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## **The Point Reyes agreement: Understanding TNC's role**

The recent settlement agreement at Point Reyes National Seashore has understandably sparked a wave of emotions and concerns. I wanted to address some of the questions and offer a perspective on The Nature Conservancy's decision to engage.

First, my colleagues at TNC and I empathize deeply with the feelings of loss and uncertainty expressed by many in the community. We have great respect for the Point Reyes ranching families and a long history of working with agricultural communities. We support local food systems and family farms, often using conservation easements to help preserve agricultural land in family ownership. Many of our colleagues and supporters live in Point Reyes Station and throughout West Marin.

TNC was invited by all the litigating parties, including the ranchers, to help them find a solution that everyone could agree to as part of their mediation process. We did not bring any litigation and were not a party to the litigation. Our decision to join the mediation was not made lightly.

We didn't know if a settlement was possible, or what the outcome would be, and we did not go in with a preconceived notion. But as we talked with all the parties, we learned that the situation had deteriorated and had become untenable, particularly for the dairies and ranches operating on uncertain and constantly challenged lease arrangements. One dairy had already voluntarily shut down.

We looked at the whole of this—all the unresolved problems and discord across so many stakeholders, well-covered by the *Point Reyes Light* over the years, and realized that pressures across the board were increasing, not decreasing. It was clear that if no change was made, there would be more conflict, more legal challenges, with adverse effects on all the people and resources of this special place. That's why we agreed to help.

When TNC was asked to engage, the parties to the suit had already reached a confidentiality agreement. Those agreements are common in mediation to allow for ideas and information to be shared freely to find solutions. Litigation is not an ideal place to problem-solve, and TNC and the parties did not have the luxury of starting from a blank canvas. There were numerous complex legal constraints in designing an outcome, because this was a settlement to address specific litigation. This solution required the agreement of all the parties.

While everyone came to the table with different perspectives and priorities, they were able to find a solution that considers the full range of everyone's perspectives. As is often the case with settlements, no one walked away with everything they wanted, but everyone accepts that the deal represents the best outcome of what was once considered an impassable challenge.

The agreement includes payments to compensate ranchers who wished to exit the conflict for relinquishing their leases and any other claims to the park service. These are deeply personal choices made by families whose historical connections to the land and contributions to the community we recognize.

Prior to the settlement, all 21 agricultural leases of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the seashore faced an uncertain future. Now, nine of them will be provided with 20-year terms. Targeted grazing will continue to be an important tool to achieve the park service's ecological management goals related to wildfire risk mitigation, weed abatement and wildlife habitat management.

One of TNC's biggest concerns, and a condition of our involvement, was creating a plan to address the impact on farmworkers, tenants and their families living in the park. That is why a key part of the agreement is a transition support plan for them. The mediation parties collectively set aside funds and resources, and are committed to ensuring farmworkers, tenants and their families receive assistance to support the transition.

As seen by the wide variety of reactions in the *Light*, there are caring people on every side of this issue—people who are dedicated to this special corner of the coast. We appreciate that communities in West Marin are deeply connected to their agricultural tradition. We also recognize the importance of sustainable agriculture and local food production. And we hope for—and will continue to work for—a future for Point Reyes that honors the extraordinary natural and cultural heritage of this unique local and national treasure.

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