

Marin Equestrian Stables Plan Environmental Assessment

Executive Summary

The United States Department of Interior National Park Service (NPS) is undertaking the Marin Equestrian Stables Plan (Plan) to guide the future use, management, and location of stables located on lands within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA, the Park) in southern Marin County, California. The Park currently manages three existing horse stables under permit by individual operators including Golden Gate Dairy, Tennessee Valley and Rodeo Valley stables. A fourth stable, operated by NPS and known as Lower Tennessee Valley stables, currently houses Park Horse Patrol operations. The National Park Service has identified certain issues associated with these stables, including site capacity, facility improvements, management, public benefit, and the protection and enhancement of important park resources, both cultural and natural. The Plan has been proposed to address these issues to achieve and maintain consistency with NPS management plans and policies.

This environmental assessment (EA) describes and analyzes four alternatives for the improvement and expansion of the equestrian stables.

Purpose and Need for Action

The *purpose* of the Marin Equestrian Stables Plan is to provide for comprehensive improvement of equestrian sites, facilities, programs, and stables management within the GGNRA. The Plan is designed to improve visitor services and preserve, protect, and enhance park natural and cultural resources in a manner consistent with NPS plans and policies.

Both the Park and the existing stables operators have identified the need for a comprehensive plan that will guide GGNRA stables into the future. During the past 35 years, although many changes have been implemented to improve operations, reduce impacts, and expand public benefit, there has not been a comprehensive management review of the horse operations. The renovated and improved equestrian facilities and management practices proposed in this plan would provide a high quality visitor experience, allow increased access to the facilities, and better protect the natural and cultural resources at the sites.

Project Objectives

The project *objectives* are specific steps toward fulfilling the purpose and must be achieved to a large degree for the project to be considered a success. The Park, in its examination of the issues and needs driving the project, has identified the following primary objectives for the subject areas:

1. **Determine appropriate long-term stables sites:** Identify appropriate sites for long-term stables use. These sites are determined by such factors as site size, topography, proximity to water resources, historic setting and resource sensitivity, cultural landscape protection, natural resource protection, trail and road access, parking, and public transportation.
2. **Establish the number of horses stabled:** Determine the appropriate number of horses based on potential programs combined with site constraints such as site size, facilities, and cultural and natural resource protection.
3. **Identify facilities improvements and desired resource conditions:** Identify new facilities and improvements to existing facilities necessary to achieve project goals and objectives, including improved access and safety for both humans and animals.

4. **Provide guidance to the business leasing phase following the Plan and EA:** Provide a framework for a business management strategy to ensure future business leases are appropriate for equestrian operations on NPS park lands. This business management strategy reflects long-term management goals of NPS consistent with applicable law, regulations, and policy.
5. **Welcome the general public, and provide education and outreach programs:** Serve both the riding and non-riding public with programs, interpretation, training, and outreach programs. Invite the public to ride, and to view and learn about horses, horse husbandry, and history, site cultural and natural resources, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Examples include websites and signs at nearby visitor centers that invite the public to come to visit and utilize the stables. Increased riding and horsemanship opportunities would be offered for a variety of skill levels and interests. At the stables there could be exhibits about horse husbandry, shoeing, breed information, tack, buggies, and the horses themselves are there to see and enjoy.

Alternatives

The No Action alternative and three action alternatives were analyzed for this environmental assessment.

Alternative A: No Action — The No Action alternative consists of continuing existing and ongoing equestrian management and operations. It includes other ongoing plans for improvements that may exist.

Elements Common to all Action Alternatives — Activities or elements that would take place under all of the action alternatives are described below. Where action alternatives discuss new or modified facilities and services, the alternative would allow for the specified facility or service to be constructed as soon as a funding mechanism is identified, however, NPS is not obligated to fund and develop the facilities or provide the services identified. Further, implementation of the Plan alternatives must be compatible with the General Management Plan (GMP) which is currently under revision.

1. **Business Management Strategy.** In all alternatives, the NPS would implement a business management strategy that utilizes best practices from the real estate, tourism, and non-profit sector. The business management strategy would update GGNRA equestrian operation management practices and it would conform to law, regulation and NPS policy. The components of this strategy are described in Chapter 1, Introduction.
2. **Public Programs, Outreach and Use (Public Benefit).** Under all action alternatives, equestrian-centered programs would continue at GGNRA in southern Marin. This Plan/EA requires that future business leases would determine specific enhancements made to foster broader public programming in order to reach a wider regional audience of riders and non-riders. Public benefit would be improved through required development and maintenance of increased public equestrian riding programs and events, improved trail and road signs, maps, and Internet sites describing location, public programs and other information about each stable site, with links to NPS websites.
3. **Facilities.** Under all action alternatives, facilities would be upgraded and enhanced.
4. **Sanitation.** Drainage and wastewater management would be improved. At all sites where they exist (Tennessee Valley and Lower Redwood Creek), field treatment septic-systems would

be upgraded or replaced with either portable or composting toilets. Treated water would be provided for residential use.

