The National Park Service (NPS) is continuing to plan for the Tomales Point area of Point Reyes National Seashore (Seashore). Development of the Tomales Point Area Plan (TPAP) will provide updated management for the preservation of park resources, indications of the type and intensity of allowed development, and guidance for visitor use and capacities at Tomales Point, in addition to the management of tule elk in this region of park. In furtherance of its government-to-government relationship with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (Tribe), the NPS will continue to collaborate with the Tribe to incorporate Tribal views and traditional ecological knowledge into the management of Tomales Point.

This planning process began in the spring of 2022 with a public comment period on the scope of the plan, issues to be addressed, and data or other information to be considered. The NPS reviewed all correspondence received during this civic engagement and those comments are informing the ongoing planning process. Once completed, the TPAP and associated environmental assessment will replace the park's 1980 General Management Plan and the 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan for the Tomales Point area of the Seashore. This planning is separate from the recent General Management Plan Amendment, which addressed leased lands for ranching in the Seashore and the management of elk on those lands.

You are invited to participate in this planning process by attending the virtual meeting and submitting electronic or written comments to inform the development of the TPAP. Please share your thoughts on the information presented in this newsletter including the proposed action and alternatives, potential issues with park resources, and any other ideas or concerns you feel are relevant and important to this process. Following this initial scoping, the NPS will continue to refine the alternatives and analyze the potential effects to the environment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable legal requirements. Details for providing comments are provided on the last page of this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Craig Kenkel
Superintendent, Point Reyes National Seashore

VIRTUAL MEETING

Join us for a virtual meeting to learn about the proposed Tomales Point Area Plan. Seashore staff will present information on the project and the preliminary alternatives, then hold a moderated question-and-answer session. Register for the virtual meeting through the link below.

Meeting Information:

Date: September 7, 2023
Time: 5:00 to 7:00 pm PDT
Link: https://bit.ly/3P5PtDl

Please log in several minutes in advance through the virtual meeting invitation you'll receive after registering to ensure you have a good connection and are ready to access the meeting when it begins.

PLANNING AREA

The plan will cover the 2,900-acre area of Tomales Point north of and including the elk fence. Approximately 85% of the planning area is within the Phillip Burton Wilderness. The remaining 15% includes Pierce Ranch, interpretive exhibits, and infrastructure such as parking lots and trailheads that support public access.

TOMALES POINT: HISTORY AND MANAGEMENT

Point Reyes National Seashore (Seashore) was established in 1962 (Public Law 87-657) and included the Tomales Point area. In 1976, an amendment to the Wilderness Act created the Point Reyes Wilderness within Point Reyes National Seashore (Public Law 94-544) designating most of the Tomales Point area as wilderness. In 1980, the NPS prepared a General Management Plan for Point Reyes National Seashore to provide guidance on the future management of the Seashore, including the Tomales Point area. The Point Reyes Wilderness name was changed to the Phillip Burton Wilderness in 1985 (Public Law 99-68).

The current planning effort will update the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) for the Tomales Point area as an amendment to the 1980 GMP. The new plan will address the statutory elements required for a GMP.

Pierce Ranch is within the planning area

HISTORY OF PIERCE RANCH

Located at the terminus of Pierce Point Road and adjacent to the Tomales Point trailhead, the Pierce Ranch is a historic-era dairy ranch consisting of a collection of domestic and agricultural buildings and landscape features that are maintained by the NPS. The Pierce Ranch serves as an interpretive site of ranch history and the region's historically significant dairy industry. This ranch was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 as a significant example of a mid-19th and early 20th century pacific coast dairy ranch with a high degree of integrity represented in its historic buildings. The site is open to the public for self-guided tours with interpretive signage, and the main ranch house is in use as a NPS residence.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT TOMALES POINT

The Tomales Point trail is one of the most popular and heavily used hiking trails within the Seashore. Visitors accessing the Tomales Point trail begin near Pierce Ranch. McClures Beach is also a popular destination for visitors. The McClures Beach parking area offers the only restroom facilities within the Tomales Point planning area.

pre 1800s
Tomales Point was home to Coast Miwok and actively managed through traditional use; Tule elk abundant within the Point Reyes area

early 1800s
Tule elk largely eliminated statewide due to hunting and habitat loss during European settlement; Pierce Ranch established

late 1800s
Pierce Ranch largest independent ranch on the Point Reyes peninsula

1962
Point Reyes National Seashore established

1971
State enacted legislation to allow for elk relocation

1972
NPS acquired Pierce Ranch and Tomales Point

1976
Point Reyes Wilderness created; Public Law 94-389 *Preservation of Tule Elk–California* passed

TULE ELK AT TOMALES POINT

Tule elk are native to California, including the Point Reyes peninsula. Hunting and habitat loss led to the near elimination of tule elk throughout California by the mid-1800s. In 1873, California passed a law to fully protect tule elk, and in 1874, a small herd (less than 10 animals) was found on a ranch near Bakersfield. This was the only known tule elk population through the early 1900s.

