



Resource Renewal Institute

INNOVATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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Legal Filing Seeks to Halt Ranching Expansion, Elk Eviction at Point Reyes National Seashore

OAKLAND, *Calif.*— The Resource Renewal Institute, Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project filed for a preliminary injunction in federal court Friday to block the National Park Service from pursuing a ranching expansion and elk-removal plan until the agency updates the park's "general management plan" and assesses the environmental impacts of commercial dairy and cattle grazing at Point Reyes National Seashore.

"Our national park deserves better than a special-interest ranching expansion plan that short-circuits our conservation laws, and the public deserves the long-overdue park planning and environmental review of activities that could harm the park's wildlife and natural areas and infringe on the recreational experience," said Chance Cutrano with the Marin-based Resource Renewal Institute. "The Park Service should be accountable to the American people who own the national parks rather than prioritize commercial interests."

In February 2016 the conservation groups filed a lawsuit seeking federal court review of the Park Service's decades-long violation of its duty to manage Point Reyes National Seashore under a valid general management plan, and challenging the continued approvals of dairy and cattle-grazing leases without conducting a full environmental review of their impacts. The lawsuit does not ask the court to stop ranching at the seashore, nor will the court decide the future of ranching at Point Reyes. By law that must be decided through a general management plan and an environmental impact statement that gives opportunities for public input.

"The Park Service cannot simply predetermine that ranching should continue long-term at the national seashore without any public input or environmental study," said Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity. "The public should be asking why the Park Service is wasting scarce taxpayer dollars on a ranching expansion plan while refusing to conduct an open evaluation of future management directions for the seashore and the role, if any, that commercial ranching should play."

A general management plan guides park management and covers all activities and their impacts, not just ranching. The process requires public comment on the proposed policies and priorities of the park. The antiquated plan for the seashore was prepared 36 years ago in 1980, with no environmental impact statement. It was declared "no longer adequate" and "completely out of date" by the seashore's superintendent nearly two decades ago. The plan hasn't been updated despite many changed conditions, including increased public visitation, climate change, the successful reintroduction of tule elk, and the listing of many endangered species that inhabit the seashore.

Starting in 1998 the Park Service spent 10 years preparing a new draft general management plan and environmental impact statement for Point Reyes, a plan that considered eliminating or reducing commercial ranching in the park to meet the Park Service's management goals of protection and preservation of park resources. Recently obtained documents indicate that although the draft general management plan was ready to print by 2008, it was shelved due to what appears to be undue political influence.

“It is clear that delaying a general management plan and pushing the ranching expansion plan would harm the plaintiffs and the general public, as well as tule elk and other wildlife and natural resources,” said Michael Connor of Western Watersheds Project. “There would be no harm or inconvenience to ranchers from completing the required general management plan, as they would have full opportunity to participate and express their needs during the process.”

The conservation groups are represented by San Francisco attorneys Jeffrey Chanin and David Rizk of Kecker & Van Nest, and lawyers with Advocates for the West, a public-interest environmental law firm.

Read a copy of the February lawsuit here: <http://www.rri.org/Complaint.pdf>

Read the preliminary injunction that’s being sought in Friday’s filing here: <http://bit.ly/2bkYxmU>



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