

**The Sierra Club  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Marin Audubon Society  
Marin Conservation League  
Sonoma County Conservation Action  
People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area  
Wilderness Watch  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
California Wilderness Coalition  
Friends of the Earth  
The Ocean Conservancy  
Audubon California  
Salmon Protection and Watershed Network**

June 5, 2008

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
United States Senate  
Hart Building, Suite 112  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Boxer:

A major goal for our organizations, representing environmental concerns at the state, local and national level, is to protect and enhance America's National Park System for present and future generations. As you know, there are too few areas left in the world that have wilderness status. Wilderness protects native ecosystems from habitat loss and commercial development while providing clean air, clean water and quiet recreational opportunities. Here in California, Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) is one such place that is blessed with wilderness, and we are writing to encourage non-interference with the congressionally mandated designation of Drakes Estero as wilderness in 2012.

Having been established in 1962 to "preserve, for the purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration, a portion of the diminishing seashore of the United States that remains undeveloped," PRNS has been successful in serving the various stakeholders and user groups the park's enabling legislation intended it to serve. In the 1976 Point Reyes Wilderness Act (Public Law 94-544) Congress designated 25,370 acres as wilderness, and designated 8,002 acres as potential wilderness. Among the potential wilderness is Drakes Estero. The legislative history (House Report 94-1680) indicates Congressional intent: "it is the intention that those lands and waters designated as potential wilderness additions will be essentially managed as wilderness, to the extent possible, with efforts to steadily continue to remove all obstacles to the eventual conversion of these land and waters to wilderness status." Currently, however the estero is occupied by Drakes Bay (formerly Johnson) Oyster Company until 2012, when its 40 year Reservation of Use expires and the estero is intended to revert to full public use as wilderness.

Drakes Estero is an extremely valuable recreational and biological resource and is unique in that it is the only estero along the entire West Coast designated as a wilderness area. Every other estero has been compromised by development and commercial use. The estero and its watershed is already home to several endangered plants and animals, contains one of the most populous harbor seal haul-outs on the Central California coast, and serves as an important bird habitat and stop-over on the Pacific Flyway. It could and should be further protected and enhanced by the long-planned designation as wilderness, which requires removal of the 1050 acre commercial oyster operation from the midst of a National Park.

Recently, there has been a flurry of ill-advised proposals assaulting America's public lands, such as plans to sell and commercialize 15 national park units. But thanks to the voices of Americans from sea to sea, these reckless ideas were rejected. Now we find we must raise our voices again to oppose yet another ill-advised proposal - this one by the oyster company that wants to continue commercial oyster production past 2012 in what is slated to be a fully designated wilderness area in PRNS. This proposal, to be successful, would require congressional language overriding and going against previous legislation created with significant public input and support from numerous environmental organizations and the Marin County Board of Supervisors. If the oyster company and its lobbyists succeed, it would be the first time Congress took an area of "potential wilderness" in a national park and downgraded its protective status simply to perpetuate a commercial enterprise. Such a step would set a dangerous precedent.

The Park Service has provided the commercial oyster company with 40 years (until 2012) to move and/or cease operations in the Estero. We ask that you write to the National Park Service to support their mandate to remove the oyster operation in 2012 and manage Drakes Estero as designated wilderness. Doing so will provide clarity to the public and provide the park with support they need to address other critical management issues affecting them.

California has a long and proud history of wilderness preservation and your continued support will ensure that present and future generations continue to enjoy the tremendous benefits of the Drakes Estero Wilderness.

Sincerely,

Gordon Bennett  
Chair, Sierra Club Marin Group

Ron Sundergill  
Director, Pacific Region, National Parks Conservation Association

Frederick Smith  
Executive Director, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin

Peter Galvin  
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Brooke Langston  
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Todd Steiner  
Executive Director, Salmon Protection and Watershed Network

cc.

Senator Feinstein  
Congresswoman Woolsey  
Speaker Pelosi  
Congressman Miller