- Through mid-May, gray whale mothers and calves can be seen heading north to Alaska off Limantour Beach and the Point Reyes Headlands.
- Chimney Rock wildflower blooms will continue until late May.
- Point Reyes is considered one of the top 100 birding areas in the world.
- Point Reyes has the largest mainland concentration of harbor seals anywhere in California.
- The Seashore contains 27 threatened and endangered species.
- With four hike-in campgrounds and several boat-in sites, reservations can be made up to 3 months in advance. Call (415) 663-8054.
- The marine waters adjacent to Point Reyes are some of the richest and most productive in the world.