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Testimony on HR 4969
"California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act of 2012"

Tuesday, September 11, 2012

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the "California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act of 2012."

My name is Merita Whatley. I am a manager of the Point Arena Lighthouse and a core member of the Point Arena Merchants Association. The Merchants Association is a group of local merchants with the objective of increasing visitation and revenue for the Point Arena area. Along with Point Arena Lighthouse, other community members, business owners and elected officials, we strongly support HR 4969 and efforts to expand the California Coastal National Monument to include the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands.

Located on the Mendocino coast of California, just north of the city of Point Arena, the Stornetta Public Lands shares two boundaries with Point Arena Light Station where I have worked for six years. The Lands are open to the public for daytime activities including hiking, fishing, bird watching, nature photography and wildlife viewing.

I would like to explain that the population of Point Arena is only 449 persons. The estimated median household income in 2009 was \$28,535; the household median income for California in 2009 was \$58,931. The nearest city with a population of more than 50,000 is Santa Rosa, 90 miles away. Point Arena is not a wealthy, coastal enclave. Because our coastal home is an economically depressed area, we work hard to maintain our quality of life. Our small businesses are still thriving partly due to the large number of visitors coming to visit Point Arena Lighthouse and to experience the natural beauty of Stornetta Public Lands.

On my way to work at the lighthouse, I often see cars lining Lighthouse Road and numerous folks walking the trails and standing on the bluffs of the Lands. We need a visitor's information kiosk for education and interpretation, more adequate parking, restrooms, and a ranger on duty to help protect the sensitive habitat areas. We need further surveys to determine means of protecting endangered plant and wildlife on the Lands. Managing these sensitive lands as part of the California Coastal National Monument, as

HR 4969 would do, will address the most fundamental of these needs and help ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy this area as we do today.

The Lands encompass several ecological zones. In the Riparian, Wetland and Aquatic zone, one may see the rare California red-legged frog, or wintering Tundra swans. In the rich, productive Garcia River that borders the Lands on the north, three threatened fish species—chinook salmon, coho salmon, and steelhead continue to exist. The Garcia River is a key recovery area in recent Endangered Species Act listings.

In the Marine Terrace zone, the very shy and endangered Point Arena mountain beaver makes its home in shallow burrows. There are very few colonies and the total population numbers less than 200 to 500 individuals. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contributed to the purchase of Stornetta Ranch to protect and restore habitat for the extremely vulnerable mammal. (Please note photo attached)

In an arrangement between the BLM and the Stornetta Family, a rotational cattle grazing agreement reflects a new model for land preservation—a balance between public access, wildlife protection, and ongoing commercial uses. In reports from botanical studies on the property, it is suggested that some grazing of cattle on the land creates a symbiotic relationship between the cattle and the federal endangered Behren's silverspot butterfly. The host plant for the butterfly's larvae is the Western dog violet. Non-native grasses block sunlight and compete with the tiny dog violet in the Marine Terrace and Coastal Prairie zones. Grazing reduces the tall grasses, resulting in a higher percentage of survival for the small orange, spotted butterfly on this last known site of population. (Please note photo attached)

Blowholes are an interesting geological formation on the Lands. They are a hole formed below the surface of the Lands in the Marine Terrace and Coastal Prairie zones. The ocean gradually pushes through sea caves causing a void in the ground surface. Difficult to see until high tide, they become apparent as ocean swells rushing through the sea caves cause the grasses above to wave up and down.

Enhanced protection for Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands through a national monument designation is an important step in stewardship of the Lands. In a letter of support, local rancher, Larry Stornetta, says "The Stornetta Family has a history of good land ethics and stewardship" and "I see the proposed designation as a means for not only providing continued conservation of California's coastal resources, but also as a way for us to preserve the working landscape and lifestyle we have built here in Mendocino County. People from all over the world come to experience the scenic qualities of this part of the California coast, however, there is little opportunity for local employment. The Stornetta Brothers Coastal Ranch is one of the few major employers in the region and I look to a monument designation as a way to preserve our farming tradition, maintain a working landscape, and provide for the people here a better

quality of life.” Rancher Stornetta concludes, “I’m hoping that by designating to monument status areas where traditional farming practices and scenic recreation can go hand-in-hand will strengthen and help us in building a more stable community. If it can bring federal and state agencies along with communities, businesses, interest groups and landowners like me together to improve our overall quality of life and the environment where we live, then it is worth my support.”

I stand with rancher Larry Stornetta, local businesses in the Point Arena Merchants Association, and so many others in our small community in supporting permanent protections of the Stornetta Public Lands as part of the California Coastal National Monument. Thank you again for your time and for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

ENDANGERED SPECIES



- Point Arena Mountain Beaver Habitat. A burrowing species
Note the dark fur

Point Arena Mt. Beaver (*Aplodontia rufa nigra*)

a) Habitat: The Point Arena mountain beaver requires dense stands of vegetation to harvest for food and cover. Habitat requirements include soil conditions that allow for excavation of the underground burrow system upon which the mountain beaver depends. Beaver burrows have been documented in both loamy soils and stabilized sand dune areas at Manchester State Park. The burrows can be found in level to extremely steep terrain as long as burrows can be constructed. Due to the animals moisture requirements the burrow systems are often found on north slopes and near streams.

Approximately 70 acres of historic and suitable habitat is found on the Stornetta Public Lands and the Stornetta conservation easement. The majority of the other lands in the Stornetta Public Lands and conservation easement are coastal prairie terrace which are unsuitable habitat and other areas of limited suitability due to long-term livestock grazing, flood control, and agricultural practices. Grazing has eliminated much of the habitat which would normally extend well over the coastal bluffs and slopes onto the upland terraces.

b) Occurrence: This subspecies of mountain beaver is only known from a small area (less than 25 square miles) of coastal Mendocino County, California in the vicinity of Point Arena which includes the Stornetta Brothers Public Lands and conservation easement and Cypress Abbey lands. The total population is estimated to be 200-500 individuals. There are 26 separate populations documented.

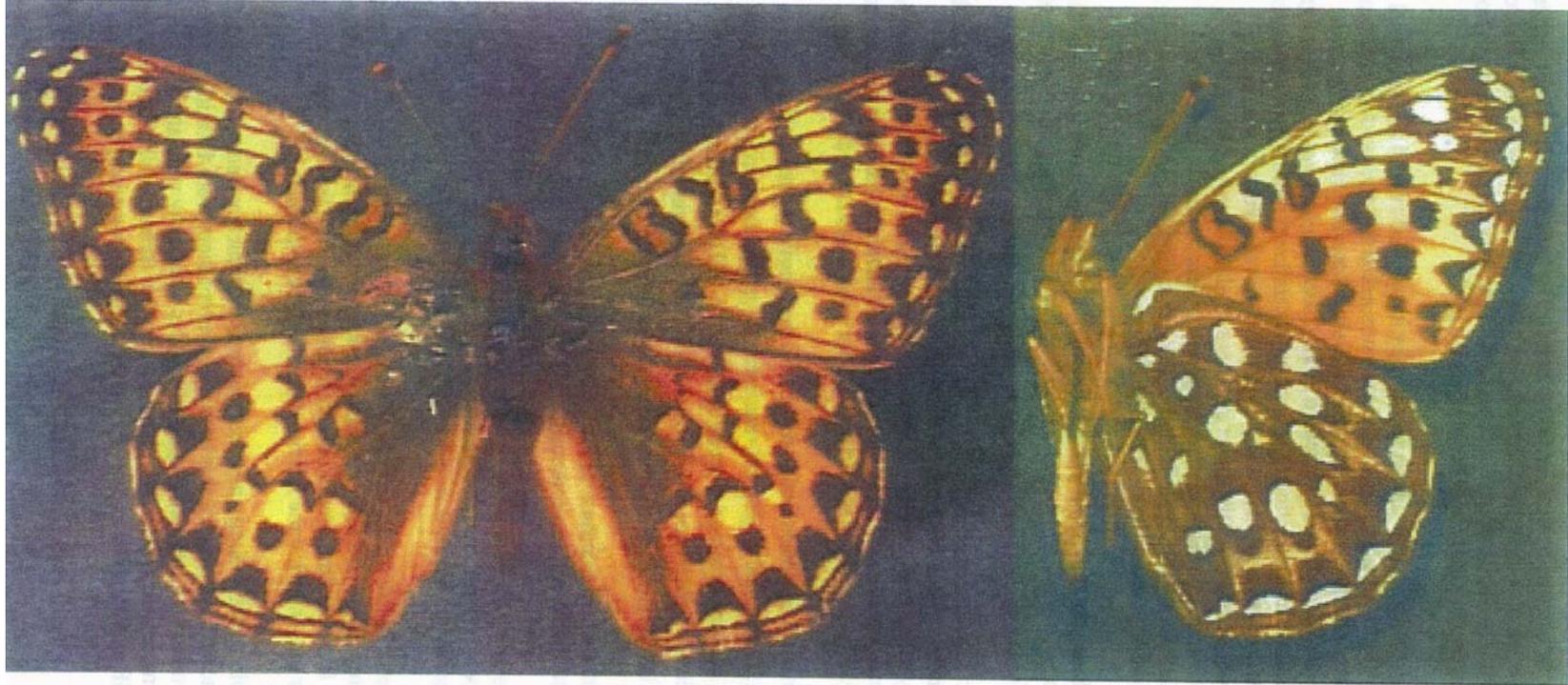
c) Ongoing Conservation Measures: The Point Arena Mountain Beaver is listed as endangered. The USFWS Recovery Plan for the Point Arena mountain beaver was completed in June 1998. The recovery plan identifies direct threats to the populations may include predation by household pets, and feral animals, poisoning, genetic isolation, genetic drift, and human caused disturbance. Potential threats to the species habitat include land development, grazing, timber harvest and invasion by alien plants species. No Critical Habitat has been identified. The recovery plan also makes reference to lack of biological data being available.

