

April 15th, 2021



Chair Steve Padilla
c/o Mr. John Weber
Federal Consistency Program
California Coastal Commission
45 Fremont Street, Suite 2000
San Francisco, CA 94105

Subject: Coastal Commission Staff Report recommending conditional concurrence for the Point Reyes National Seashore and North District Golden Gate National Recreation Area General Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Padilla:

This letter is a resubmission of our letter dated January 6th, 2021 submitted when this item was scheduled for review on January 14th, 2021. The Marin Conservation League appreciates the extended time provided for review and comment. We have continued to study the details and issues of this item, and find the staff recommendations reasonable and supportable, as detailed in our previous letter and communicated again in this letter.

The purpose of this submission is to urge the Commission to support the Staff Report's recommendation for conditional concurrence with the National Park Service's (NPS) request for a Coastal Consistency Determination (CCD) for the Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) and North District Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) General Management General Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement (GMPA/EIS). We previously provided our initial analysis of the proposed action and support for a CCD in our letter to staff dated December 14, 2020 (attached).

Marin Conservation League's 85-year history of conservation is synonymous with the preservation of coastal lands for the public in Marin County. The designations of both the Point Reyes Peninsula and Golden Gate National Recreation Area as national parks are landmark achievements in which MCL played key roles in collaboration with many others. MCL continues to steward the treasured natural and cultural resources as well as the scenic and recreational coastal values of these national parks that make up almost one-third of Marin's land area and attract millions of people from around the world every year.

In supporting the NPS 'Preferred Project' before you today, MCL has been guided by the lengthy legislative record and policy directives that, together, continue to affirm ranching as a distinctive historic cultural feature of PRNS. Of particular note is the Order of Ken Salazar, then-Secretary of the Interior (November 29, 2012), directing the NPS to offer 20-year leases to the multi-

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Marin Conservation League was founded in 1934 to preserve, protect and enhance the natural assets of Marin County.

generational ranches dating back more than 100 years. MCL is also guided by an Agriculture Policy (attached) whose goal is “to support the role Marin’s agricultural community plays in maintaining open space, protecting wildlife corridors, managing carbon, preserving a valuable local heritage, and contributing to food security and the local economy.”

In keeping with our long-standing conservation mission to preserve public lands, our understanding of the legislative and policy history, and our locally-focused agricultural policy, MCL has diligently tracked and participated in NPS planning processes to balance and integrate multiple resource values into the management of PRNS and GGNRA. The result of this research and deliberation is MCL’s support for ranching within PRNS and GGNRA because it is compatible with and does not compromise “the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and the scientific and historical merits” that prompted the parks’ original authorizations. Traditional family ranching can continue, but with the additional implementation of environmentally sound mitigation measures detailed in the GMPA/EIS. MCL also believes that, although not subject to the jurisdiction of the Coastal Act, healthy populations of tule elk can be managed with State Department of Fish and Wildlife approval as they are in every elk preserve in the state, where issuance of annual hunting tags is the primary tool for managing populations. And three quarters of the park will continue to be “natural” and “wilderness” in perpetuity. Fuller analysis and explanation of MCL’s support of the GMPA/EIS and Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) is available on our website¹.

Determination of Conditional Consistency with the California Coastal Act

MCL commends the California Coastal Commission staff for its careful and detailed review of the NPS request for consistency determination under the authority of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and for its disciplined application and adherence to the California Coastal Act, specifically Chapter 3. Staff analysis and recommendations demonstrate an accurate understanding of the advisory authority the CCC has over proposed actions on reserved federal lands and the potential for “spill-over effects” of such actions on State waters and lands and resources.

In their report to the Commission, your staff recommends finding that the majority of actions proposed by the NPS’ Preferred Alternative would be consistent with the policies in Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. The exception is a finding for *conditional* consistency with respect to the potential for adverse water quality in PRNS coastal drainages to impact downstream marine habitats: “. . . missing, however, from the NPS proposal is a comprehensive water quality monitoring component. . . to demonstrate whether implementation of those actions (would) result in compliance with water quality standards.” (Staff Report, pp. 58). Therefore, as a condition, staff requests that a water quality monitoring plan for PRNS coastal drainages be reviewed and “approved” by the CCC before new leases with ranchers are finalized.

¹ Marin Conservation League Newsletter: November December 2019 (http://www.conservationleague.org/images/stories/Newsletters/NL19D_NovDec_web.pdf); and September October 2020 (http://www.conservationleague.org/images/stories/Newsletters/NL20D_Sept-Oct_web.pdf).

In response to this condition, MCL asks you to note that the intent and analysis, and all plans, practices and other measures in the GMPA/EIS to manage water quality, are in alignment with and supportive of the regulatory authority of the State Water Resources Control Board and San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board. To avoid unnecessary duplication, it is essential that any final conditions requested by CCC staff and Commissioners be coordinated to ensure that NPS' proposed plans and SFRWQCB authority are consistently and fully carried out. This is consistent with element number 2 that your staff recommends for the Water Quality Assessment Plan. (Staff Report, p. 59)

By way of background, as early as 1995, NPS staff established water quality monitoring plans for both the Tomales Bay and Coastal drainage portions of PRNS and GGNRA². The results from this monitoring network have facilitated evaluation of ambient water quality conditions and effectiveness of conservation practices in an effort to improve those conditions. For example, the robust water quality sampling program carried out by the NPS between 2000 and 2013 in three coastal drainages documents a consistent decline in fecal indicator bacteria (FIB) and six-fold increases in samples meeting regulatory criteria, coincident with instituting a variety of best management practices on both cattle and dairy ranches. The program is documented in Appendix L of the GMPA/Final EIS³. The GMPA/EIS provides a plan to build on this progress. The plan also would strengthen partnerships with technical and financial assistance organizations, and secure much needed funding support for implementing both conservation measures and monitoring water quality.

In 2005, the California State Water Resources Control Board issued its Non-point Source (NPS) Pollution Monitoring and Enforcement Policy. This policy directed the respective nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCBs) to regulate water quality from multiple sources, including agriculture, through existing authority of the Federal Clean Water Act, California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act, and respective regional Basin Plans. The San Francisco Bay RWQCB has subsequently established regulations for grazing operations in the Tomales Bay watershed⁴ and confined animal facilities, including dairies, in both the Tomales Bay and coastal watershed areas⁵. In the case of confined animal facilities, the Regional Board order specifically requires annual monitoring and reporting of water quality results. Any monitoring protocol requested by the CCC would have to be consistent in both timing and content with these already-established state programs.

² National Park Service and Point Reyes National Seashore Water Resources Management Plan and San Francisco Bay Area Monitoring Network - <https://www.nps.gov/articles/water-quality-monitoring.htm>.

³ Point Reyes National Seashore Water Quality Monitoring Report 2001; National Park Service GMPA/EIS Appendix L 2020; and Lewis et al. 2019

⁴ SFRWQCB, 2018, Resolution No. R2-2018-0046 Renewal of Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Grazing Operations in the Tomales Bay Watershed

⁵ SFRWQCB, 2016, Order No. R2-2016-0031 General Waste Discharge Requirements for Confined Animal Facilities within the San Francisco Bay Region

In Conclusion

MCL is calling upon California Coastal Commissioners to follow staff lead in recommending a water quality strategy before new leases with ranchers are finalized. We also agree with the five elements to be included in the assessment plan: 1) provide short and long-term goals and timelines for Drakes Estero and other Pacific Ocean watersheds and the creeks that feed them; 2) collect data sufficient to determine water quality standards are met using protocols that are consistent with existing regulatory protocols for monitoring and reporting of a “sister” State agency with equivalent public trust responsibilities on the coast; and 3 and 4) provide annual reports that include water quality standards, data, priority areas for grazing-related best practices and indicate how these practices are incorporated into the individual Ranch Operating Agreements for implementation; and 5) inclusion in the annual report of water quality monitoring results and practice implementation from Tomales Bay including Lagunitas and Olema Creek watersheds.

Thank you and the other Commissioners for considering support of your staff’s recommendation for conditional consistency of the proposed action.

Sincerely,



Robert Miller
President



Nona Dennis
Chair
Parks and Open Space Committee

Attachments:

- Marin Conservation League letter to Consistency Review Program Coordinator dated 12/14/2020
- Marin Conservation League Agricultural Policy Statement 2015

December 14th, 2020



Mr. Larry Simon
Federal Consistency Program
California Coastal Commission
45 Fremont Street, Suite 2000
San Francisco, CA 94105

Subject: Coastal Consistency Determination for the Point Reyes National Seashore and North District Golden Gate National Recreation Area General Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Simon:

The purpose of this letter is to express Marin Conservation League's support of the National Park Service's (NPS) request for a Coastal Consistency Determination (CDC) for the subject action.¹

Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B in the General Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement [GMPA/EIS]), the NPS is offering up to 20-year leases to multi-generational dairy and cattle ranches that have occupied the land for more than 150 years. Granting 20-year leases will give ranch owners a certainty of tenure, enabling them to invest in ranch infrastructure to assure the future viability of their operations and make necessary improvements to better protect natural resource values, such as water quality and sensitive habitat areas. The GMPA/EIS, including Appendices (notably Appendix F) details the conditions under which ranching would continue.

In general terms, MCL supports the continuation of historic family ranching on Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS, Seashore, or Park) and the Northern District of Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) under the guidance of an environmentally-sound management approach spelled out in the GMPA/EIS. Anchored by Ranch Operating Agreements (ROAs) between NPS and ranch owners and a sub-zoning plan designed for each ranch to protect sensitive resources from ranch operations, the approach consists of a comprehensive suite of strategies (detailed in Appendix F) that would be incorporated into each ROA, thus ensuring that the desired conditions laid out

¹ To clarify the purpose of a Coastal Consistency Determination: Section 307 of the "[Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972](#)" (CZMA), requires that federal actions – including those on NPS parks not in the California Coastal Zone that might affect the state's interest in land, water or other natural resources within the coastal zone – be consistent with the enforceable policies of the state's federally approved coastal management program. A "consistency determination" is a brief statement describing how the proposed activity will be undertaken in a manner consistent to the maximum extent practicable with enforceable policies found in Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act. The Coastal Commission's goal is to provide open communication and coordination with federal agencies and provide the opportunity for the public to participate in the process.

in Chapter 1 (Page 2) of the GMPA/EIS would be met. These strategies include standardized management activities, employing “practice standards” based on federal and state agency regulations and guidance, and implementing required mitigation measures and other conditions outlined in the EIS and detailed in Appendices.

Continued ranching under these terms described in the Preferred Alternative would be consistent with “the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and the scientific and historical merits” that prompted the park’s original and later-amplified legislative authorizations.

With implementation of the conditions outlined above and discussed in greater detail below, MCL believes that the Preferred Alternative also is consistent with the policies in the California Coastal Act of 1976 as amended. Because the GMPA/EIS covers both detailed actions and programmatic elements, the NPS is requesting a Consistency Determination only for detailed actions. Projects under programmatic elements proposed during the 20-year GMPA plan period, such as diversification and some visitor amenities, would require subsequent environmental review, and possible CCC consultation.

MCL’s letter incorporates by reference the summary description of the GMPA/EIS Preferred Alternative contained in NPS’ letter to the CCC, dated October 16, 2020. To

PRNS connections and MCL assumptions

Four assumptions based on the factual record undergird MCL’s position:

1. First, it is necessary to view PRNS in its historic and local context as well as in terms of its national significance. Its history reveals that many parts had to come together to preserve this unique coastal site of natural beauty, scientific and historic/cultural interest, rare plants and wildlife, and public recreation as national park.

From inception in 1916 of the National Park System – regularly proclaimed “America’s greatest idea” but in reality an amalgam of ideas that have evolved over time – national parks have been interconnected with the surrounding world, with deep economic and cultural connections to adjacent communities and ecological linkages to surrounding landscapes. They have never served as isolated nature reserves.²

No national park demonstrates these connections as consistently as Point Reyes National Seashore. Set on the Pacific Coast within the West Marin context, with its millennia-old indigenous heritage, its historic, generations-old agricultural and rural village culture, as well as its location within an hour’s reach of a large metropolitan population, the Seashore is the product of the local, regional, and

² Keiter, R.B., *To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea*, Island Press, 2013

national interests that came together in an eons-old geologic and ecological coastal setting to create the priceless and multi-faceted park that millions enjoy today!

2. As a second assumption, MCL is highly qualified to comment on PRNS as a public park of national and local significance. Few organizations are as intimately connected with the early history of PRNS as MCL. MCL, founded in 1934 as the Golden Gate Bridge was under construction, was among the first to identify the need to protect Marin's scenic coastal lands for the public and to act on it. At that time these lands were completely open to private exploitation. From a planned list of priorities for acquisition, MCL's first documented success was acquisition of a 54-acre property including Drakes Beach, the first "piece" of the National-Seashore-to-come. In the two decades that followed, MCL founders facilitated acquisition of other coastal sites that eventually became state parks and initiated or participated in many other public land acquisitions, including the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). MCL's key motivation behind these actions was to save special lands for public enjoyment. Ecosystems and sensitive habitats were not yet in the conservation vernacular.

Throughout the 1950s, MCL worked closely with other conservationists to seek protection for Point Reyes Peninsula from the destructive consequences that commercial and residential development could have. With authorization of most of the peninsula as a national park in 1962, some expressed interest in preserving the human as well as the natural landscape under the aegis of the NPS. Caroline Livermore, then president of Marin Conservation League, wrote, ". . . as true conservationists we want to preserve dairying in this area and will do what we can to promote the health of this industry which is so valuable to the economic and material well-being of our people and which adds to the pastoral scene adjacent to proposed recreation areas."³

In the late 1960s, MCL devoted hundreds of hours and financial resources to the 1969 "Save Our Seashore" campaign to obtain Land and Water Conservation funds for acquiring the ranches. Ranchers played a key role in this campaign by supporting the new park and willingly selling their lands to fulfill the congressional intent. In the 1970s, MCL also advised protecting the park as a natural area in the preliminary master plan for the Seashore, and advocated for the maximum area to be designated as Philip Burton Wilderness.

3. MCL's third assumption concerns the role that cattle and dairy ranching continue to play as an important component of the Seashore's (and GGNRA's) cultural and natural resource values. This role has been acknowledged over the past fifty years in legislative authorizations, amendments and clarifications, and management policies. The NPS' working relationship with the ranches in the park was fostered

³ Livingston, D.S., *Ranching on the Point Reyes Peninsula – 1834-1992*, National Park Service, 1993, rev. 1994

by early park administration, which recognized that cows and cattle were “co-managers” of the scenic pastoral grassland landscape that would devolve into brush without a regular grazing regime. There were later indications that the working relationships between ranchers and park management were generally positive, and that the park was committed to keeping the ranches viable as an integral part of the national seashore as well as the GGNRA Northern District. Their historic significance was reinforced by their later designation as Historic Districts and their recognition as cultural resources to be protected in concert with protecting and preserving the well-documented natural and indigenous resources throughout the Park.

4. As a fourth assumption, the history of Marin County agriculture, including production records, has demonstrated for decades that the ranches on Point Reyes are an integral part of a single cultural heritage and agricultural economy. Roughly one third of Marin County’s land area is made up of rural rangeland and family farms. Together, ranches, both on and off the Seashore, constitute a critical mass that enables the whole to remain viable. MCL has long recognized the value of these agricultural lands and developed a supportive relationship with dairymen and ranchers in West Marin. As a previous Executive Director of MCL stated: “If you sold off the agricultural land and just let it go for open space, it would change the character dramatically . . . it would not be the pastoral scene we know today.”

Consistency with provisions of the California Coastal Act

The primary goal for amending the General Management Plan for this unique coastal resource over the next 20 years is to achieve the “Desired Conditions” articulated in the GMPA/EIS (Chapter 1). These conditions are organized around. . .

- preservation of ecological functions;
- preservation of native species, including threatened and endangered species;
- management of invasive/non-native species;
- preservation of cultural resources (including historic ranches); and
- public use and enjoyment/visitor experience.

In essence, these have been at the core of the Seashore’s management policies over the past fifty-years. Without exception, these “desired conditions” are consistent with key policies in Articles 2 through 6 of the Coastal Act that have protected California’s Coast for almost the same period of time, namely:

- provision of public access and recreational opportunities;
- protection of coastal waters and unique and sensitive marine and land resources;
- maintenance of prime agricultural land and the agricultural economy; and
- protection of scenic and visual qualities.

The actual achievement of these desired conditions in the Seashore, which are aspirational in nature, depends on successful implementation of a detailed and

comprehensive set of management actions that make up the Preferred Alternative, described in the GMPA/EIS, detailed in Appendices, and summarized in Table 2: Strategies for the Preservation of Area Resources, pages 29-32. Appendix F presents an inventory of management activities, practice standards, and required mitigations. Mitigation measures specific to avoiding impacts to threatened and endangered species are detailed in Biological Assessments (Appendices N and O). Implementing these conditions would accomplish the purposes of the Preferred Alternative. The discussion below offers selected examples of the many NPS management strategies that demonstrate consistency of the Preferred Alternative with Coastal Act policies.

Articles 2 and 3 – Public Access and Recreation

“ . . . maximum access. . . shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse.” (Section 30210)

“ . . . ocean front land suitable for recreational shall be protected for recreational use and development. (Section 30221) . . . upland areas necessary to support coastal recreational uses shall be reserved for such uses.” (Section 30223)

The Seashore welcomes more than 2.5 million visitors annually and provides wide ranging opportunities and facilities for educational and scientific activities, affordable day and overnight accommodations such as camping, volunteer programs, trails for hiking, equestrian, and cycling recreation, and wide-ranging opportunities for “sight-seeing.”

Public access currently is allowed in the existing Pastoral Zone (to be renamed as the Ranchland and Scenic Landscape Zones under the Preferred Alternative), consistent with the need to avoid disrupting ranch operations and infrastructure, protect ranchers’ privacy, and ensure safety. Many of these public amenities are made possible through partnership with the non-profit Point Reyes National Seashore Association’s robust program of educational and volunteer activities.

These would all remain under the Preferred Alternative. The Ranchland and Scenic Landscape zones would continue to maintain the current landscape and public access to coastal and upland sites for access and recreational and educational use. In addition, the GMPA/EIS describes numerous possible projects to enhance existing opportunities. Most are described and their impacts analyzed at a programmatic level. For example, proposals to enhance a network of connecting trails and old ranch roads, detailed in Appendix H, could be proposed over the 20-year plan horizon covered by the EIS, and would require site-specific environmental review. Similarly, proposed farm stays and farm tours to engage ranchers in the Seashore’s interpretive programs would require subsequent environmental review and possible coastal consistency. Appendix I discusses indicators and thresholds for visitor use and enjoyment, and considers visitor capacity and addresses issues such as traffic and parking and the need for shuttle systems. The

NPS does not anticipate expanding levels of visitor access under the Preferred Alternative. Even with some enhanced options, e.g., trail loops and connections, or new interpretive programs, visitor use would continue to be managed to avoid sensitive resources in the Park.

