



Ocean Ranch Restoration Project

Draft Environmental Impact Report Public Hearing
October 13, 2020



Public Hearing Format

- 6:00 - 6:10 - Hearing Overview
- 6:10 - 6:30 - CDFW PowerPoint Presentation on Project & Draft EIR
- 6:30 - 7:30 - Hearing Open for Public Comment

Note: The public hearing will be recorded. All participants will be on mute until recognized by the moderator during the oral comment portion of the meeting.

Public Hearing Ground Rules

- Please stay on mute unless you are providing comments
- Opportunity to comment provided at the end of the hearing:
 - ✓ Use the “raise your hand” function to ask to give comments
 - ✓ We will ask those attending the hearing by phone if there is anyone who wishes to provide comments
 - ✓ Hearing participants will have up to five minutes to provide oral comments
 - ✓ Comments should be pertinent to this Project or this Draft EIR
 - ✓ We will not provide responses to comments during this hearing
 - ✓ Responses to substantive comments will be in the Final EIR

Project Location

- Ocean Ranch Unit of the Eel River Wildlife Area (approx. 2,600 acres), Humboldt County, CA
- Owned / managed by CDFW
- Purpose of Acquisition (~1986): Coastal Wetland Habitat
- 850-acre restoration area:
 - 571-acres saltmarsh
 - 279-acres coastal dunes





Project Need

- Loss of estuarine habitat in Eel River watershed
- Cost and staff commitment to repair / maintain existing infrastructure (levees, water control structures) prohibitive
- Invasive plants adversely affecting native species abundance and diversity
- Open access with no formal trail system or amenities.

Levees



Tide Gates



Dense-flowered cordgrass



European beachgrass

Project Purposes

- Restore and expand natural estuarine and dune functions within the Ocean Ranch Unit
 - Recover & enhance native species, habitats & vegetation communities
- Improve public access
- Maintain the existing level of flood protection for adjacent private landowners

Project Milestones & Baseline Studies

- 2006-2012 - Baseline Data Collection
- 2013-2015 - Feasibility Study
- 2017-2021 - Baseline Studies to Support EIR and Project Permits
- 2018 - Ongoing - EIR Development
 - June/July 2018 - Notice of Preparation of a Draft EIR / Scoping
 - September 2020 - Draft EIR released for public comment
 - 45-day comment period ends November 2, 2020

