Ocean Ranch Restoration Project

Draft Environmental Impact Report Public Hearing

October 13, 2020

DUCKS UNLIMITED

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE

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

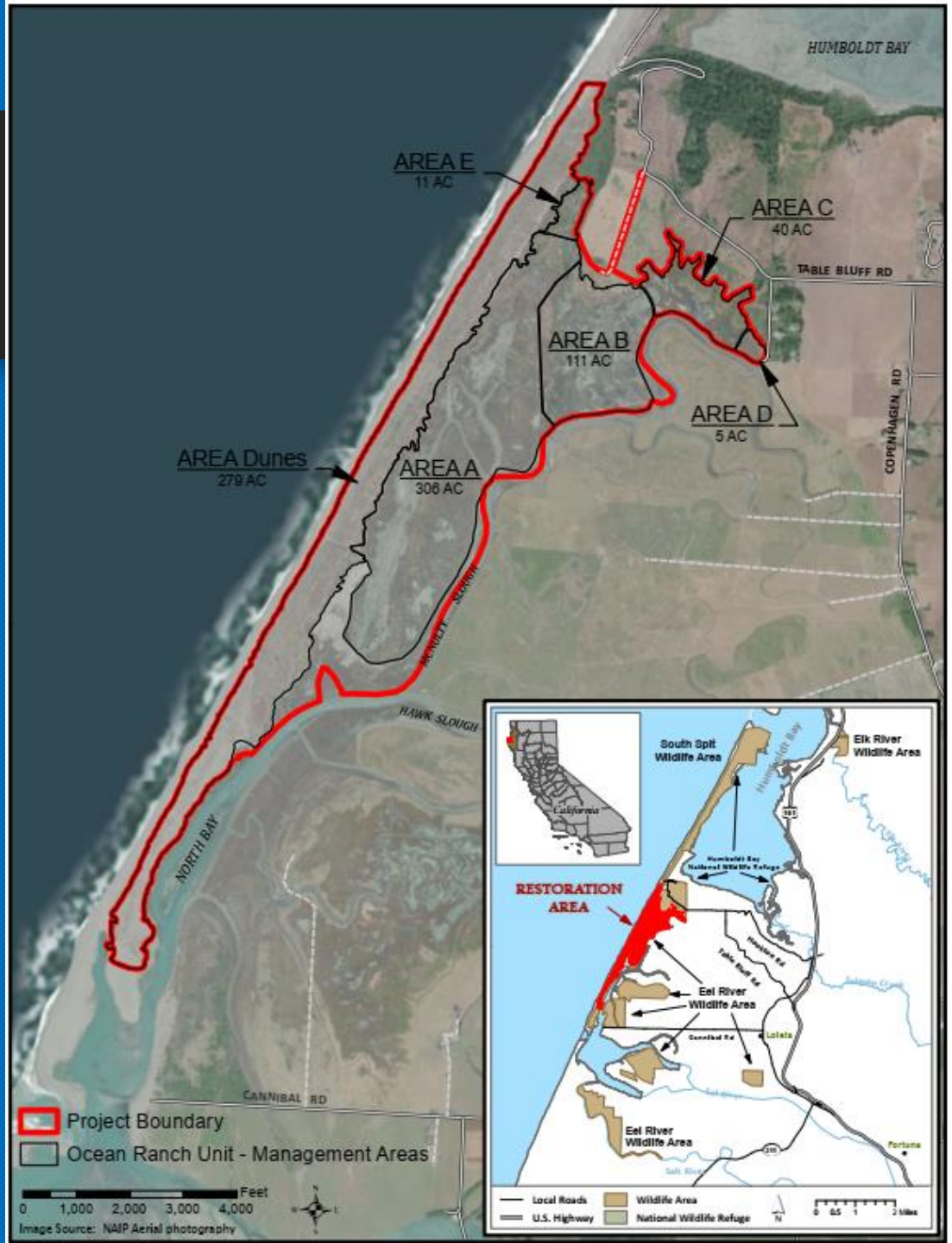
<u>Note</u>: The public hearing will be recorded. All participants will be on mute until recognized by the moderator during the oral comment portion of the meeting.

