



June 23, 2011

Honor The Promise of a Wildlife Legacy

On June 9th, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Ken Salazar, spoke before the Wilderness Society's annual awards ceremony at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington, D.C. He outlined a momentous push to create additional wilderness areas in existing public lands: "We need to move forward and create additional wilderness so that these places that are so precious and yet so limited are places that we protect and preserve for a long time."

Secretary Salazar, we could not agree with you more. And, we have a golden opportunity for you that will not require you to request any legislation, action or additional funding by Congress or any other authority. Simply honor the 1976 Point Reyes Wilderness Act and its intent to give Drakes Estero full wilderness designation and protection. When the Reservation of Use that Drakes Bay Oyster Company is using to operate terminates in November 2012, let it expire, then publish a notice the next day in the Federal Register that the long-intended full Wilderness Designation has gone into effect. And you will have created the West Coast's only marine wilderness.

In doing so, you will have left a legacy for a place that is beyond precious for the wildlife who reside, breed, feed, nest and migrate through this ecological sanctuary. And, you will have protected this designated wilderness for generations of our children to come, so that they, too, may witness this sanctuary and the species that depend on it.

Drakes Estero has been designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and a site of Regional Importance in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan because the Estero is a refueling station during avian migration. The National Research Council noted that Drakes Estero represents an important site for overwintering and seasonally migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, with special significance as a feeding and staging site for migrating Black Brant geese which feed primarily on eelgrass. Boats operated by the oyster business in the Estero are likely to disrupt shorebirds and other waterbirds. Having lines of oyster bags present on the intertidal flats, and tending those bags, likely could diminish the feeding and grit gathering opportunities for Brant in Drakes Estero, which require the ingestion of grit for food digestion.

The Point Reyes Wilderness Act was passed by Congress after several years of public hearings and meetings with local citizens. Fulfilling the full-wilderness designation upholds this promise the government made with the public for a marine wilderness and preserves the integrity of national park laws and policies, thus ensuring that other promises made across the National Park System are not compromised.

Secretary Salazar, you proposed in your June 9th address to identify areas where there is significant support for the creation of additional wilderness, despite the Obama administration's indication it will pull the plug on designating new lands for wilderness. It is now all the more important to consummate the already designated wilderness lands. The Point Reyes Wilderness Act was the culmination of a thorough public process, and the intended full wilderness protection for Drakes Estero has now been pending for nearly four decades. In this time span, our planet has seen our wildlife populations dwindle, in large part because we have not left them natural, untouched areas in which to live. As a result, coming generations already will be receiving from us a diminished wildlife legacy. You have an opportunity to ensure a long-promised space is honored. Please, we implore you, make your mark here and honor the 1976 Point Reyes Wilderness Act.

Gordon Bennett, President, Save Our Seashore

Amy Trainer, Executive Director, EAC

Brent Plater, President, Wild Equity Institute