Article 4 – Marine Environment

“ . . .The biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes . . .shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored through . . .minimizing adverse effects of waste water discharges and entrainment, controlling runoff . . . encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining . . . riparian habitats . . .”
(Section 30231)

The planning area does not include marine waters. It does, however, include watersheds and streams that carry runoff from cattle and dairy operations and discharge into esteros and the ocean and Tomales Bay via Olema Creek, thus potentially impacting the quality of coastal waters and related biological productivity. Ranch activities that require water quality and erosion management include road and other infrastructure maintenance, stream stabilization and riparian protection, water supply for livestock, stream crossings, and, in the case of dairies, manure and nutrient management.

This complex issue is analyzed in depth in the GMPA/EIS and Appendix L. The NPS and ranchers over recent decades have already implemented many management activities to improve water resource conditions but acknowledge the need for improvements. The Preferred Alternative’s approach to protecting sensitive resources from water pollutants involves a comprehensive suite of actions, beginning with the zoning and ranch sub-zoning strategy outlined in Appendix J, in which ranch operational areas are separated by intensity of use and to avoid sensitive resources. The GMPA/EIS then describes the existing water control management actions and presents in Table 3, Page 40, an array of management actions to monitor and further improve water quality.

Actions to manage manure and nutrients and associated water quality apply only to the six dairy ranches. To avoid polluting nearby streams and wetlands, water and waste from confined animal facilities have been regulated for many years by the state’s San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. Under the Preferred Alternative, ranches would continue to operate under these regulations, with improvements outlined in Appendices F and L. With these actions, the desired conditions listed in Table 2 would be achieved.

Article 5 – Land Resources

“ . . .Environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values . . .and development in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat areas and parks and recreation areas shall be sited . . .to prevent impacts. . .and shall be compatible with the continuance of those habitat and recreation areas.” (Section 30240)

Many of the actions described above for protecting marine resources also apply to protecting environmentally sensitive habitat areas in the planning area against potential disruption from cattle and dairy operations: Zoning and sub-zoning of ranches to avoid impacting sensitive habitats; a comprehensive suite of management activities, practice standards, and mitigations identified in Appendix F; and mitigations defined in the Biological Assessments, Appendices N and O. As noted in the EIS, the grazing regimes associated with livestock vary in their impact on special status plant species. Grazing can be both beneficial for some species and damaging for others. To minimize these impacts, 1,200 acres are currently set aside as Resource Protection Buffers. The Preferred Alternative would add 800 acres to these protective buffers.

“ . . . the maximum amount of prime agricultural land shall be maintained in agricultural production to assure the protection of the areas’ agricultural economy.” (Section 30241)

The adoption of a Ranchland Zone under the Preferred Alternative would not expand or otherwise change the area of ranching on either PRNS or GGNRA Northern District. Nor would it expand the stocking capacity for livestock. It would, however, offer the opportunity for limited diversification of ranching activities. The addition of chickens, goats, or sheep, or dryland cropping, for example, would allow ranchers to react to poor forage production years and fluctuation in the economic market (e.g., the price of cattle, hay, and grain).

The prospect of diversification has been misunderstood in public comments as though it would open the door to unlimited options. In fact, any diversification would be limited in scope – chicken or goat “animal units” would replace not add to comparable cattle animal units. Activities would be restricted to the ranch core or, where warranted, the pasture zones. Further, as stated in the EIS (ES Page iv), proposals for diversification would only be considered if they incorporate the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Practice Standards and mitigation measures for a defined set of Management Activities identified in tables F-11 through F-13 of Appendix F of the EIS. NPS would continue to work closely with local agricultural organizations, state agencies, and natural resource conservation experts to share information and discuss issues related to ranching.

Article 6 Development

“ . . . the scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. . . to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas. . . ” (Section 30251)

The connection between national parks and cultural resources is well established in federal law. The act that created the NPS in 1916 mandated that “. . . natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein. . .” be protected for public enjoyment. Over the years the idea that cultural resources are a matter of national interest has been affirmed by

numerous congressional actions, including the National Historic Preservation Act and its amendments. Federal law and NPS policies now place equal weight on protecting natural, historic/cultural, and scenic values.

The historic/cultural and scenic resources that are being preserved on PRNS and GGNRA, along with their rich natural resources, are a combination of the historic pastoral landscape and the multi-generational farm families, who, four and five generations later, are the legacy of an historic period of dairies and farming that dates back to the mid-1800s.

Notable is the role played by the “historic pastoral landscape,” which includes not just historic farm structures, but also the dominant scenic rangeland vistas that meet the eye of the visitor. Without continuation of the grazing regimes managed by cattle, that grassland scene would change dramatically, as evidenced on former ranches that have been retired and cattle grazing has ceased. The Preferred Alternative is not the only alternative that would protect this scenic resource, but it presents the optimum combination of preserving the array of values that have been discussed above. It also would be maximally consistent with Coastal Act policy that calls for “minimizing the alteration of natural land forms.”

Drawing on these comments as examples, MCL believes that the Preferred Alternative examined in detail in the GMPA/EIS demonstrates not only a high affinity with the purposes of the California Coastal Act but also consistency with most of the specific policies set forth in Chapter 3.

In summary, Marin Conservation League believes that the NPS Preferred Alternative analyzed in the GMPA/EIS is consistent with the Coastal Act because . . .

- Both PRNS and GGNRA will continue to provide opportunities for visitors from around the world to enjoy the coastal resources that they encompass and at the same time preserve their richly diverse natural and cultural resources;
- Under the Preferred Alternative, both parks will continue to maintain, among their other purposes, productive ranching operations that are the legacy of a 150-year-old culture and occupy a significant role in the local agricultural economy. Offering up-to-20-year leases will ensure the ranches’ continued viability and enable investing in long-term environmental improvements;
- The GMPA/EIS and its Appendices present a comprehensive suite of practices, including zoning and sub-zoning, mitigation measures and other conditions applicable to each ranch. Under the regulatory and guidance oversight of NPS and multiple agencies, these conditions will assure that coastal marine and land resources continue to be protected from the potential impacts of ranching operations;
- The continuation of a grazing regime under the Preferred Alternative will assure that the pastoral landscape, dominated on PRNS by broad vistas of grassland, will not be irreversibly altered if the present grazing regime were to cease; and

- Agriculture in the two parks will not expand under the Preferred Alternative; closely delimited diversification will, however, offer ranchers a buffer against the economic vicissitudes of cattle and dairy-based agriculture.

In closing, public comments too often reveal a “black and white” view of the NPS options on Point Reyes and GGNRA – either ranches, *or* wild nature. Marin Conservation League believes that these can coexist under thoughtful and sensitive park management and continue to enrich the lives of millions of visitors. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Robert Miller
President



Nona Dennis
Chair, Parks and Open Space Committee

Cc: Jared Huffman, US Congressman, California 2nd District
Laura Joss, General Superintendent Golden Gate National Recreation Area,
National Park Service
Carey Feierabend, Deputy Superintendent, Point Reyes National Seashore

Marin Conservation League Agriculture Policy Statement

OVERVIEW

Two hundred and fifty-five families operate Marin County's farms and ranches. Most of these are multi-generational ranches with annual gross incomes of less than \$100,000.00 and an average size of 600 acres. These ranches are located on 167,000 acres of hilly grassland and mixed oak woodland in rural Marin County. Included in this number are at least 28,000 acres of ranchland in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore, which are subject to federal jurisdiction.

The most productive use of the great majority of Marin's agricultural land is livestock grazing. Relatively dry and cool marine climatic conditions along with steep rolling hills and relatively little water are defining factors. An exception is the less than 1% of prime land, which is suitable for row cropping.

Agriculture is one of the ten major business ventures in Marin, and therefore valued as a critical element in supporting Marin's economy. Flexibility and diversification over the last 30 years have enabled agriculture to remain economically viable. Where conventional milk and beef production were the foundation of the Marin agricultural economy for many decades, now value-added and specialty products and services augment the base. For example, grass-fed beef, pastured poultry and eggs, on-farm cheese-making and small-scale organic row and tree cropping, as well as bed and breakfast accommodations, are some of the newer agricultural ventures contributing to the agricultural economy. Organic milk production accounts for more than 40,000 acres being in organic certification, far above state and national rates. The purchase of conservation easements by the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) has helped about half of the ranch operations to stay in business.

On-going threats to Marin's agricultural community remain much as they have been in the past: skyrocketing property values, which encourages urbanization, family succession challenges, invasive plants, and, more recently, uncertain climate and rainfall conditions. Along with A-60 zoning, supportive Countywide Plan policies, and

strong Coastal Zone protections, the purchase of conservation easements by the Marin Agricultural Land Trust and enrollment in the Williamson and Super Williamson Acts has helped stay the hand of developers and estate ranchers. Ninety percent of Marin's ranches are protected in this way.

The vast majority of ranches and farms are generational family enterprises, which has effectively raised sustainable standards and made owners better guardians of the land. As stated in the Land Use Plan (p. 12, 3rd para.) of the Local Coastal Plan, and adopted by the Marin Board of Supervisors, "More than 85% of Marin farms had between one and four family members involved in their operation, and 71% had a family member interested in continuing ranching or farming."

Marin's ranchers have demonstrated a high level of voluntary participation in beneficial conservation practices over the past 30 years. Implementation of conservation practices has improved water quality, created wildlife habitat, prevented soil loss and sequestered carbon. More than 25 miles of creeks have been restored and more than 650,000 cubic yards of sediment have been kept out of creeks and the bay. Marin's ranches, with their extensive grasslands and forests, are expected to help Marin County reach its Climate Action Plan goals. Ranchers are supported in their conservation practices by a suite of strong federal and state laws, standards, and regulations and effective county policies and code, all designed to protect environmental resources on agricultural lands.

STATED GOAL

To continue to support the role Marin's agricultural community plays in maintaining open space, protecting wildlife corridors, managing carbon, preserving a valuable local heritage, and contributing to food security and the local economy. This statement is consistent with MCL's previous positions and actions regarding agriculture.

POLICY

As approved by the Board of Directors on November 17, 2015

Following are policy statements that specify and clarify Marin Conservation League's goals and concerns.

Natural Resources Management:

1. Support sustainable management of grassland and rangeland, which provides critical forage for livestock, while fostering wildlife habitat and preserving native plants.
2. Support soil management practices that lead to increased water-holding capacity and an increase in organic matter in the soil.
3. Support soil management practices such as the use of the "no-till drill", which minimize soil disturbance, prevent soil loss and reduce the flow of sediment into streams, bays and the ocean.
4. Encourage the alignment of local conservation programs and practices with the goals of the Healthy Soils Initiative as described on the California Department of Food and Agriculture website.
5. Support development restrictions within 100 feet or more of wetlands and stream conservation areas, as defined in the Countywide Plan (BIO-3.1 and 4.1) to protect wetland and stream habitats.
6. Support the management of invasive plants through Integrated Pest Management, including chemical measures, where other control measures are infeasible or ineffective.
7. Support the federal Clean Water Act 1974 and Endangered Species Act 1973, and California's Porter-Cologne Act of 1969 because of their broad powers in protecting natural resources.
8. Encourage those conservation practices that reduce the delivery of pathogens, sediment, mercury and nutrients to our waterways and all bodies of water.
9. Promote the efficient use and reuse of water on farms and ranches to meet their

agricultural needs. Maintain water infrastructure, and if old sources become insufficient, consider developing new sources of water only if adverse environmental impacts can be avoided.

10. Support carbon farm planning and implementation of the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service's carbon-beneficial practices.

11. Support assisted ranch management planning and cost-share implementation of best management practices, rather than depend principally on enforcement to attain compliance with environmental regulations.

12. Encourage efficient energy management and the production of renewable energy resources on and for individual ranches, such as wind, solar and methane digestion, where adverse environmental impacts can be avoided.

13. Discourage the development of large wind and solar "farms" on agricultural lands for commercial purposes, due to energy production inefficiencies, installation and transmission impacts, visual impacts such as disharmony of scale and inconsistency with rural character, and environmental impacts such as wildlife and habitat degradation.

14. Encourage greenhouse gas reduction and climate adaptation practices, as described in the U. S. Department of Agriculture's "GHG and Carbon Sequestration Ranking Tool."

Partnering Agencies:

15. Support the Grazing and Dairy Permit Waiver Programs of the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

16. Support funding and technical support to farmers and ranchers seeking to improve water quality and fisheries habitat.

17. Support national, state, local, and private funding for conservation implementation programs through Marin Resource Conservation District, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

18. Support landowner education and permitting facilitation through county-

funded positions, such as the Marin Resource Conservation District's Stream Coordinator position and the University of California Cooperative Extension's Agricultural Ombudsman position.

19. Encourage the County to control invasive plants on County rights of way and on open space preserves, to prevent invasives from spreading onto ranchland.
20. Support coordination programs between permitting agencies, such as the Marin Resource Conservation District's Coastal Permit Coordination Program, which bundles permit requirements over several agencies to promote efficiencies and to reduce the financial burden on agencies and landowners.
21. Support the inclusion of the Local Coastal Program permitting requirements in the recertification of the Marin Resource Conservation District's Coastal Permit Coordination Program.
22. Endorse the role of Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Marin Resource Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Ag Institute of Marin, the Marin Dept. of Agriculture, the Marin Community Development Agency and the University of California Cooperative Extension Service, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in preserving and protecting Marin County's agricultural heritage and natural resources, and supporting the best management practices which foster long range productivity and environmental protection.

Zoning and Land use:

23. Support a "critical mass" of agricultural production (e.g., sufficient number of dairies, acres of beef production, small-scale crops, etc.) needed to maintain the demand for goods and services that are necessary to support a viable agricultural economy in Marin County.
24. Balance ranchers' desire for flexibility in cropping decisions with the need to not exceed impact thresholds or standards for grading quantities (e.g., terracing), irrigation, and setbacks from streams, wetlands, and other sensitive resources.
25. Support Marin Countywide Plan and Coastal Zone policies that limit residential

development on agriculturally zoned land, and limit the size of farm residences.

26. Limit development of farm dwellings and ancillary structures to clusters within 5% or less of total ranch acreage. (See Marin Countywide Plan AG-1.6).
27. To facilitate intergenerational succession on family farms in the Coastal Zone, support up to two dwellings in addition to the farmhouse per “farm tract” (defined as all contiguous lots under common ownership), as conditioned in the Land Use Plan of the Local Coastal Program, adopted August 25, 2015 by the Board of Supervisors.[\[i\]](#)
28. Support affordable, safe and healthy housing for Marin’s largely permanent farm workforce both on-farm and in nearby villages.
29. Support policies, programs and zoning that restrict subdivision of agricultural lands by requiring demonstration that longterm productivity of agricultural on each parcel created would be enhanced. (See Marin Countywide Plan AG-1.5).
30. Maintain a minimum A-60 zoning, as it has been instrumental in protecting agriculture, maintaining open space values, and preserving the rural character of West Marin.
31. Support the County of Marin’s Affirmative Agricultural Easement Program and MALT’s Mandatory Agricultural Easement Program, which are listed in the LUP of the LCP as a program to evaluate: Program C-AG-2b Option to Secure Affirmative Agricultural Easements Through Restricted Residences...etc.
32. Support small-scale diversification and value-added production (such as cheese production), and services (such as bed-and-breakfast or non-profit farm tours) consistent with County policy and code, where adverse environmental impacts can be avoided.
33. Balance development of new retail farmstands with the need to protect viewsheds and safety on Highway One.
34. Encourage internet capacity expansion in the rural areas of Marin, avoiding negative visual impacts to ridgelines and viewsheds.
35. Discourage expansion of vineyards due to their negative impacts on soils, water quantity and quality, and wildlife habitat.

36. Support prohibition of incompatible and environmentally damaging recreational uses, such as motorcycle riding and off-road biking, on agriculturally zoned land.

37. Encourage the restoration of traditional and iconic ranch structures, such as wooden barns and outbuildings, to maintain the cultural landscape of agriculture in West Marin.

Footnote to Item #27 _____

[1] Excerpted from Land Use Plan policies C-AG-5 A. and AG-7, agricultural dwelling units, including intergenerational housing, may be permitted in C-APZ zoning districts, subject to the following conditions: dwelling units must be owned by a farmer or operator actively engaged in agricultural use of the property; no more than a combined total of 7,000 square feet (plus 540 square feet of garage space and 500 square feet of agricultural-related office space) may be permitted per farm tract; intergenerational farm homes may only be occupied by persons authorized by the farm owner or operator; a density of at least 60 acres per unit shall be required for each farmhouse and intergenerational house (i.e., at least 180 acres required for a farmhouse and two intergenerational homes); no more than 27 intergenerational homes may be allowed in the County's coastal zone; permitted development shall have no significant adverse impacts on environmental quality or natural habitats; all dwellings shall be placed within a clustered development area; and development shall be sited to minimize impacts on coastal resources and adjacent agricultural operations.

References:

Three Essential Documents:

1. 2007 Marin Countywide Plan

<http://www.marincounty.org/depts/cd/divisions/planning/2007-marin-countywide-plan>

2. Development Code (aka Zoning Ordinance)

https://www.municode.com/library/ca/marin_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodetid=TIT22DECO

3. Zoning Maps*

(<http://www.marinmap.org/Html5Viewer/Index.html?viewer=mmdataviewer>)

* MarinMap serves up County geographic data including Zoning. There doesn't seem to be a free-standing Zoning Map accessible on the web. The *MarinMap* screen shot *County Zoning* document provides a generalized picture of the Zoning, and a *MarinMap Viewer* set to Zoning can be used on the above website with the "Layers" toggled on or off as shown to get more refined information.

Hart, J. 1991. *Farming on the Edge: Saving Family Farms in Marin County, California*. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA. 174 pgs.

ICF International. 2015. *Marin County Climate Action Plan (2015 Update)*. July. (ICF 00464.13.) San Francisco. Prepared For Marin County, California.

Marin County Department of Agriculture. 2015. *2014 Marin County Livestock & Crop Report*. Marin County Department of Agriculture. Novato, California. 8 pgs.

Marin Economic Forum. 2004. *Marin County Targeted Industries Study*. Prepared for the Marin Economic Forum and The Community Development Agency by Economic Competiveness Group, Inc. San Rafael, CA. 22 pgs.

NRCS. 2015a. *Comet-Planner: Carbon and Greenhouse Gas Evaluation for NRCS Conservation Practice Planning*. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Colorado State University. <http://www.comet-planner.com/>.

NRCS. 2015b. *Practice Standards for Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction and Carbon Sequestration*. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/air/?cid=stelprdb1044982>.

SFRWQCB. 2013. *Renewal of Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Grazing Operations in the Tomales Bay Watershed*. Resolution Order No. R2-2013-0039. Oakland, CA. 20 pgs.

SFRWQCB. 2015. *Renewal of Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Existing Dairies within the San Francisco Bay Region*. Resolution Order No. R2-2015-0031. Oakland, CA. 19 pgs.