

April 28, 2009

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
US House of Representatives

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations

Senator Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources

Congressman Nick Rahall, Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources

Senator Mark Udall, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources

Congressman Norm Dicks, Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior and Environment
and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations

Congressman Raul Grijalva, Chairman
House Subcommittee on National Parks
Forests and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources

Senator Barbara Boxer, Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment and Public
Works

Congressman George Miller
House Committee on Natural Resources

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey
US House of Representatives (CA-6)

RE: Wilderness Protection at Point Reyes National Seashore (California)

Dear Members of Congress:

We are organizations that are committed to protecting the natural resources and cultural landscape at Point Reyes National Seashore (Seashore) over the long-term, a vision set aside by the founders of this park. As you know, there is continuing controversy regarding a commercial oyster business seeking to have its operating rights extended within a designated wilderness area (Drakes Estero) in the Seashore. If successful, this proposal would reduce Wilderness Act protections for this tremendous natural resource, which is also the only marine protected area on the West Coast between Mexico and Canada congressionally designated for wilderness protection. Specifically, it would be the first time that a wilderness area designation was diminished for the sake of commercial, private interests in the national park system. Setting this precedent would embolden efforts by private industry to increase and expand commercial activity in wilderness areas throughout the United States.

Drakes Estero is a part of the Philip Burton Wilderness Act of 1976 and is designated as potential wilderness. The Estero will obtain full wilderness status in 2012, when the right of a private oyster company operating in the Estero expires.

We believe that it would be inappropriate to make a fundamental change to the Wilderness Act through a legislative rider, without public hearings and full congressional review. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to grant new federal benefits to an individual business interest without considering competitive bidding requirements.

We are encouraged by efforts of the National Park Service, the American Land Conservancy, and Drakes Bay Oyster Company to find a resolution to this controversial issue. Given the long-standing controversy surrounding the 2012 expiration of the oyster company's right to operate in Drakes Estero, we support any efforts to find a solution that would maintain the integrity of the national wilderness system.

Because of this legitimate and serious effort being made to resolve the issue in a consensus manner, through a buyout, we urge the Congress to support the buyout effort and to oppose any efforts to reduce wilderness protections at Drakes Estero and Point Reyes.

Sincerely,

Ron Sundergill
Director, Pacific Region
National Parks Conservation Association

Leslie Jones
General Counsel
The Wilderness Society

Johanna H. Wald
Senior Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council

Ryan Henson
Policy Director
California Wilderness Coalition

Warner Chabot
Vice President for Regions
The Ocean Conservancy

Frederick Smith
Executive Director
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)

Bill Wade
Chair, Executive Council
Coalition of National Park Service Retirees

Peter Galvin
Conservation Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Dan Taylor
Director of Public Policy
Audubon California

Patty Glick
Senior Global Warming Specialist
National Wildlife Federation

Vicky Hoover
California/Nevada Wilderness Committee Chair
Sierra Club

Barbara Salzman
President
Marin Audubon Society

Nona Dennis
President
Marin Conservation League

Todd Steiner
Executive Director
Turtle Island Restoration Network

Cc:
Dan Wenk, Acting National Park Service Director
Molly Ross, Office of the Department of Interior, Solicitor
Will Shafroth, Office of the Department of Interior, Secretary's office
Peter Douglas, Executive Director, California Coastal Commission