

Point Reyes Ranching, Elk Culling Proposals To Be Heard At Public Hearings

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POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE (CBS SF) — The National Park Service is holding two hearings this month on six proposals regarding cattle and dairy ranching and tule elk management on 28,000 acres in the Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Marin County.

The six alternatives include issuing 20-year agricultural lease permits to two-dozen beef and dairy ranches, reduced ranching and prohibiting dairy ranching.

The National Park Service's preferred alternative would allow existing ranch families to continue beef and dairy operations with 20-year permits.

The tule elk management alternatives include removing the Drakes Beach tule elk herd, setting a threshold of 120 adult elk and taking no action to reduce the population growth of free-range elk that compete with cattle for forage in Point Reyes. The National Park Service's preferred alternative is setting a limit of 120 elk and using lethal removal efforts to maintain it.

The herd has grown to hundreds of animals and is moving into ranch lands, disrupting cattle operations.

The Center for Biological Diversity opposes the National Park Service's preferred alternative. Spokesman Jeff Miller said the park service's preferred plan would "enshrine cattle grazing as the primary use of a huge swath of the National Seashore at the expense of native wildlife and natural habitats."

"The plan would destroy wildlife habitat, harm endangered species, degrade water quality and lead to killing of some of the park's most iconic wildlife, including tule elk," Miller said in a written statement.

Bob McClure's family has ranched here for a long time. "This year is the 130th year that my family has been in business on the Point Reyes Peninsula," said McClure.

He says the elk issue is not new but is always a sensitive topic, and that ranches only use 30 percent of the park. "What we would like to see is, put the elk, keep them separate from the working farms and ranches, keep them separate in the 70 percent of the wilderness area," said McClure. "They're fine there! We do not dislike elk."

The offer of 20-year leases to the historic ranches would fulfill a promise by former Obama administration Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. "The 20-year lease part, we really appreciate," said Rancher Tim Kehoe. "We feel very fortunate to have that available to us."

A public review and comment on the alternatives is open until Sept. 23. The public hearings on the draft environmental impact statement for the General Management Plan Amendment are 5-7 p.m. Aug. 27 at the West Marin School gym in Point Reyes Station and Aug. 28 at the Bay Model Visitor Center in Sausalito.

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