



The Marine
Mammal Center

May 19, 2009

Senator Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein,

As the executive director of an organization that focuses on the rescue, rehabilitation, and research of seals, sea lions and other marine mammals along the Central and Northern California coast, I write on behalf of The Marine Mammal Center to express my strong support for the National Park Service's existing plan for sustaining and preserving the wilderness site established at Point Reyes National Seashore, and limiting commercial activities and human traffic that could detrimentally effect populations of animals long protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

At The Marine Mammal Center we focus on harbor seals, California sea lions and elephant seals, and in our 34 years of operation we have treated over 14,000 of these animals and related species. Through our long history and recognized expertise rescuing and treating harbor seals, we know that harbor seal females, when disturbed, will abandon their pups. And, we know that human activity leads to disturbance.

The Marine Mammal Center cares for between 600 and 1,200 marine mammals each year and in so doing we advance critical scientific research that furthers our understanding of their veterinary care, and the many diseases and syndromes that afflict them. The animals we treat show us direct links between human disturbance and animal health as well as ocean health and human health. We use our findings for new and ongoing research projects and to educate students and the public, promoting stewardship of the environment and marine conservation. Thriving ecosystems and safe and adequate habitats support healthy populations of marine mammals: plans for a protected marine habitat at Drake's Estero—a wilderness designation—afford greater expanse, diversity and access to coastline that will support healthy populations of marine mammals, specifically harbor seals. The mixed use of these same regions to advance commerce or other purposes, works against this.

A recent National Research Council report, SHELLFISH MARICULTURE IN DRAKES ESTERO, POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE, CALIFORNIA, examined the environmental issues connected with oyster farming in Drake's Estero and received much attention. In fact, the report cited the disturbance of harbor seals and such disturbance is a direct violation of the prohibitions on harassment of marine mammals as stated in the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

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Harbor seal populations are threatened by frequent El Niño events and their effect on fish stocks, climate change in general, established and emerging diseases, anthropogenic disturbances, and variability in food resources. As our human population has grown and developed much of the Bay Area and coastline, we have encroached on harbor seal rookeries, nurseries and haul out sites. Steps must be taken to preserve suitable harbor seal habitat and ensure resiliency in the harbor seal population. Under the existing National Park Service plan, Drake's Estero becomes a wilderness area in 2012, and accomplishes this goal.

Thank you for thoughtfully considering the issues presented here. I'd be happy to make myself, or my staff, available to you for further discussion or to elaborate on any of these topics.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jeff Boehm
Executive Director
The Marine Mammal Center

cc: Jon Jarvis, Regional Director, Pacific West Region, NPS
Tim Ragen, Executive Director, Marine Mammal Commission