In 1971, the state enacted legislation to allow for the relocation of tule elk and offered protection from hunting with the goal of achieving a state-wide population of 2,000. In a management plan from the same year, Tomales Point was identified as a potential relocation area. The 1976 Public Law 94-389 Preservation of Tule Elk – California provided for cooperation between federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, and the State of California for the protection of tule elk. These legislative actions coincided with the acquisition of Tomales Point by the NPS in December 1972 and the designation of Point Reyes Wilderness (1976), which collectively led to the reintroduction of tule elk to Tomales Point. In 1978, the NPS in collaboration with the State of California, introduced 2 male and 8 female tule elk to Tomales Point. As part of the 1978 introduction, the State of California required the NPS to build an elk fence in order to contain the herd in the Tomales Point area. Cattle grazing continued at Tomales Point after NPS acquisition and eventually ended in 1980.

Tule elk graze in the Tomales Point area

While the herd initially failed to thrive, it surpassed 140 animals by 1990, leading to concerns about overpopulation at Tomales Point. A 1993 scientific advisory committee recommended that the elk at Tomales Point be "permitted to self-regulate" and that "the long-range goal of elk management at the seashore should be the re-establishment of free-ranging elk throughout the seashore." In 1998, the NPS completed the Tule Elk Management Plan. The elk plan recommended retaining the elk fence and managing elk at Tomales Point with "as little population management as possible," and also allowed for the establishment of a free-ranging herd. As a result, later in 1998, the NPS relocated tule elk from Tomales Point to Limantour Beach. The population of tule elk at Tomales Point has fluctuated since reintroduction as anticipated, however in 2013 and again in 2020, there were two substantial population reductions, decreasing from 540 to 286 elk from 2012-2014 and again from 445 to 221 elk from 2019-2021. These population losses coincided with historic drought conditions, leading the NPS to provide supplemental water and minerals to the Tomales Point herd. This program, initiated in 2021, remains in place and is implemented as needed.

1978 — Elk fence built; Ten tule elk brought to Tomales Point

1980 — General Management Plan developed for the Seashore; Remaining beef cattle removed from Tomales Point

1985 — Pierce Ranch added to the NRHP; Point Reyes Wilderness name changed to Phillip Burton Wilderness

1990 — Tomales Point herd surpassed 140 animals; Overpopulation concerns lead to tule elk management planning effort

1998 — Tule Elk Management Plan released; Tule elk from Tomales Point relocated to Limantour area

2012 - 2014 — Tomales Point herd reduced to less than 300 due to extreme drought conditions; Herd had been above 300 elk since 1995

2021 — NPS provided supplemental water and minerals to the Tomales Point herd due to another drought-related population decline

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this plan is to establish the management direction at Tomales Point for protecting natural resources, preserving historical and cultural resources, preserving wilderness character, and improving visitor experiences. Key components of the proposed plan include tule elk management, wilderness management, visitor use at Pierce Ranch, and co-stewardship with the Tribe.

Tomales Point is a unique, geographically isolated peninsula within the Seashore. The need for this plan is rooted in these key topics:

- Two historic droughts during the last decade have adversely affected habitat conditions for tule elk confined to Tomales Point since their reintroduction to the Seashore in 1978.
- Management of the Pierce Ranch area and the Tomales Point unit of the Phillip Burton Wilderness is needed to address changing climate conditions and visitor use patterns.
- The NPS has a General Agreement with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria that established a partnership between the Tribe and the NPS for natural and cultural resource protection and stewardship, use of traditional ecological knowledge, education, research, revitalization of community and tradition, and the overall stewardship of Seashore lands and places.

Resources Potentially Affected

The NPS has identified the following preliminary impact topics:

- Wilderness character
- Cultural resources
- Wildlife, including tule elk
- Visitor use and experience, including safety

ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT

Based on internal scoping and review of public comments received during civic engagement, the NPS has identified a proposed action for the plan. The proposed action would include removal of the tule elk fence and all temporary water systems installed during the most recent drought, monitoring and management options for tule elk, potential opportunities to improve recreational uses and visitor experience at the historic Pierce Ranch, approaches to preserve and maintain wilderness character in the congressionally-designated wilderness in the planning area, and methods to better protect natural and cultural resources. The following sections describe the no-action alternative and preliminary alternatives for the plan. These alternatives will be refined, as necessary, after public and agency scoping for analysis in the environmental assessment.

