

Environmental Assessment

Point Reyes Youth Hostel
POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE
Marin County, California

Environmental Assessment
Point Reyes Youth Hostel
Proposed Staff & Hostel Housing Unit
Rehabilitation of Septic System

Point Reyes National Seashore
National Park Service
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Purpose and Need

This *Environmental Assessment (EA)* has been prepared to assist National Park Service (NPS) planning and decision making, and to determine whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required for the proposed new facilities at the Point Reyes Hostel (Hostel) at Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS). The Hostel is proposing the construction of a staff housing and additional lodging facility and rehabilitation of the septic treatment system. The current 44 bed Hostel operations are under a concessions contract with the American Youth Hostel program. The facilities are located at the former Laguna Ranch off Limantour Road near the Point Reyes Clem Miller Environmental Center (See Appendix A for Location Map).

As a federal facility, the PRNS is subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the basic national charter for environmental protection. NEPA requires an interdisciplinary study of the impacts associated with federal actions. For the PRNS, these requirements were initially met with the preparation of the *PRNS/Golden Gate National Recreation Area General Management Plan and Environmental Analysis* (NPS 1980). Because the proposed rehabilitation of the Hostel involves new construction, an EA was prepared to address site-specific impacts to determine whether further environmental review is necessary.

The purpose and need for this federal action is to construct additional family (four bedrooms) and staff accommodations (three bedrooms) and bring the Hostel into compliance with state, federal, and Marin County regulations. This project will add 8 beds to the current 44 bed capacity for a total capacity of 52 beds. In addition, staff housing capacity will be increased from the current two rooms for staff to three rooms. Current staff housing and sewage treatment facilities do not meet federal, state, and county health and safety codes.

The need for a Hostel as a visitor service at PRNS is based on park objectives provided in park planning documents and current visitor use patterns. The concept of hostels, as opposed to full-scale lodging facilities, is particularly appropriate to Point Reyes National Seashore because of the large number of cyclists and hikers that frequent the park. In addition to providing minimal accommodations for visitors using non-motorized transportation, the Hostel furnishes emergency accommodations to hikers and campers stranded in foul weather, and provides overnight accommodations not otherwise available, which assists in the control of illegal and indiscriminate camping.

The Point Reyes Hostel operation dates back to 1972. This is the first major capital investment by the Hostel since the concession operation was initiated. The park has no plans for further expansion of guest accommodations beyond the level set forth in this plan.

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act directs federal agencies to further the purposes of the Act. Federal agencies are required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to ensure that any action authorized, funded or carried out by the agency does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or

critical habitat. Informal consultation under Section 7 is underway on this project. Based on informal consultation, the NPS has concluded that the proposed action would not adversely affect any federally listed species or critical habitat.

Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their actions on properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Because two of the buildings--the former garage and main house-- are on the List of Classified Structures, and determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the proposed action could adversely affect a historic property.

Other Environmental Compliance Provisions

Other environmental provisions which may affect this project are the following:

Americans with Disabilities Act 1990
California Coastal Act
Archeological Resources Protection Act
Clean Water Act
Regional Water Quality Control Board

Relationship to Other Plans and Projects

General Management Plan (GMP), Point Reyes National Seashore (NPS 1980) designates the Laguna Ranch facilities as a hostel for park visitors. The GMP places the Laguna Ranch complex in a development zone surrounded by natural environmental zoning.

The Statement for Management for Point Reyes National Seashore (NPS 1993) discusses the Point Reyes Hostel and encourages its continuation but does not discuss the need for new facilities.

Marin County Local Coastal Program, Unit 2 supports and encourages the enhancement of public recreational opportunities and the development of visitor-serving facilities. Such development must, however, be undertaken in a manner that preserves the unique qualities of Marin's coast and which is consistent with the protection of natural resources and agriculture. According to the program, recreational uses shall be low-intensity, such as hiking, camping, fishing, in keeping with the character with that of the community in which it is located and shall be sited, and designed to minimize impacts on the environment.

Issues and Impact Topics

This document, prepared by the NPS, in cooperation with staff of the Point Reyes Hostel, evaluates two alternatives and the impacts associated with these actions. Evaluation of the project site has identified the following issues of potential concern and provides the basis for the analysis of alternatives: impacts on natural resources, including soils, endangered and threatened species, water resources and wildlife; impacts on visual quality; impacts on

noise; impacts on public health and safety; impacts to public services and utilities; and impacts on cultural resources. These issues were developed from review and public discussion of the project. Those issues that were identified as potential concerns are evaluated in the Environmental Consequences section of the document.

Alternatives, including the Proposed Action

Alternative A: No Action

This alternative will leave the project site in its present condition; no demolition or construction of buildings at the Hostel would occur. The new septic system would not be constructed. No site improvements would be constructed for parking or public interpretation.

The staff would continue to live in the former garage building and the Hostel would continue to provide approximately 8,000 visitor stays per year.

Under this alternative, the Hostel would fail to comply with county, state, and federal regulations related to health, safety, and building codes.

Alternative B: Construct New Guest/Staff Housing Unit and Upgrade Sewage Disposal System. (Proposed Action)

Under this alternative the American Youth Hostel would construct one 2800 square foot (sf), single story staff and guest housing unit, extend and upgrade the existing septic system, install new water storage tank, stabilize a historic shed, and construct a parking area for nine cars.

Guest accommodations in the new housing unit will consist of four guest bedrooms, one guest common area, a storage room, two half baths and two full baths. New family style accommodations would add eight beds to current capacity; total capacity would increase from 44 beds to 52 beds. Staff accommodations will include three bedrooms, one full bath, one half bath and a staff common area that includes a kitchen area.

The housing unit will be of standard wood construction with metal roof and horizontal cement board siding with rough sawn cedar trim. The structure will be build on a concrete stem wall with footer.

The septic system currently serving the existing bunk house will be enlarged to include adequate septic tank capacity (4,500 gallons) and a 1,500 gallon grease interceptor and gravity flow to two 1,500 gallon sumps, providing at least 1,500 gallons of emergency storage and pumping into a 1,500 sf sand filter. From the sand filter, effluent will then be pumped into shallow trenches within the area of the existing leach field.

The existing septic tank and unknown leach field serving the main house and existing leach trenches serving the bunk house will be abandoned.

A 5,000 gallon water storage tank will be installed to enhance fire protection capabilities and provide for emergency water storage during electrical outages and loss of service from the National Park Service.

The historic structure now serving as staff housing and the storage shed will be stabilized. Final decision as to the nature of the stabilization and renovation will be made after a historic compliance review (Section 106 Compliance) and approval by the State Historic Preservation Office. Currently, this structure, built in about 1900, is in very poor condition.

All site and building improvements will be confined to those areas already assigned to the Youth Hostel.

Additional paved and gravel parking stalls to accommodate the additional guest space in the new housing unit are planned. The nine additional parking stalls will provide for 5' aisles alongside the two paved disabled accessible slots.

Alternatives Considered but Rejected

The removal of the entire complex was rejected as an alternative. The *General Management Plan* (NPS 1980) currently calls for the continuation of a hostel operation to provide low-cost accommodations.

A small new staff housing/lodging facility was considered. However, this alternative was rejected because the economic return of a small facility was deemed inadequate for the investment. A reduction in the staff housing portion of the project was rejected because the current size of the housing component is considered the minimum needed for the operation of the facility.

Renovation of the historic garage for staff housing was rejected because the square footage in the existing building was inadequate for the proposed improvements. In addition, the former garage is in extremely poor condition.

The Affected Environment

Project Site Description

The existing 44 bed Point Reyes Hostel currently operates out of three buildings that were once part of Laguna Ranch, and subsequently assigned to the concessionaire after acquisition by the NPS. The buildings include the main hostel building, employee dormitory, and a structure used for group functions. Access to the site is via Limantour Road from Bear Valley Road. The site is approximately eight miles from park headquarters (See appendix A for Location Map).

Current Facilities

The current facilities consist of the following:

Main Ranch House. Originally the main residence for a dairy ranch, this roughly 2000 square feet house has been modified to contain 24 beds divided between two sleeping rooms, along with a separate family guest room. The house also contains bathroom facilities, kitchen, living room, and an attached school room. The structure is in serviceable condition, but is about 120 years old (ca. 1870s) and shows expected signs of wear and tear.

Employee Housing. Formerly the garage for the dairy ranch, this structure is currently used for storage and a small employee residence. The building is 90 years old (ca. 1900) and in very poor condition.

Group Building. This frame structure was built around 1980 and is about 1,200 sf. It is still in serviceable condition and is currently used for group functions. The building contains approximately 20 beds divided between two sleeping rooms, bath facilities, and a common area with fireplace.

Utilities

Potable water is provided to the site by the NPS from the Limantour water system that also serves the Clem Miller Education Center. The electric service is provided by Pacific Gas and Electric and will be placed underground by the NPS in 1999. A phone system is in place and will not need to be expanded.

Sewage disposal is handled by two individual residential type septic systems. These include two 1,500 gallon standard septic tanks and drain fields. All are located within the existing footprint site except the drain field from the main house. No records exist as to the exact location of the main house drain field and it is assumed to be of minimal capacity and is likely located outside the existing footprint of the site, towards the adjacent creek.

History and Cultural Resources

Founded by Oscar and James Shafter, the dairy ranches of Point Reyes were once acknowledged as the most important in California and were famous for their quality product. As a historic dairy ranching district, certain structures therein have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places on a state-wide level of significance. Laguna Ranch is significant for the role the ranch played in the development and success of the Shafter dairy industry and the dairy industry in general in Marin County.

Three historic structures determined eligible remain at Laguna Ranch: the ranch house (originally two stories but remodeled to one story after a fire in the 1950s) with school room attached, approximately 100-130 years old but greatly altered; the garage, at least 90 years old, now used for storage and a small residence; and the "Davis House" near the Laguna Trailhead, built about 1935. The "Davis House" is not part of the project area and is currently occupied by a park employee.

The original Point Reyes Road passes through Laguna Ranch. It descends from the ridgetop at the top of Balboa Avenue down a gulch to the ranch, then follows the currently paved road to Muddy Hollow. Another pioneer road, now a part of the Coast Trail, leaves the Old Point Reyes road near the ranch house and heads west to the coast, passing the original site.

The project area does not contain any known archeological sites.

Geology, Topography, Soils

The project area is located in the Drakes Bay Formation which consists of marine sediments that filled the basin between Inverness Ridge and the Point Reyes Headlands toward the end of the Tertiary age in the early Pliocene epoch (about eight million years ago). The site is slightly sloped, with major portions of the site altered by past land use. These soils, derived from soft sandstone of the underlying Drakes Bay Formation, are deep (to about four feet) and moderately well drained.

Vegetation

The project area has vegetation typical of the northern coastal scrub plant community. It is characterized by densely packed shrubs less than 6 feet tall interspersed with grassy openings supporting primarily non-native species. This scrub community is found on windy, exposed sites with shallow soils. Typical species include California sagebrush, bush lupine, coyote brush, bush monkey flower, and poison oak. Weedy exotic species such as poison hemlock, gopher plant, and periwinkle are also present on the site. The project site was burned during the 1995 Vision Fire. Adjacent to the site are resprouting bishop pines. Directly west of the project area, approximately 300 feet, is Laguna Creek which is bordered by red alders and willows.

Wildlife

Coyotes, gray fox, mountain lions, raccoon, bobcat, black-tailed deer, mountain beaver, brush rabbit, striped skunk and other small mammals are known to occur in the area. Common bird species in the area include wrentit, scrub jay, turkey vulture, American robin, bushtit, white-crowned sparrow, and house sparrow. The exotic fallow deer also inhabit the vicinity. The park reintroduced tule elk back into the wilderness area adjacent to the hostel facility in 1998.

Threatened & Endangered/Special Status Species

No special status species including threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur or are residents in the specific project area. The Point Reyes mountain beaver, peregrine falcon, red-legged frog, steelhead trout, and northern spotted owl are known to occur in the direct vicinity of the project area.

Recreation and Visitor Use Analysis

Since the establishment of the park, visitation has increased dramatically and since 1984 visitation has surpassed two million visitors every year. However, primarily because of regional transportation constraints, visitation has stabilized at approximately 2.5 million visitors each year.

The existing concessionaire has operated the site since 1972. Based on statistics over the last four years, the hostel is currently handling approximately 8,000 overnight visitor stays per year.