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**

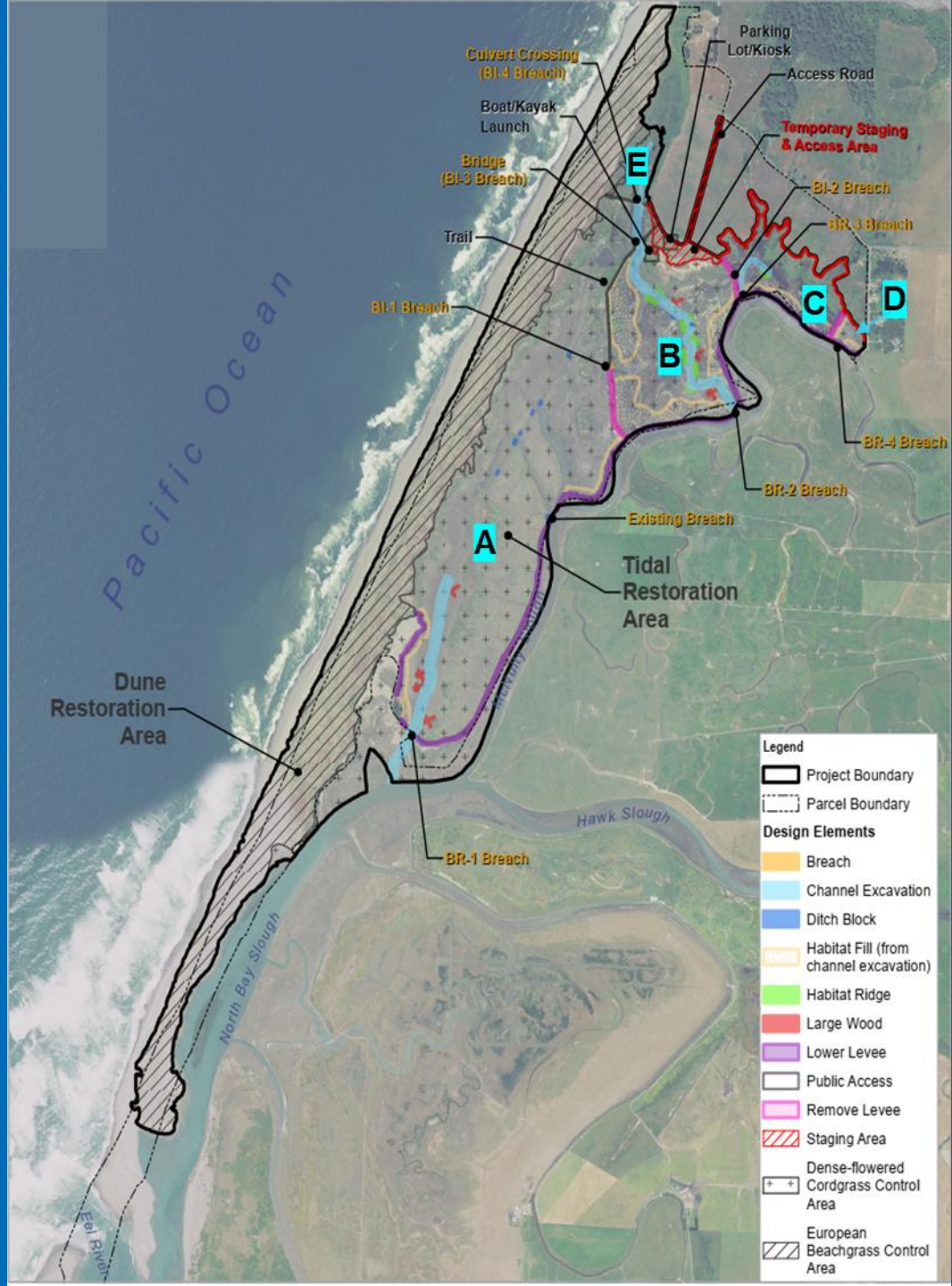
Restoration Design Process

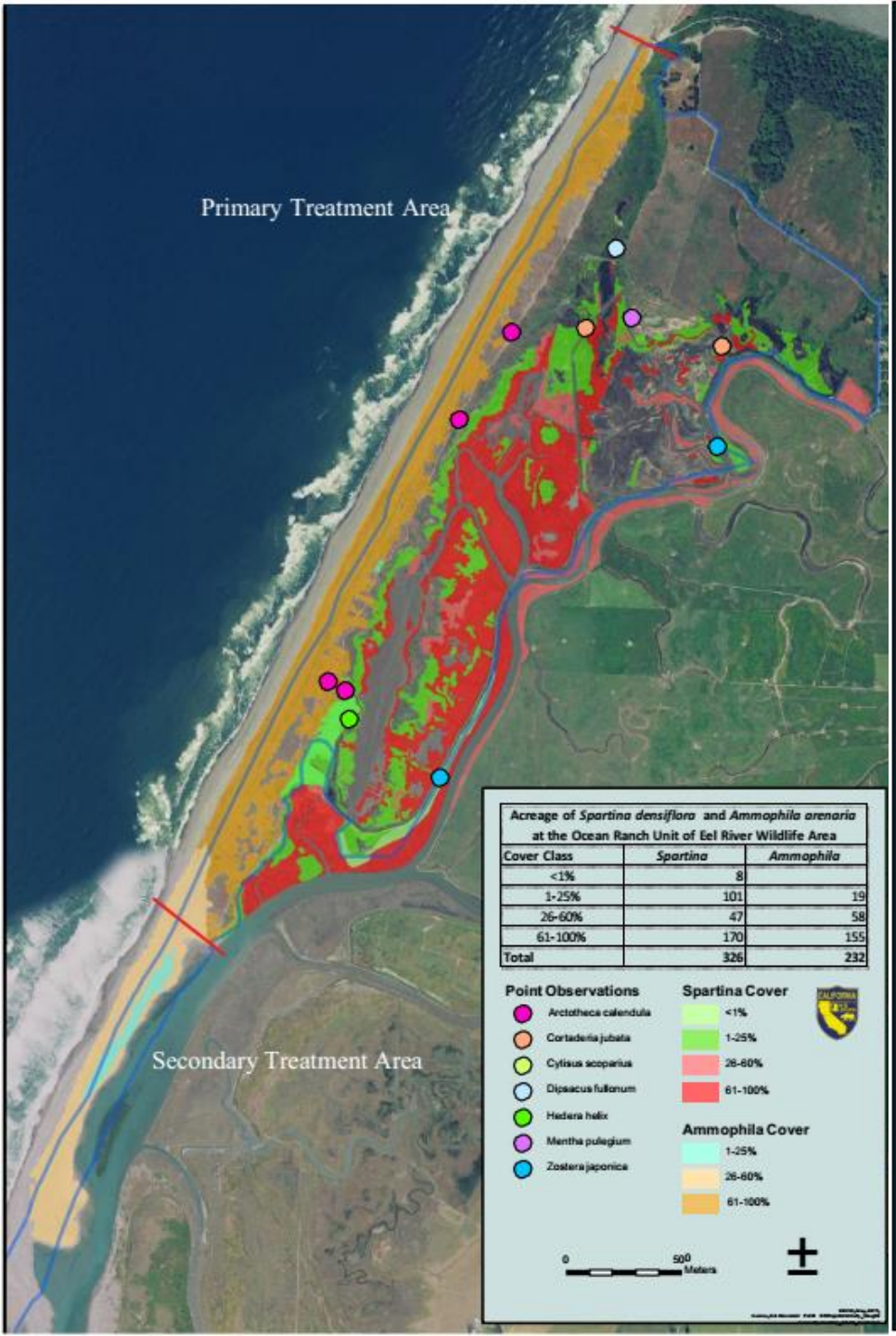
- Feasibility Study (2015)
  - Evaluated four conceptual restoration alternatives
    - Two carried forward to 30% design
  - Reflect input from Technical Advisory Committee
  - Funded by State Coastal Conservancy & CDFW
- EIR Development and 60% Design (Ongoing)
  - Alternative development informed 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****




Primary Treatment Area
Secondary Treatment Area
Acreage of Spartina densiflora and Ammophila arenaria at the Ocean Ranch Unit of Eel River Wildlife Area
Cover Class | Spartina | Ammophila
<1% | 8 |
1-25% | 101 | 19
26-60% | 47 | 58
61-100% | 170 | 155
Total | 326 | 232
Point Observations
Arctotheca calendula
Cortaderia jubata
Cytisus scoparius
Dipsacus fullonum
Hedera helix
Mentha pulegium
Zostera japonica
Spartina Cover
<1%
1-25%
26-60%
61-100%
Ammophila Cover
1-25%
26-60%
61-100%
0
500
Meters