Actions needed for recovery of the Point Arena mountain beaver as listed in the recovery plan include:

- 1) Protect suitable occupied and unoccupied habitat.
- 2) Develop and implement management plans for populations on public lands.
- 3) Enhance and restore habitat.
- 4) Monitor existing populations.
- 5) Survey suitable habitat.
- 6) Identify and protect corridors.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service contributed to the purchase of the Stornetta Ranch to protect a known population on the conservation easement and to protect suitable habitat and corridors.

The population of Point Arena mountain beavers located on the Stornetta Public Lands and Cypress Abbey will be fenced to exclude livestock use and prevent the possibility of trampling of burrows.



ENDANGERED
SPECIES

- Behren's silverspot butterfly habitat

Behren's Silverspot Butterfly (*Speyeria zerene behrensii*)

Habitat: The Behren's Silverspot Butterfly inhabits coastal terrace prairies. The Behren's Silverspot Butterfly caterpillar's host plant is the early blue violet, also called the western dog violet (*Viola adunca*). The Behren's Silverspot Butterfly habitat requires this host plant be present as well as adult nectar sources and refugia from wind in proximity to the ocean, with mild temperatures, moderate rainfall and fog.

A large portion of the Stornetta Public Lands grasslands are dominated by introduced annual and perennial grasses. In a vegetation survey (2004) by BLM botanist Clara Sanders it was noted that the predominate grass found were sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), velvet grass (*Holcus lanatus*), reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*), tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*), orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), and bent grass (*Agrostis alba*). Sanders observed that the western dog violet grows in many different habitat types including areas with dense thatch from annual grass. However, it has been documented that the western dog violet responds positively to mowing and keeping thatch to a minimum. It is suggested that non-native grasses compete with and negatively affect the western dog violet, and also the nectar species for the Behren's silverspot butterfly. Dense thatch may also modify the microhabitat of the egg-laying female by increasing dampness, and changing the bacterial and fungal community (Sanders 2004).

b) Occurrence: The Behren's silverspot Butterfly was historically known to six locations extending from City of Mendocino south to Salt Point State Park, Sonoma County, California. The Point Arena population is listed as the only extant (still existing or surviving) population of the six.

c) Ongoing Conservation Measures: Behren's silverspot butterfly is listed as endangered. The USFWS Draft Recovery Plan for Behren's silverspot butterfly was completed in November 2003. This species lives in restricted habitat which has been seriously affected by human activities. The subspecies was listed because of one known existing population and loss and degradation of its habitat. No critical habitat has been designated due to impacts from the collection of rare and endangered butterflies and the subspecies limited distribution.

Actions needed for recovery of the Behren's silverspot butterfly as listed in the recovery plan include:

- 1) Protect existing habitat; Determine ecological requirements, populations, constraints, and management needs.
- 2) Reduce take and sources of mortality.
- 3) Develop a site specific management plan to address habitat needs, and threats.
- 4) Develop a monitoring plan for extant populations.
- 5) Undertake public information and outreach program.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service contributed to the purchase of the Stornetta Ranch to protect a known population on the south half of the Stornetta Ranch and to protect suitable habitat and corridors.

Identified threats to the habitat in the Recovery plan include invasion by exotic species (non native woody species and annual grasses), natural succession (i.e. to beach pine forest), fire suppression, and development. Capture for collections of rare and endangered butterflies is considered a significant threat to the population.

Moderate grazing is ongoing on the Stornetta Public Lands under a valid existing lease until 2014. The grazing may enhance the butterfly habitat by keeping thatch to a minimum and allowing the butterflies food nectar species to compete for light and nutrients. It appears that potential nectar sources may be limited. Measures to increase the diversity and density of nectar plants during the interim period will be important.

On a 210 acre portion of the Stornetta Public Lands young pines will be removed which are encroaching on the Behren's silverspot butterfly habitat. Removing the pines at this time will prevent them from forming a dense canopy and shading out the food species on the which the butterflies rely. This is the only vegetation management project proposed in the interim period. Shrubs which pose a threat to Behren's silverspot butterfly habitat will not be removed until the CRMP is completed and appropriate cultural clearances are completed.