

California Fish and Game Commission

August 2022 Field Trip Details

- Who:** Commissioners, staff, California Department of Fish and Wildlife staff, and members of the public
- What:** Field trip to learn about and tour the Ocean Ranch Restoration Project at the Eel River Wildlife Area
- When:** Wednesday, August 17, 2022, approximately 4:00 p.m. or 45 minutes after the end of the Commission meeting (whichever is later)
- Where:** Waluplh-Lighthouse Ranch, 5064–5098 Table Bluff Rd, Loleta, CA 95551

The Commission invites members of the public to join commissioners, staff, and Department staff for a field trip late Wednesday afternoon. Members of the public are welcome to attend but must provide their own transportation.

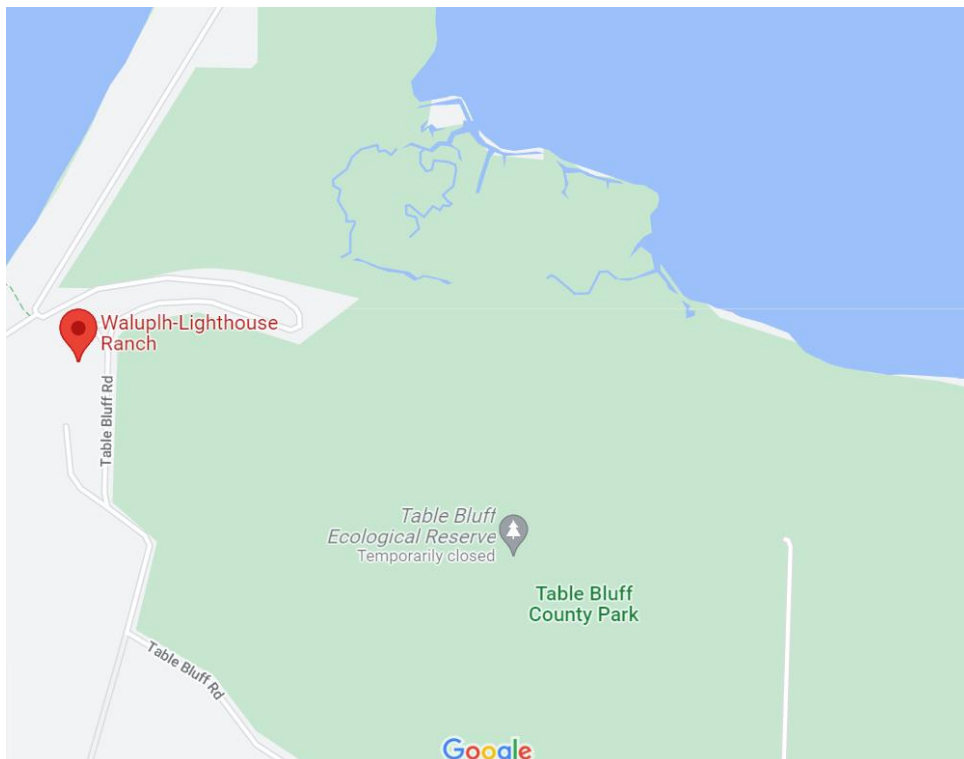
Department staff will provide an overview of the project, including its purpose, the major components, and collaborators, including the Wiyot Tribe. For background information on the project, please see the project overview starting on page 3.

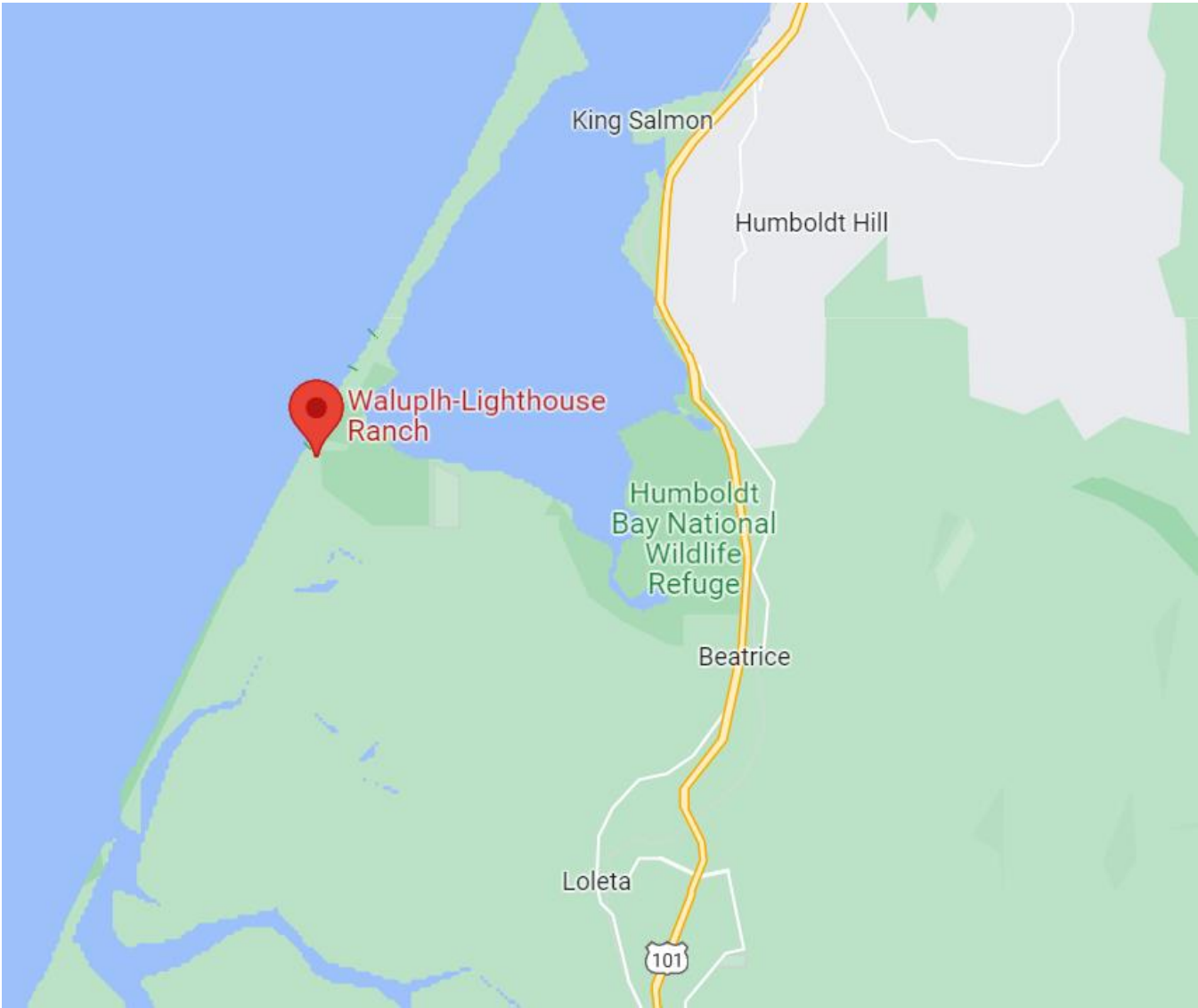
Meeting Location

Meet at the Waluplh-Lighthouse Ranch on Table Bluff overlooking the Ocean Ranch Unit. From there, participants will caravan to the restoration site.

This field trip takes place outdoors. Please wear closed-toed shoes and be prepared to walk over uneven terrain. Additionally, please bring appropriately warm, layered clothing, sun protection, and drinking water for the conditions.

General Location Maps





Ocean Ranch Restoration Project – Eel River Wildlife Area



Background: The North Spit of the Eel River, comprised of coastal dunes, was acquired from the State Lands Commission in 1954 for \$1.00. Ocean Ranch, situated adjacent to the North Spit and West of McNulty Slough, was acquired by the Wildlife Conservation Board in 1986 for \$1,724,141 for the purpose of coastal wetland habitat conservation. In combination, these two parcels became the Ocean Ranch Unit (ORU) of the Eel River Wildlife Area, which is a 2,600-acre complex in the Eel River estuary.

Project Need: Once acquired by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), a series of levees, berms, and water control structures (e.g., tide gates) were installed to allow the area to be managed as shallow freshwater and estuarine wetlands in five distinct management areas (Areas A through E). Over time, unplanned levee breaches and water control infrastructure failures resulted in decisions to discontinue management and maintenance of “artificial” wetland habitat, allowing a partial return to saltmarsh or brackish marsh. Invasive plant species have become prevalent throughout the marsh and dune habitat of the ORU, impacting Sensitive Natural Communities, reducing biodiversity, and impairing ecological processes.

Project Implementation: The Ocean Ranch Restoration Project (ORRP) will restore and enhance tidal marsh and dune mat Sensitive Natural Communities within the ORU of the Eel River Wildlife Area, including 571 acres of restored saltmarsh and 279 acres of coastal dunes. The Project has three primary elements:

- ✚ **Tidal Estuary Restoration:** activities include breaching external and internal levees; removing some internal levees; excavating tidal channels; filling lower elevation areas to create higher marsh habitat; installing ditch plugs and placing large wood structures. Site preparation activities began in Fall 2021 and construction started in May 2022.
- ✚ **Invasive Species Control and Eradication:** the estuarine restoration area is dominated by dense-flowered cordgrass (*Spartina densiflora*). Control methods targeting cordgrass include prescribed fire, herbicide (Imazapyr only), mowing, grinding, tilling and/or excavation. Coastal dunes restoration will focus on eradication of European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) using prescribed fire, herbicide, and/or manual and mechanical methods.
- ✚ **Public Access Improvement:** public access improvements include, improving the access road and parking areas, constructing a new trail system on retained levees with amenities and interpretive signage, and installing a non-motorized boat launch.

Collaborators: The ORRP is a unique and highly collaborative project across CDFW Programs and Regions, including Region 1’s Habitat Conservation, Coastal Lands, and Coastal Fisheries Programs, the Marine Region, and Law Enforcement Division. Project design, compliance and funding has been supported by Ducks Unlimited, Inc., as well as a diverse and engaged group of funding partners that played an integral role in streamlining the compliance process. In addition, the project continues to benefit from important collaboration with the Wiyot Tribe and staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System. The Ocean Ranch Unit is located on the homelands of the Wiyot people.

Ocean Ranch Restoration Project – Eel River Wildlife Area

Funding Partners:

- Wildlife Conservation Board (\$900,000)
- National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center (~\$1.4 million)
- California Coastal Conservancy (\$750,000)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (~\$1.9 million)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - National Coastal Wetlands Conservation (~\$1.8 million)

CEQA: Final Environmental Impact Report certified, Spring 2021

Map of Ocean Ranch Restoration Project Area showing Dunes and Marsh Management Areas