Ocean Ranch Unit
Primary and Secondary Restoration Areas
Draft - Conceptual Plan
Primary Restoration Area
Secondary Restoration Area
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
Slough
McNulty
CALIFORNIA
Restoration Area Bo
0
0.5

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)

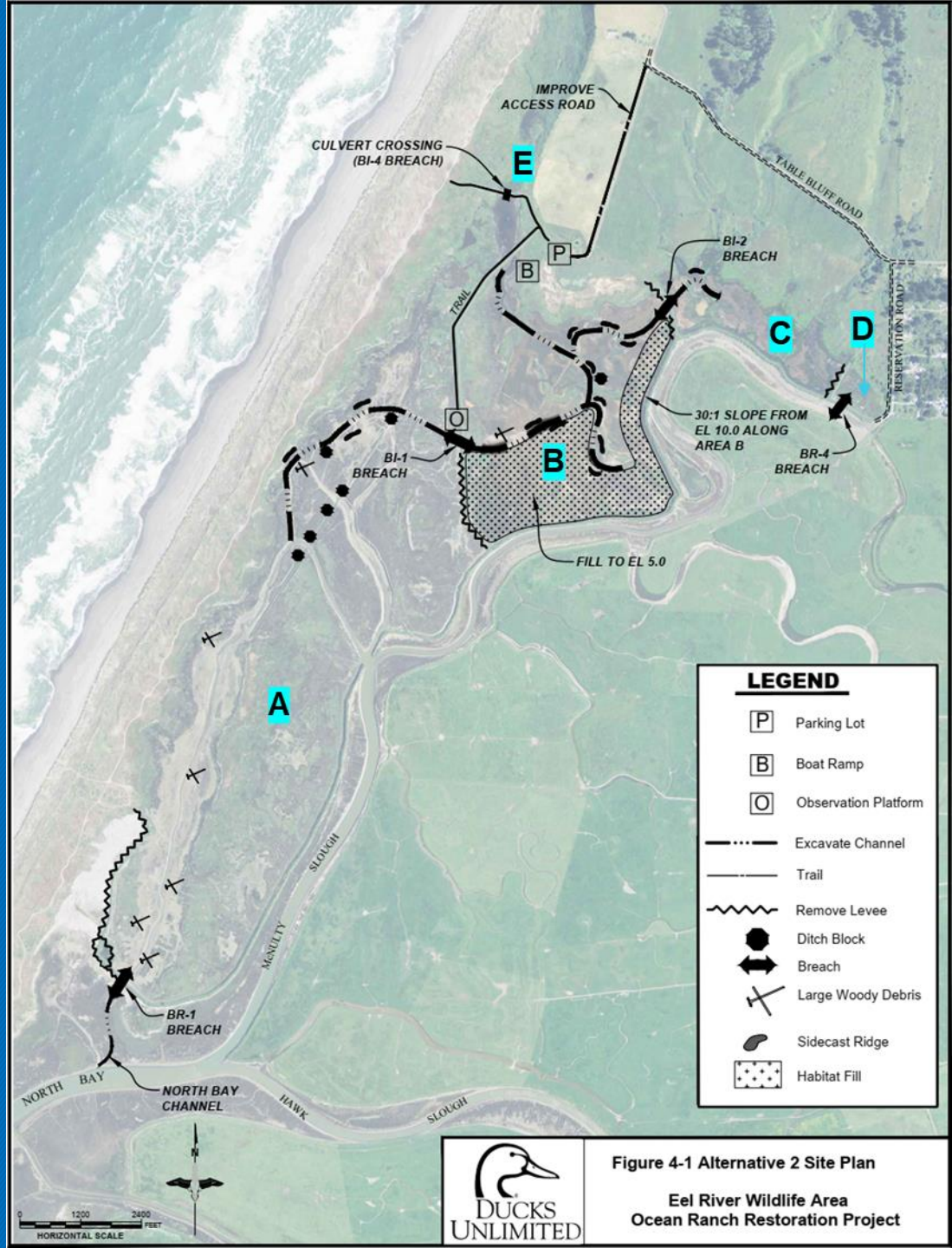
"**Limited Breaches to McNulty Slough**"

- 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
  - The moderator will ask at the end of comments if anyone on the phone would like to provide comments
- 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
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THANK YOU!

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