5. **Safety.** A safety and emergency plan and requirements for posting of safety and emergency procedures would be required at each stable.
6. **Cultural Resources.** For all action alternatives, specified major maintenance and capital improvements would include actions designed to protect or enhance cultural resources in accordance with the NPS guidelines. The specific improvements will be determined during the future leasing phase.
7. **Natural Resources.** Incorporation of expanded Best Management Practices (BMPs) into management, operation and maintenance activities associated with all action alternatives would improve protection of natural resources including water quality and sensitive habitats adjacent to equestrian facilities. The specific improvements will be determined during the future leasing phase.
8. **Sustainability.** In all action alternatives major new buildings are designed to reach three sustainability benchmarks: 1) A minimum silver or higher Leadership in Environmentally Efficient Design (LEED) rating (achievable rating may vary by alternative); 2) Minimal increase in electricity usage, natural gas use, water usage, and sewage output and, 3) Reduced potentially polluted storm water runoff from the site(s).

Alternative B: Enhanced Existing — Alternative B includes two options; Option B1 would result in permanent stables at *four* sites and **Option B2, the Preferred Alternative**, would result in permanent stables at *three* locations. Under Option B1, Golden Gate Dairy, Tennessee Valley, Lower Tennessee Valley and Rodeo Valley would remain as equestrian stables. In contrast, under Option B2 the same sites are considered *except* Lower Tennessee Valley- which would no longer be a stable, and the horses for the Park Horse Patrol program would be moved to the Tennessee Valley stables. Otherwise, Options B1 and B2 would be similar and would include the elements common to all alternatives, as described above and in section 2.3.2. The overall number of horses in stalls (76) would remain the same as existing (Alternative A).

Alternative C: Consolidated — Alternative C would reduce the number of stables in southern Marin GGNRA lands by consolidating existing equestrian stables from four to two of the stable sites – Tennessee Valley and Rodeo Valley. The Park Horse Patrol would move from Lower Tennessee Valley to Tennessee Valley. Equestrian stables and associated programs at Golden Gate Dairy would be eliminated. The overall number of horses in stalls within the GGNRA would be reduced from 76 in Alternative A to 72 in Alternative C.

Alternative D: Dispersed and Expanded — Alternative D would result in three stables at existing stable locations and the development of two new stable locations with a maximum capacity of 88 equestrian stalls. Tennessee Valley, Golden Gate Dairy, and Rodeo Valley stables would remain as equestrian sites, with a reduction in the number of horses at Golden Gate Dairy from 11 down to a maximum of four horses. New stables would be developed at Lower Redwood Creek and Marincello Trail sites. The Park Horse Patrol would be located at the Marincello site

Preferred Alternative — The preferred alternative for the Plan implementation is Alternative B, Option B2. The action alternatives have many elements in common; however, Alternative B, Option B2 provides the most advantages with regard to the evaluation factors of public benefit, public access, and cultural and historic resource protection when compared to the other action alternatives. Three

historic sites, Golden Gate Dairy, Tennessee Valley and Rodeo Valley, remain as stables, an appropriate use that will help preserve these resources for future generations. The goal of natural resource preservation will be achieved by site improvements and environmental Best Management Practices.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative — Taking all impacts together, the differences between the various alternatives are not great. However, Alternative C is anticipated to have the least adverse impacts due to the least number of stables sites. With two sites being stables as opposed to three, four or five sites in the other alternatives, the impacts associated with horse operations would be geographically confined to those two areas, Tennessee Valley and Rodeo Valley, and would not occur in the Redwood Creek drainage (Golden Gate Dairy and Lower Redwood Creek sites), Marincello Road area, or Lower Tennessee Valley. This reduces adverse impacts overall. One of the project objectives is to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion at the facilities. Alternative C would provide for the best protection of natural resources by reducing drainage problems and potentially contaminated water leeching into nearby drainages compared to the other alternatives.

For these reasons, Alternative C was selected as the environmentally preferred alternative. Alternative C provides the most advantages with regard to the evaluation factors of natural resource protection when compared to the other action alternatives.

Impact Topics Analyzed

The following impact topics were analyzed in this environmental assessment to determine the potential effects that would occur as a result of implementation of each of the four alternatives:

- Geology and Soils
- Water Resources
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- Species of Special Concern
- Air Quality
- Cultural Resources
- Visitor Experience
- Transportation
- Visual Resources
- Park Operations

No impairment to park resources is expected under the proposed alternatives. Please refer to **Table 2-12** for a summary of impact intensities by alternative. Proposed mitigation measures are described in **Table 2-13**.

Environmental Review Process

The EA will be available for a 45-day public review and comment period. Written comments received on the EA will be screened to determine whether any important new issues or reasonable alternatives or mitigation measures have been suggested. If major substantive issues are raised which point to the potential for significant impacts, an Environmental Impact Statement would be prepared, otherwise a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared.