

4 September 2009

Jeffrey A. Creque, Ph.D.  
Alliance for Local Sustainable Agriculture  
P.O. Box 1316  
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

Dear Dr. Creque:

Thank you for your letter of 31 August 2009 regarding the Point Reyes National Seashore and the question of disturbance of harbor seals in Drake's Estero. I am sorry that we did not know about your organization when we visited Point Reyes two weeks ago, as we would have appreciated a chance to visit with you and get your perspective on this matter firsthand.

Your letter seemed to be based on an impression that we are farther along in our review process than we actually are. Our trip to Point Reyes was for the primary purpose of meeting the involved parties and getting to know their concerns and thoughts firsthand regarding the most useful way to approach this review. We were seeking input before developing our plans for the review, as we believe that is the best way to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding down the road. Perhaps most importantly, we had not yet met or spoken at length with Mr. Kevin Lunny, and wanted to have a chance to meet and talk with him. We also appreciated the opportunity to meet with personnel from the National Park Service, Sierra Club, and National Parks Conservation Association, as well as a member of the Marin County Board of Supervisors.

Because we are still in the planning stage and because our primary intent was simply to meet and get to know the various parties in this matter, my colleague and I agreed that we did not need to go into Drake's Estero at this time. You can be assured, however, that the final plan for this review will include time in the Estero so that those involved in the review can see it first hand. Having been a field biologist for much of my career, I believe visiting the site is crucial to understanding the matters of concern. Based on our conversations, I believe that the National Park Service and Mr. Lunny agree that visiting the Estero is essential.

I also appreciate your point that other forms of disturbance should be considered in our review. Such disturbance is one of the questions that we will consider as we develop our final plans for the review. As the purpose of our review is to ensure that the seals are being adequately protected from disturbance, I think your point is well taken regarding other forms of disturbance. I expect and hope that if we review the existing data and the Estero environment, we may be able to make constructive recommendations regarding all sources of disturbance, whether they pertain to oyster farming or kayakers, etc. It remains to be seen how much information can be gleaned from the existing data and what kinds of constructive recommendations we might make.

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I would appreciate a chance to discuss with you the report of the National Academy of Science, as my reading of that report is somewhat different from yours. Although the report did not find strong evidence of an effect of oyster farming on the seals, it did find a basis for concerns and, indeed, recommended additional studies to investigate those concerns.

Finally, your letter makes a number of somewhat inflammatory statements about our review. I believe that those statements are false and unwarranted, but also do not see that we can move this review in a positive, constructive direction by arguing such points in an antagonistic fashion. Rather, I would like to encourage you to call me and discuss these matters in person. I would be more than happy to listen to your concerns with the hope of making this review as useful as possible for all involved. My hope is that by talking through these points, we can not only find solutions to current issues, but also establish a rapport and means for resolving future issues, should they arise. With that in mind, I again ask that you simply call me to discuss your concerns in a more constructive fashion. My direct line at the Marine Mammal Commission is 301.504.0101 and my cell number is 240.676.4162.

I expect to be traveling to California again to manage this review. I will let you know in advance and, if you are available, I would be glad to meet with you and discuss these matters in person.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

cc: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar  
Senator Dianne Feinstein  
Senator Barbara Boxer  
Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey