

Issue 3 2022

The Wild Lens

magazine for photographers

Cascade
Red Fox

Big Cats

A Day in
Point Reyes

Yuriko David



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Publisher's Note



GEORGE MELNIKOFF

The human-wildlife conflict continues. Every year, we read of wildlife attacks in the national parks, particularly those with a large number of visitors like Yellowstone. This time it was a bison and a young woman from Ohio. Disregarding the 25-yard regulation in YNP, she was gored and thrown 10 feet in the air. Luckily for her, she survived, but many don't. Give wildlife some space!

Another conflict of this type is taking place in stunning Point Reyes, California. Tule elk are being culled to make room for beef cattle. An indigenous species that many believe were first spotted by Sir Francis Drake, the elk were hunted freely and thought to be extinct in the late 1800's. California cattle baron Henry Miller protected tule elk after he discovered a pair on his Marin County ranch. Miller ordered his men to protect the elk and is credited for the subspecies' survival. Ironically, it's cattle that are now threatening tule elk. Read Lori Lundin's interview with resident and wildlife guide Daniel Dietrich, who has a great love for the park and places appreciable importance on preserving this peaceful, iconic animal.


In the Washington Cascade Range, a hauntingly beautiful species of fox is in danger. Issues such as habitat loss, logging and increased human recreation are compromising these beautiful mammals. Gretchen Kay Stuart has dedicated herself to analyzing and documenting this plight. Read her powerful story.

Ranjan Ramchandani dazzles us with an African cat portfolio and, later in the issue, see some of the wild species that exist in Point Reyes alongside the tule elk.

Look on our website, www.thewildlensmagazine.com, for a powerful short film about the tule elk/cattle conflict from 8-year-old Evie Dietrich.

Michelle Liles

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A Cascade Red Fox is the central focus of the image, sitting on a thick layer of snow. The fox has a mix of brown, tan, and grey fur, with a lighter-colored ruff around its neck. Its eyes are a deep, warm brown, and it has a small black nose. The fox is looking slightly to the left of the camera. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a forest or wooded area. The overall mood is serene and natural.

The Plight of the
**Cascade
Red Fox**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GRETCHEN KAY STUART

It was June of 2020. Covid lockdowns had finally lifted enough for national parks to begin reopening. I'd visited Mount Rainier the previous year and fallen in love with the Cascade Range. I was anxiously awaiting the opportunity to return.

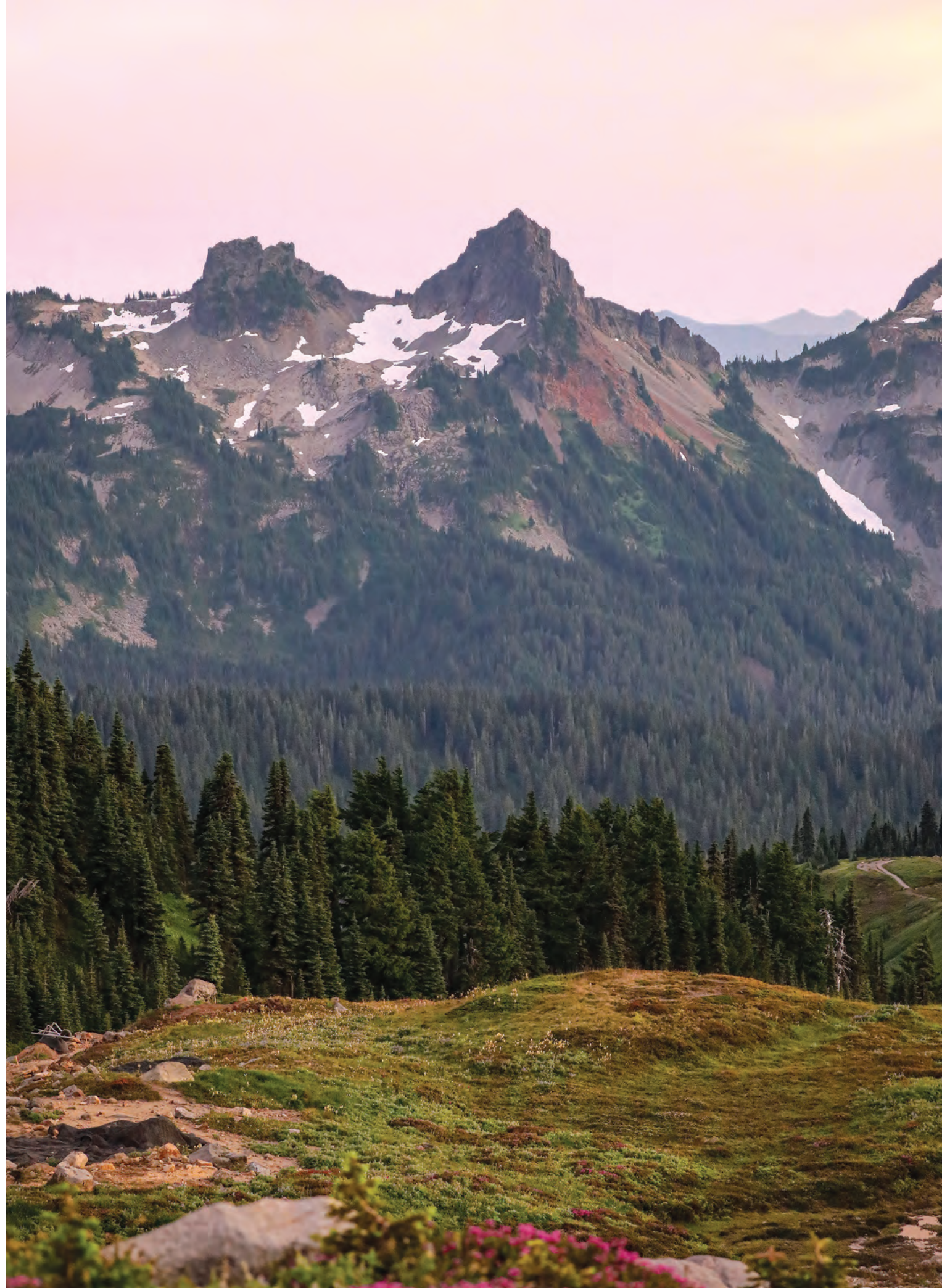
As I wound up the road to Paradise, WA, admiring the snowy scene, suddenly... there she was. A thick coat of fur scrambling along the tops of snow banks that towered over either side of the road. "What is that?" I heard myself say aloud, though traveling alone. I pulled over to encounter the most uniquely beautiful fox I had ever laid eyes on. Little did I know, I had just met a fox known by biologists as Whitefoot. She was Paradise's matriarch of a little-known subspecies — the Cascade red fox.

During the harshest blizzards, when most species descend to forested valleys to find food and protection from the weather, the Cascade red fox remains high in the sub-alpine region of the Cascade Range. Endemic to Washington State, this threatened mountain fox is one of the rarest and least understood mammals in North America, and in need of urgent protection.



"Whitefoot", Cascade red fox

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRETCHEN KAY STUART

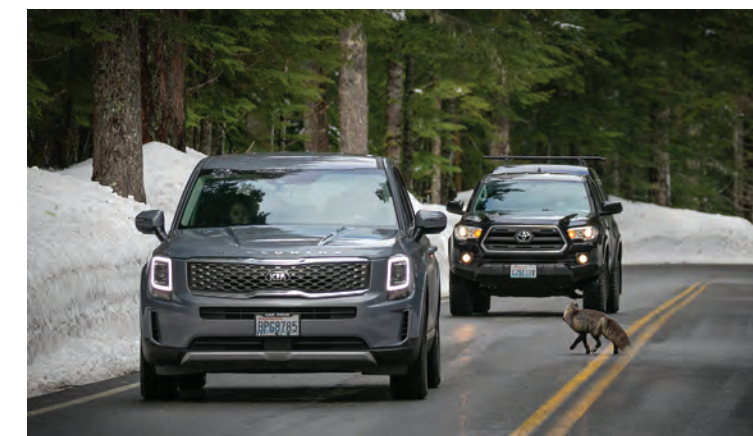


The Cascade red fox faces many threats:

- Much of their historical distribution is now unoccupied and their numbers are in serious decline.
- Climate change is accelerating their habitat loss and allowing increased predation/competition by coyotes.
- Small population sizes are limiting genetic diversity.
- Timber harvest and development are restricting connectivity between populations.

These threats feel overwhelming, but there is one threat that we can easily control — the feeding of wildlife and carelessness with trash which has resulted in car strike fatalities.

Whitefoot, (now believed to be deceased), had first been documented by researchers in 2011 making her unusually old for a wild fox. It is extremely rare to encounter one of these elusive creatures, but Whitefoot had become well-known among visitors due to her learned technique of sitting on the road like a trained pet, begging for food thrown out of car windows.





Kayla Shively, Biological Field Technician for Mount Rainier National Park, with collected DNA sample

Whitefoot's reproduction was also well documented. Her dens were located next to the road where she and her kits would be observed and fed by visitors. Her last litter was in 2018 when one of her three kits was fatally struck by a car. Luckily, that kit's life didn't completely go to waste. After being necropsied and frozen for a couple of years, the kit was collected for an exhibit at the Burke Museum in Seattle. The kit's DNA was stored, and his skeleton and skin were preserved to be used for research over the years to come.

When I first encountered Whitefoot, there was very little information to be found regarding the Cascade red fox other than a website belonging to the conservation nonprofit Cascades Carnivore Project. I immediately reached out to inquire about how I could volunteer. I spent the remainder of the summer and autumn of 2020, as well as seven months of 2021, living out of my camper van in the South Cascades to spend as much time tracking and photographing the foxes as possible.

My fieldwork, which continues to this day, consists of remote hikes through subalpine habitat and serves two

main purposes: First, to photographically document the Cascade red fox and record the behavior of known foxes while searching for new individuals. My second objective is to collect scats and hair samples for Cascades Carnivore Project which are genotype tested for identification, and meta barcode tested for a complete profile of the individual's diet. This data contributes to determining a population count and helps us understand how climate change may be affecting their prey.

In 2020 I only discovered one Cascade red fox other than Whitefoot — a black-phase male whom we nicknamed Snag.

In the early spring of 2021, I encountered Whitefoot quite regularly. I then spent five long months feeling very discouraged with zero sightings whatsoever, until September when I encountered a red-phase female whom we nicknamed Ginger.

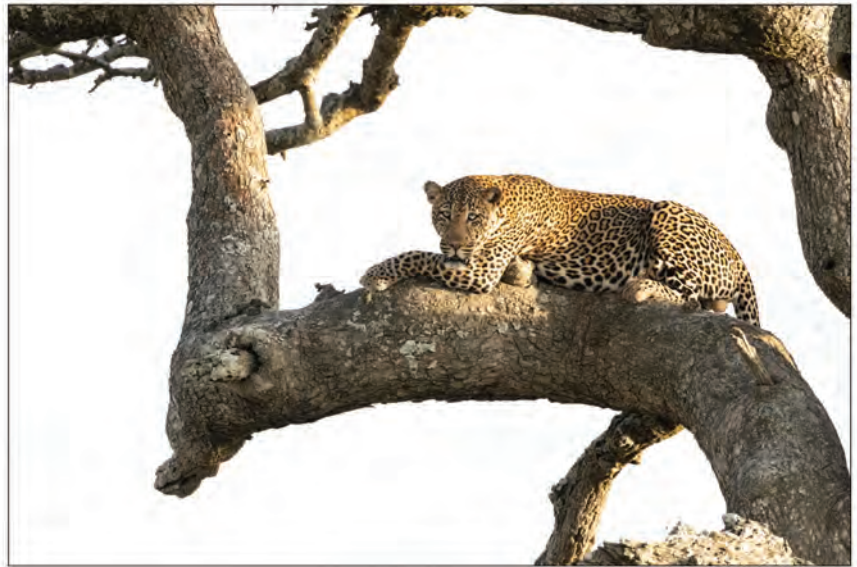
Most exciting of all, I found Snag again and documented him interacting with Ginger in such a way that leads us to believe they are mates. This discovery gives us great hope for the possibility of future kits.

Photo (right): "Snag", black-phase Cascade red fox





GRETCHEN KAY STUART | "Ginger", Cascade red fox



Tanzania

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After many visits to the African continent and creating several itineraries for photographers & holiday makers alike, I found myself working on a very unique Tanzanian experience.

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Ranjan Ramchandani

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A lioness is lying on a large, dark, textured rock. She is looking towards the camera with a calm expression. The background is a clear blue sky with some light, wispy clouds. The overall scene is bright and natural.

On Top of Their World

Admiring Big Cats With
Ranjan Ramchandani









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A DAY IN POINT REYES

DANIEL DIETRICH
SEBASTIAN KENNERKNECHT
MICHELLE LILES
ZITA QUENTIN

Located just north of California's San Francisco Bay, Point Reyes National Seashore encompasses over 100 square miles (33,300 acres) of coastal wilderness area. At the beginning of the 17th century, Spanish explorer Sebastian Vizcaino named the impressive cliffs that line the seashore "la Punta de los Reyes" (Point of the Kings). The park preserves the natural ecosystems, native species and cultural heritage found along the diminishing undeveloped western coastline of the United States. Vast windswept beaches, scrub grasslands, salt and freshwater marshes, coniferous forests and striking granite headlands characterize the peninsula, which is home to over 1,000 species of plants and animals. In addition to the area's magnificent natural beauty, Point Reyes is home to a unique set of cultural resources, which highlights the many layers of human history present in the region.

Recently, a group of photography enthusiasts, led by Sebastian Kennerknecht of Cat Expeditions, explored the breathtaking Point Reyes National Seashore. We were rewarded with incredible species like coyote, bobcat, tule elk, red fox, great horned owl, harrier, elephant seal and the stunning landscape that serves as a backdrop.

Photo by SEBASTIAN KENNERKNECHT | Text by MICHELLE LILES



SEBASTIAN KENNERKNECHT | Bobcat



ZITA QUENTIN | Coyote



DANIEL DIETRICH | Peregrine falcon



SEBASTIAN KENNERKNECHT | Elephant seal



ZITA QUENTIN | Great horned owl



DANIEL DIETRICH | Badgers



MICHELLE LILES | Elephant seal



ZITA QUENTIN | Tule elk

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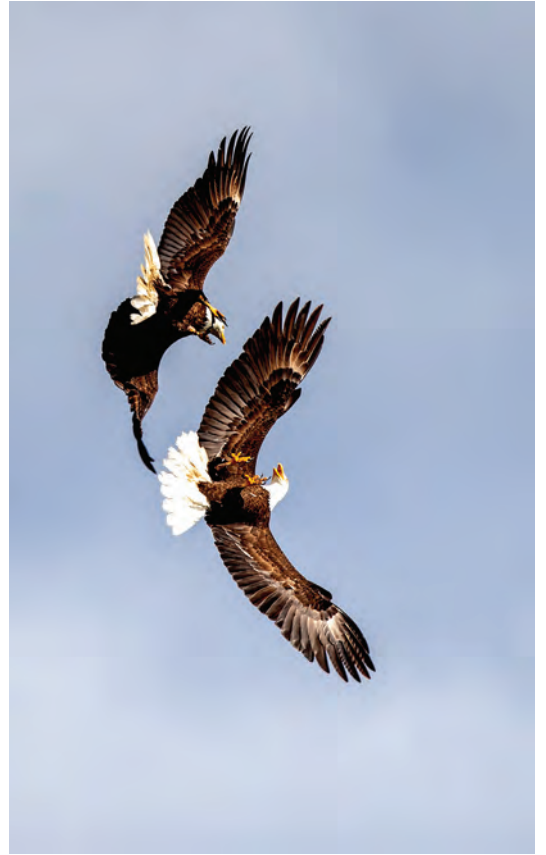
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August 1, 2022

PHOTOGRAPHER FEATURE

Yuriko David

Originally from Portugal and now living in the U.S.A., Yuriko David is an award-winning internationally-acclaimed artist and photographer. His work has been published the world over in hundreds of books and magazines. He specializes in wildlife, landscape, sports and portrait photography.

INSTAGRAM: [#yurikodavidwildlife](#)







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COLLATERAL DAMAGE

A Legal Fight to Save Endangered Tule Elk



by Lori Lundin

PHOTOS BY DANIEL DIETRICH

One of Northern California's most magical, wild, and biodiverse stretches of coastline is at the heart of an intense legal battle that could mean life or death for its landscape and rare, threatened and endangered native species. Environmental groups are suing the National Park Service (NPS) for greenlighting a lease agreement for cattle and dairy ranching on thousands of acres of public lands at Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County, California, for up to 20-plus years. Making room for thousands of domestically bred cattle will mean killing more native tule elk. Not lost here – the alarm bells on time running out for the world to avert the most devastating impacts of global warming. The United Nations has cited animal agriculture as a leading contributor to greenhouse gasses. Activists say it's antithetical that the very agency charged with protecting public lands would welcome and support expanding environmentally destructive commercial ranching. The NPS argues that there are decades of precedent for Congressional support of beef and dairy ranching on federal lands.

I recently spoke with Point Reyes-based wildlife conservation photographer and cinematographer Daniel Dietrich, who is deeply concerned about this issue and has been actively involved in the fight to protect this national park.



LL: So the National Park Service has been leasing out these federal lands to ranchers at Point Reyes National Seashore, and now, under a new General Management Plan amendment, they are looking to issue new 20-year leases? And part of this plan includes killing native tule elk?

DIETRICH: Yes, that is correct. When this national park was formed in 1962, the ranchers who sold their land were given 20-year leases to sunset their operations. The equivalent of \$350 million dollars was paid for the land. The intent was for the leases to expire and the ranchers to leave. Politics and other factors have allowed for lease extensions to be granted and 60 years later the ranchers and their operations are still here.

The National Park Service is now planning to issue new 20-year leases that will allow new domestic animals, such as goats and sheep, to be raised inside the national park, will possibly allow commercial row crops such as artichokes to be grown and has plans to kill the native tule elk to free up grass for the cows. It is unconscionable.

LL: What environmental impacts have the ranching operations already had to these public lands and native wildlife that the National Park Service is required to preserve and protect?

DIETRICH: Just in the past year, the public, not the National Park Service, has uncovered major environmental issues within the park. An illegal toxic dump was found on one ranch. A rancher bulldozed a sensitive riparian area alongside a protected stream, multiple ranch houses were found pumping raw human sewage out into the

fields where the cattle graze. Another house was pumping human waste from the residence into a cattle manure pond, which is then spread by trucks over the land. What else are we missing?

The National Park Service was required to perform an Environmental Impact Statement on the ranching operations. Several alternatives were considered, the two most notable were Alternative B, which allowed ranching to stay and expand and Alternative F, which removed ranching from the national park. The EIS clearly showed the environmental benefits of Alternative F, with protection of endangered species, soil recovery, native plant protections, water quality improvements, air quality improvements and so many others. The National Park Service still chose Alternative B and has been pursuing this plan ever since.

Point Reyes National Seashore is at the very top of the [list of] most polluted waterways in the entire state of California. A water quality report showed 40 times over the safe limit for E. coli in the waterways.

These are the waterways my kids explore. It is incomprehensible to me that I have to tell my kids to not touch the water in our national park.

LL: Every international climate report including from the UN has said animal agriculture, particularly cattle ranching and the dairy industry – is one of the biggest contributors to global warming and the destruction of the planet. This seems like the antithesis of what the NPS should want for these federal lands. Has the NPS given a reason for why it makes sense to take out wildlife in their natural habitat to make room for more cows given the climate emergency?

DIETRICH: This has left many people scratching their heads. That the National Park Service wants to kill native tule elk to protect cows which graze in a national park is simply astonishing. This is supposed to be some of the most protected land in the world and here we are protecting cows. Politics plays a very significant role in this decision. Well over 90% of the commenting public on this issue is opposed to ranching in their national park. Just over two percent support it. Yet the National Park Service agenda continues to move forward.

LL: Where do things stand in the legal fight and who are the main groups/organizations taking this on?

DIETRICH: There is currently an active lawsuit by three organizations which are challenging the current National Park Service plan. They are Resource Renewal Institute (RRI), Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and Western Watersheds Project (WWP).

In a recent hearing at the California Coastal Commission, the National Park Service presented its water quality plan for the CCC to approve to move forward with its proposed new plan. The Commission voted unanimously against it.

A 15-minute summary of the 3.5 hour hearing can be seen here. It is an incredible watch. <https://youtu.be/34lxFxEpwkU>

LL: What can people do to help?

DIETRICH: The National Park Service is legally required to protect the public's resources. Specifically, "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein [within the na-

tional parks] and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

I moved to Point Reyes to be closer to nature and wildlife. My eight-year-old daughter was so distraught over the tule elk decision that she made a two-minute short film with her GoPro about it. <https://youtu.be/9yeD2sDi7NI>

She is not alone. The public wants its park back. The people want a national park to be free of private industry and polluting cows. They want hiking trails and clean water, wildlife and wildflowers. Isn't this what a national park is supposed to be?

Those that are interested in helping can write their congressman, email the superintendent of Point Reyes National Seashore, get involved with an organization who supports restoring this national park or purchase a "Rewild Point Reyes" hoodie on my website, www.danieldietrich.com/store.

This is the most critical time for one of our nation's greatest national parks. We must protect this place.

You may also view Evie Dietrich's tule elk video on The Wild Lens website, www.thewildlensmagazine.com.

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