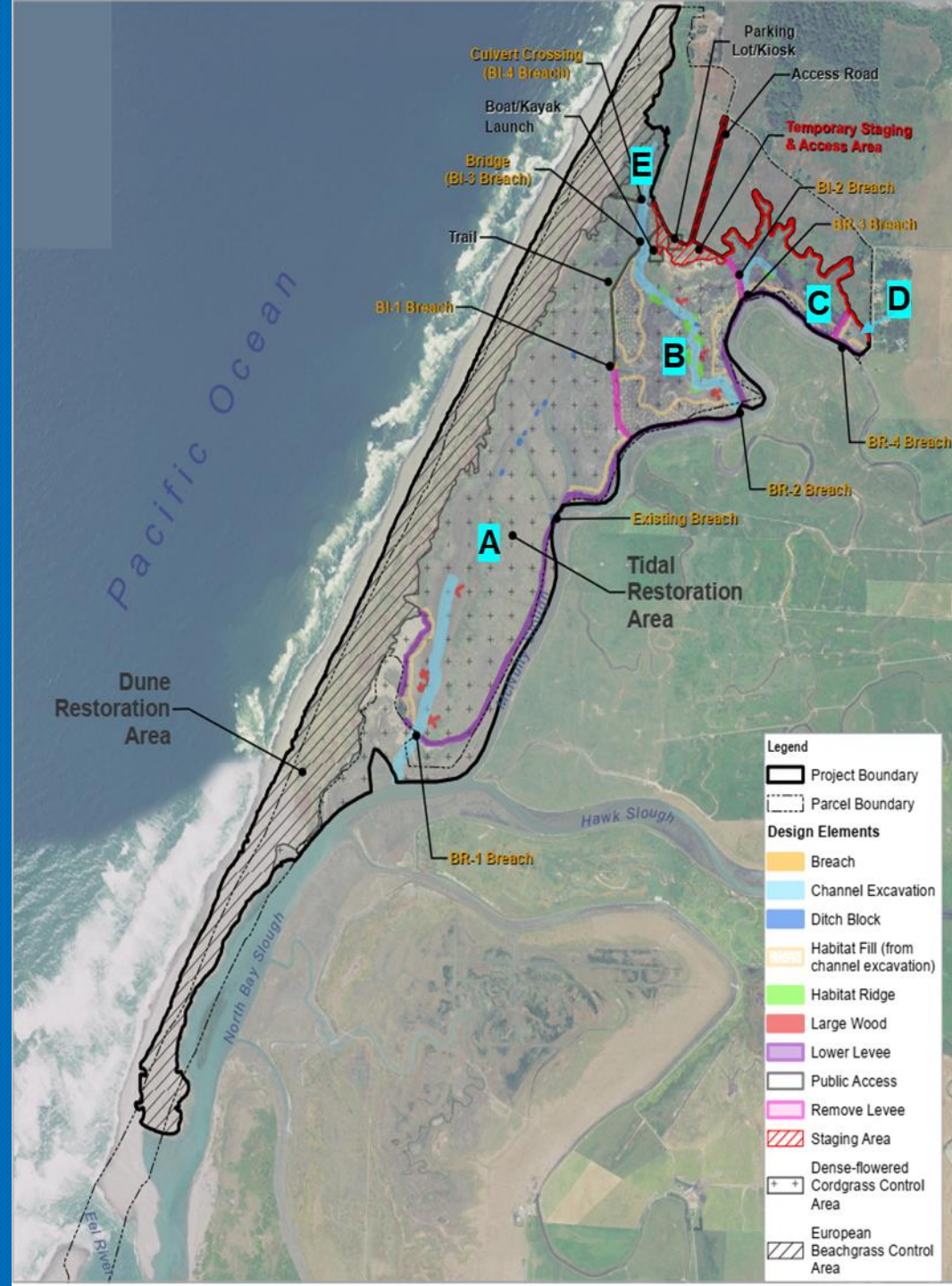
Restoration Design Process

- Feasibility Study (2015)
 - Evaluated four conceptual restoration alternatives
 - Two carried forward to 30% design
 - Reflect input from Technical Advisory Committee
 - Funded by State Coastal Conservancy & CDFW
- EIR Development and 60% Design (Ongoing)
 - Alternative development informed by:
 - Public and stakeholder input during scoping
 - Feasibility Study
 - Hydraulic Modeling (18 scenarios evaluated)
 - Funded by the Wildlife Conservation Board and NOAA Restoration Center

EIR Project

- Connect Area A to North Bay
- Breach Areas B, C, & D to McNulty Slough
- Lower or remove external levees
- Breach or remove internal levees
- Excavate new tidal channels
- Install ditch plugs
- Create high marsh in Areas A, B, C, & D
- Install large wood
- Implement public access improvements
- Eradicate dense-flowered cordgrass, European beachgrass, and dwarf eelgrass