Alternative A: No Action

This alternative, as required by NEPA, would continue the current management at Tomales Point and would not update zoning or land management guidance. The Tomales Point tule elk population would be managed as a confined herd, consistent with the State's original requirements for reintroduction and the 1998 Tule Elk Management Plan. The elk fence would remain at its current location and be maintained. Supplemental water infrastructure would remain in place and would be operated as needed. Natural water sources within the Tomales Point area would be monitored. Limited management of invasive plant species within the Tomales Point area would continue.

Scenic viewsheds are part of the visitor experience

Preservation treatments of Pierce Ranch would continue, and the site would remain a passive outdoor exhibit with waysides to educate park visitors. The main house would continue to be used as NPS employee housing.

Maintenance of the Tomales Point and McClures Beach trails would continue in accordance with NPS policies. Trails beyond Lower Pierce would remain unmaintained. Overnight camping permits would continue to be issued for the beaches and coves along Tomales Bay (for the areas north of the elk fence). Day use of the beaches and coves along Tomales Bay would continue.

Alternative B: Unconfined Elk Herd and Pierce Ranch Core Area (NPS Proposed Action)

Under alternative B, the NPS would update management zoning within the planning area to include a Wilderness Zone and a Scenic Landscape Zone. Alternative B consists of the following elements:

Preservation of Park Resources

- Remove existing elk fence. Consider adding a fence to exclude cattle from Tomales Point.
- Discontinue provision of supplemental water and minerals for tule elk. Remove all existing, non-historic supplementary water systems.
- Retain historic, cultural landscape features, unless they are incompatible with natural resources.
- Inventory and manage invasive plant species, which may include manual removal and use of herbicides.
- Implement programs to promote ethnobotanical resources in coordination with the Tribe.
- Evaluate use of prescribed fire to meet desired conditions of native plant communities.
- Terminate vegetation monitoring projects that rely on the use of the twelve elk exclosures and remove elk exclosures. Encourage further vegetation research at Tomales Point that does not rely on the installation of permanent infrastructure within the Philip Burton Wilderness.
- Continue to partner with the Tribe for the preservation and protection of significant cultural resources.

Type and Intensity of Development

- Improve facilities at the Pierce Ranch to function as a core location for visitor use in the Tomales Point area. Revise circulation patterns to bring more visitors through the historic site and add a spur trail leading to an overlook of Tomales Bay on the eastern edge of the complex.
- Add new vault toilets at the Pierce Ranch area.
- Increase parking capacity by formally designating areas currently used unofficially.
- Improve and maintain the Tomales Point and McClures Beach trails to better protect resources while also providing access.

Visitor Capacity and Use Management

- Improve visitor use management for Tomales Bay beaches and coves through refinement of the camping program (e.g., site-based reservation system) or other options. Permitted camping locations may be limited to protect natural and cultural resources. Additionally, daytime use of beaches could also be limited to protect natural and cultural resources.

A visitor views the ocean from the Tomales Point Trail

Visitors stand along the shoreline at McClure's Beach

Alternative C: Maintain Elk Fence and Actively Manage Elk Population

Alternative C would include the same management recommendations as the NPS proposed action (Alternative B) with the following differences:

- Retain and continue to maintain the elk fence.
- Control the elk population through lethal removal to a pre-defined threshold to prevent dramatic swings in population levels resulting from year-to-year water availability.
- Remove non-historic supplementary water systems but enhance the availability of naturally occurring water at the springs and seeps.
- Continue active vegetation monitoring to understand the impact of the elk herd on Tomales Point vegetation.
- Allow overnight camping at the beaches and coves along Tomales Bay using a site-based reservation system.

Steps in the Planning Process

Spring 2022	Civic engagement Complete
Summer 2023	Public Scoping ** We are here **
Fall 2023 to Summer 2024	Prepare the EA
Summer 2024	Public review of the EA and comment analysis
Summer to Fall 2024	Announce final decision

Get Involved & How to Comment

The NPS is seeking input from the public and agencies on relevant issues, the preliminary alternatives, concerns, opportunities, or topics that should be addressed during the planning effort. Your involvement in this planning process is vital to the future management of Tomales Point. Please participate in the virtual meeting and provide your input during the public comment period following the guidelines below.

Virtual Meeting

Date: September 7, 2023

Time: 5:00 to 7:00 pm PDT

Meeting Registration Link: **https://bit.ly/3P5PtDl**

How to Comment

The public comment period is open for 31 days until Monday, September 25, 2023, 10:59pm PT.

The preferred method for commenting is online through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website **https://parkplanning.nps.gov/tpap**.

Hard copy comments may also be submitted by mail or hand delivery to:

Tomales Point Area Plan
c/o Superintendent
Point Reyes National Seashore
1 Bear Valley Road
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

Please note that comments will not be accepted by fax, email, USB drive, or any way other than those specified above. Bulk comments submitted on behalf of others, in any form, will not be accepted.

An additional opportunity for public involvement will be provided later in the planning process, including an opportunity to review and comment on the TPAP when it is released next year.