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Contact:

Chance Cutrano, Resource Renewal Institute, (415) 928-3774, ccutrano@rri.org

Jeff Miller, Center for Biological Diversity, (510) 499-9185,

jmiller@biologicaldiversity.org

Michael Connor, Western Watersheds Project, (818) 345-0425,

mjconnor@westernwatersheds.org

Jeffrey Chanin, Kecker & Van Nest, (415) 391-5400, JChanin@KVN.com

Court Rules Lawsuit Over Point Reyes Management Plan Can Move Forward

OAKLAND, *Calif.*— A federal court has rejected a legal motion by the National Park Service and refused to dismiss a lawsuit brought by conservation groups seeking an updated “general management plan” and assessment of the environmental impacts of commercial dairy and cattle grazing at Point Reyes National Seashore, before long-term cattle-grazing leases are pushed through. The court earlier rejected a motion by ranchers to intervene in the lawsuit.

“Unsurprisingly, the court agreed that the Park Service must manage our public lands at Point Reyes National Seashore under a current general management plan,” said Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity. “We’ll proceed with litigation to require an update to the park’s badly outdated 1980 plan, and an environmental impact statement, which with public input will determine how the Seashore should be managed.”

In February 2016 the Resource Renewal Institute, Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project filed a federal lawsuit seeking court review of the Park Service’s decades-long violation of its duty to manage the Point Reyes National Seashore under a valid general management plan, and continuing to approve dairy and cattle-grazing leases on publicly owned parklands 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.

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 of the park. The Park Service requires its parks to operate under a “timely” plan, yet the current one for Point Reyes National Seashore (which was established in 1964) is badly outdated. The last 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 such as increased public visitation, climate change, the successful reintroduction of tule elk, and the listing of many endangered species that inhabit the Seashore. For eight years, starting in 2000,

the Park Service readied a new draft general management plan and environmental impact statement, slated for public release in 2008, but it was then shelved with no explanation.

“The park’s guiding management plan and environmental review are not only legally required, but they are critical for the public to determine what activities are appropriate at Point Reyes National Seashore,” said Chance Cutrano with the Marin-based Resource Renewal Institute. “Our lawsuit aims to keep the Park Service focused on its legal mandate to ensure maximum protection for native wildlife and the natural environment. That goal should be supported by anyone concerned with proper stewardship of a national treasure like Point Reyes.”

“We appreciate the court allowing this important case to proceed,” said Michael Connor of Western Watersheds Project. “The lands and habitats of Point Reyes National Seashore are too special to be managed by decree. We’re eager for a full and fair scientific review of the impacts of ranching on the many protected species in the park, as compared to other, public uses of the Seashore.”

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

| Read a copy of the [February 2016 lawsuit](#) and the [court’s order](#) denying the motion to dismiss.