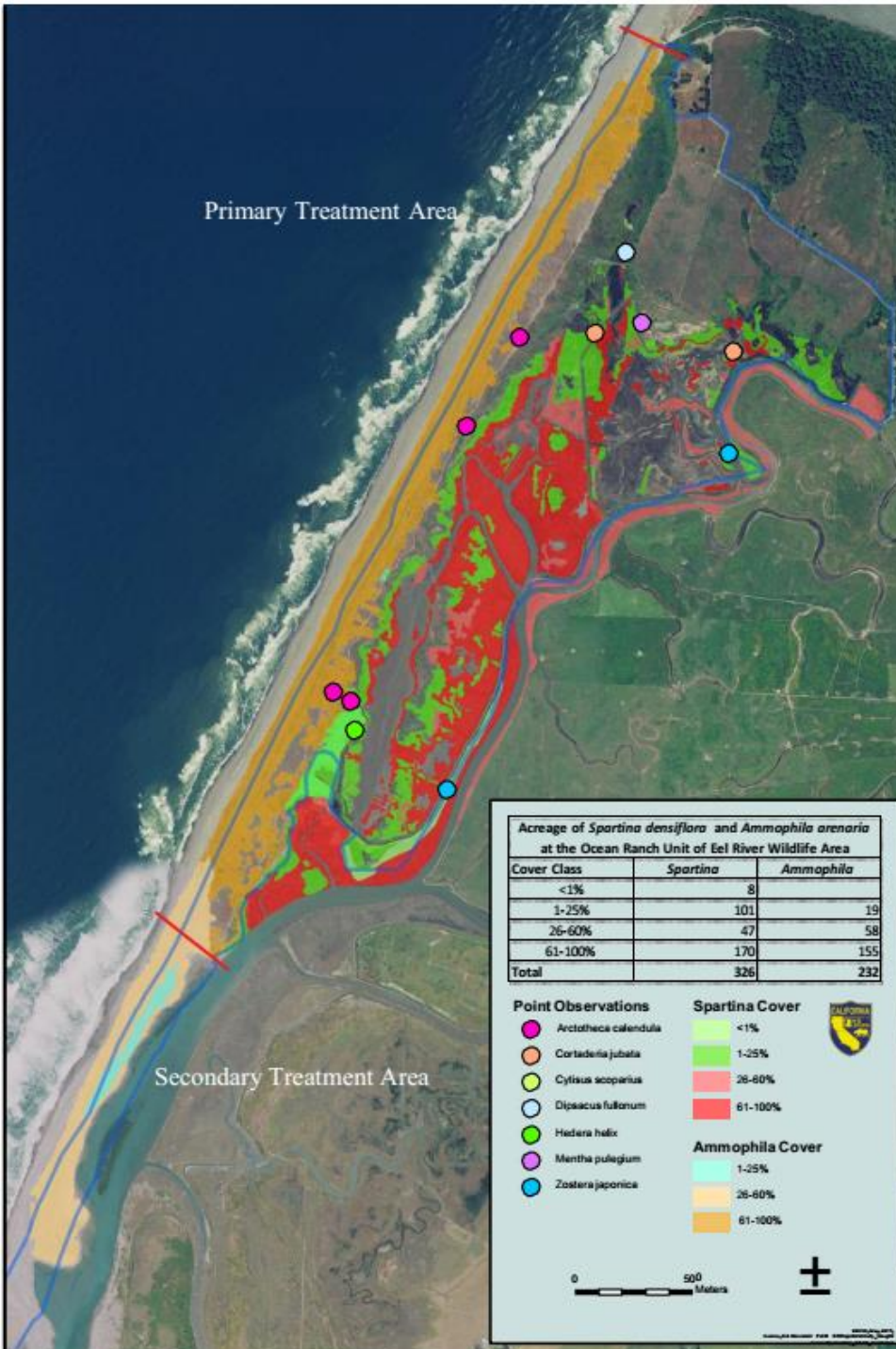
****Hydraulic model indicated potential adverse hydraulic impacts in McNulty Slough****



Ocean Ranch Unit

Primary and Secondary Restoration Areas

Draft - Conceptual Plan



Key Design and Avoidance Measures

- Spatial and temporal phasing for removal of European beachgrass
- Prescribed burns in coordination with CAL FIRE under burn plan
- Herbicides applied:
 - Under licensed applicator supervision
 - In accordance with label
 - During appropriate environmental conditions
- Project work would:
 - Conform to nesting bird and in-water work windows, as applicable
 - Completed at low tide or when site is dry / dewatered
- Special-status plant species demarcated prior to ground disturbance
- Shovel probes / surveys completed prior to work near potential cultural sites

EIR Alternatives to the Project

- Alternative 1 - No Project
- Alternative 2 - Estuarine Restoration with Limited Breaches to McNulty Slough
- Alternative 3 - No Herbicide Use

Additional Alternatives Considered but Rejected because they fail to meet most of the basic project objectives:

- Partial Estuarine Restoration Alternative
- Full Estuarine Restoration Alternative
- No Invasive Plant Management / Eradication

Environmentally Superior Alternative (Alternative 2)

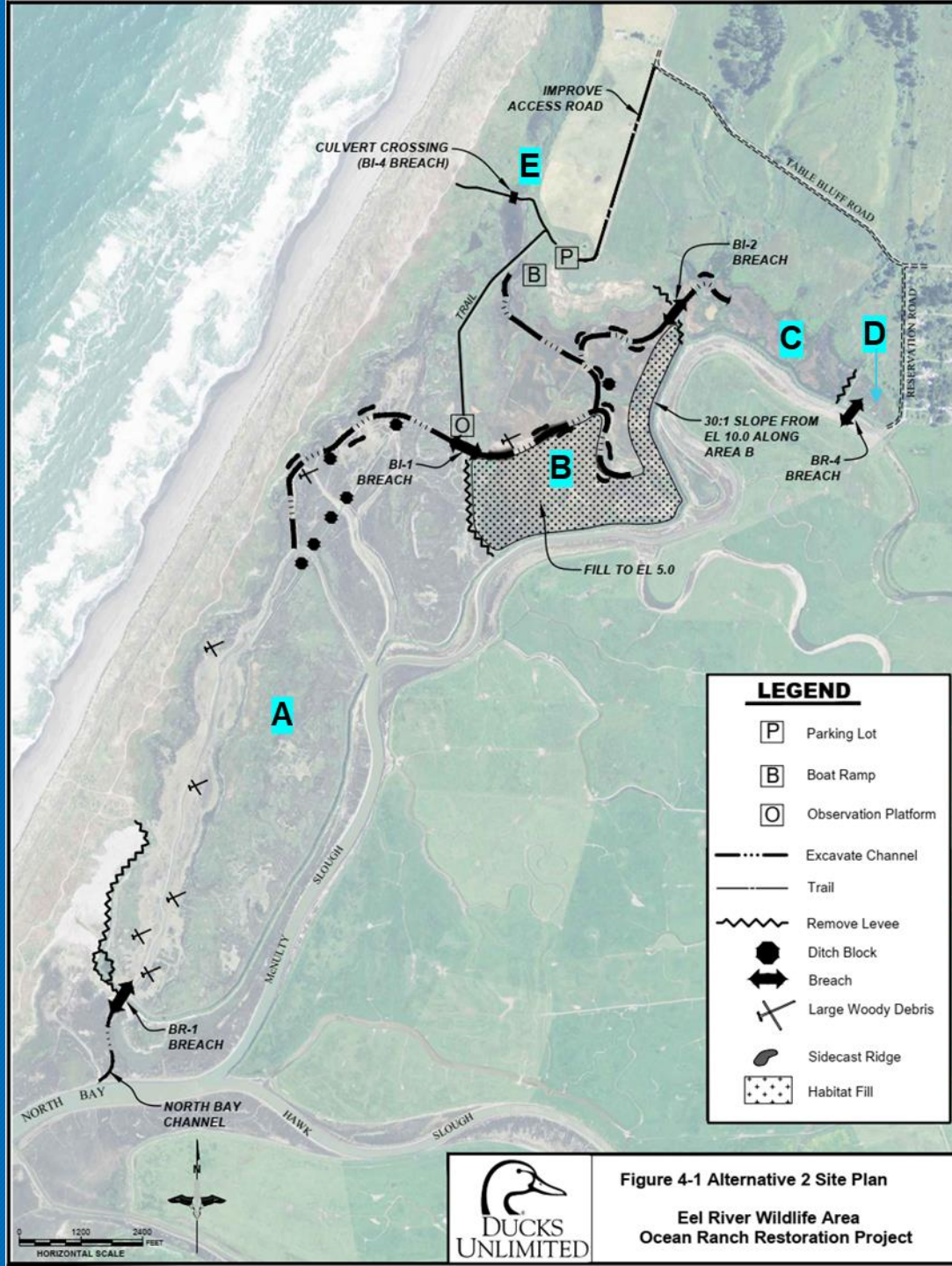
“Limited Breaches to McNulty Slough”

- Exterior breaches limited to Areas A & D
- Levees along McNulty Slough not lowered
- Channel excavation into Area A from BR-1 eliminated
- Interior channel network reconfigured to connect Areas A, B, and C
- Tidewater Goby habitat enhancement in Areas A, B, and E
- High marsh habitat limited to southern portion of Area B

Other elements similar:

- Public access components
- Eradication of dense-flowered cordgrass, European beachgrass and dwarf eelgrass

Adverse hydraulic impacts in McNulty Slough avoided = Environmentally Superior Alternative



Key CEQA Findings

- Potential adverse hydraulic impacts in McNulty Slough / on adjacent properties
 - **Impacts avoided under Alternative 2**
- Shifts in habitat types, but overall net benefit in ecological condition
- Long-term improvements in aquatic habitat due to increased connectivity and access
- Long-term improvements in dune mat and salt marsh habitat to recover native plants and wildlife
- Improved public access and amenities
- No adverse impact on agricultural lands

Next Steps

- CEQA
 - Public Comment Period on Draft EIR Closes - November 2, 2020
 - Publish & Certify Final EIR, CDFW Make Decision on Project - Winter 2020-21
- Permitting
 - Permit Submittals - Winter 2020-21
- Continued Outreach & Communication - Ongoing
 - Regulatory agencies
 - Private landowners
 - Local stakeholders
- Construction - Summer 2021-22

How to Provide Public Comments

Written Comments:

CDFW
619 2nd Street
Eureka, CA 95501
Contact: Gordon Leppig, Project Manager

Email: orurestoration@wildlife.ca.gov

Indicate “Ocean Ranch Restoration Project Draft EIR Comments” in subject line

How to Provide Oral Comments

- Please stay on mute unless you are providing comments
- Click on the “raise your hand” icon to be recognized by the moderator and taken off mute
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- Once recognized, state your full name and affiliation (if any)
- Each commenter will have up to 5 minutes to provide comments specific to this Project and/or Draft EIR
- Responses to comments will not be provided during the hearing
- The public hearing will end at 7:30, or after all oral comments have been received and recorded

THANK YOU!

