

GROUPS

December 4, 2018

Dear Senator:

We are writing to express our opposition to H.R. 6687, which is scheduled for a legislative hearing in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks on December 5, 2018. H.R. 6687, introduced by Rep. Huffman and Chairman Bishop, would fundamentally undermine the environmental integrity of Point Reyes National Seashore, cause significant harm to the native Tule elk population there, erode the National Environmental Policy Act, and make a mockery of an ongoing public comment process regarding the future management of the National Seashore. No standalone companion Senate bill to H.R. 6687 has been introduced.

Tule elk are the smallest and rarest subspecies of elk, and are endemic to California. Due to overhunting, loss of habitat, and competition with ranching, the entire population was reduced to less than two dozen elk. Thankfully, due to state protections and extensive reintroduction, they have rebounded from the brink of extinction to several thousand living in small conservation herds in a few locations in California, including Point Reyes National Seashore. Despite their precarious status, H.R. 6687 would give priority to commercial ranching regardless of the impacts to the elk, even if one or more herds were removed from the park.

The management of Point Reyes National Seashore and impacts of commercial livestock grazing have long been controversial. Ranchers, conservationists and the Park Service recently reached an agreement to evaluate the environmental impacts of ranching in the park, through a transparent process of amending the general management plan, including public comment. The planning process began in 2017 and the Park Service completed the scoping process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A full environmental impact statement will be completed in the next few years. Nearly 3,000 public comments have already been received by the Park Service, including one by Rep. Huffman's office.

Instead of allowing the NEPA process to play out in a democratic and meaningful fashion, H.R. 6687 would simply dictate the outcome - requiring the Park Service to issue 20-year leases to all commercial ranching. H.R. 6687 would also change the purposes of the park by requiring the Park Service to give priority to ranching over the protection of native wildlife and public enjoyment. By forcing a particular outcome, the purposes of NEPA — allowing citizen participation and requiring a hard look at environmental harms — is turned into a charade. Without any scientific evidence or regard to California state law, the legislation could allow a hunting season on Tule elk inside a national seashore — an extraordinary, unprecedented action on virtually any unit of the Park Service outside of Alaska.

When Congress established Point Reyes National Seashore in 1962, it made very clear that the park was being established to promote recreation and enjoyment of the seashore's natural

environment. Congress authorized funding to secure and acquire private property and made very clear — both in 1962 and in later amendments to the Seashore’s enabling legislation in 1976 — that the continued operation of commercial ranching enterprises was to be *temporary*. It is simply false to claim, as H.R. 6687 does, that Congress intended commercial cattle operations to remain in Point Reyes National Seashore indefinitely, or that the Park Service cannot manage ranching leases to coexist with elk and other wildlife. This legislation turns the Seashore’s enabling legislation on its head by giving a commercial special interest primacy over the public good.

Like any National Park, Point Reyes National Seashore was established for the benefit and enjoyment of all Americans across this nation, now, and for future generations. H.R. 6687 undermines the Seashore and represents yet another attack on our environmental laws, our public lands, and our country’s wildlife heritage. We urge you strongly to oppose it during the hearing.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity