

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
HOLLISTER FIELD OFFICE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (REVISED)  
Laguna Ridge Trail Construction  
DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2015-21-EA**

**CONTROL NUMBER:** #DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2015-21-EA

**CASE FILE/SERIAL NUMBER:** NA

**PROPONENT:** BLM

**PROJECT:** Trail Construction

**LOCATION:** Coast Dairies, Santa Cruz County

**AFFECTED ACREAGE:** Less than one acre (< 1 ac.) of direct surface disturbance associated with (proposed) interim access & new (trail) construction activities.

**7.5" QUADRANGLE:** Davenport

**LAND STATUS:** Public

**SPECIAL DESIGNATION AREA:** (*Recommended*) Area of Critical Environmental Concern

**AUTHORITY:** Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA)

The Federal Land Management and Policy Act (Section 102), as amended, directs Federal agencies to manage public lands on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law. Often referred to as BLM's "organic act", FLPMA also directs the agency to manage the public lands in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use.

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FEDERAL STATUTES, REGULATIONS, & PLANS**

*Endangered Species Act (ESA)*

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) requires federal agencies to complete formal consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for any action that "may affect" federally listed species or critical habitat. The ESA also requires federal agencies to use their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species.

*National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)*

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, directs all Federal agencies to take into account effects of their undertakings on properties included in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. It is implemented by regulations at 36 CFR 800 with ultimate oversight provided by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):

U.S. code (40 CFR 1508.9) states that an Environmental Assessment (EA) shall include brief discussions of the need for the proposal, of alternatives as required by section 102(2)(E), of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted.

The BLM's NEPA Handbook and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations explain that only significant issues must be the focus of the EA. Significant issues are those related to significant or potentially significant effects (reference NEPA Handbook, Section 7.3, Significance). For the purpose of BLM NEPA analysis, an "issue" is a point of disagreement, debate, or dispute with a proposed action based on some anticipated environmental effect. Issues point to environmental effects; as such, issues can help shape the proposal and alternatives.

Following a 30-day public comment period (June 10 – July 10, 2015), the BLM's Hollister Field Office revised environmental assessment #DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2015-21-EA to include a new preferred alternative for the Laguna Ridge Trail and analyze its potential impact on recreation resources, transportation and travel management, biological resources, cultural resources, livestock grazing, public health and safety, and social and economic conditions described in the affected environment.

The description of natural, cultural, and physical resources in this EA is based on BLM resource specialists' knowledge of the area and the best available information at the time of the evaluation. The impact analysis in this EA describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that are likely to occur based on current resources conditions (i.e. environmental baseline) and BLM's experience managing public lands and trails for day-use hiking on California's central coast. Similarly, issues and concerns identified during the public comment period from individuals, organizations, and the California Coastal Commission regarding potential effects of interim access to the Coast Dairies public lands on transportation (i.e. traffic) and public safety directly influenced the proposed vehicle parking and regularly scheduled, controlled access design features in the (new) preferred alternative for the Laguna Ridge Trail analyzed in this revised EA.

## **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL PLANS & POLICIES**

Planning efforts for the transfer of the Coast Dairies property into public ownership began nearly twenty years ago. Circa 1996, the California Coastal Conservancy, the County of Santa Cruz, the California State Parks (CSP), and others interested in coastal preservation expressed grave concerns about commercial real estate development plans to subdivide and construct more than one hundred residential homes on the property owned by the Coast Dairies Land Company (CDLC) surrounding the town of Davenport, CA.

As a result, the non-profit organization The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) purchased the Property on October 26, 1998. In August of 1998, CSP and BLM agreed with TPL to be the permanent stewards of the coastal and upland portions of the Property, respectively. BLM, CSP, and TPL signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on August 8, 2000 that set forth the respective roles, expectations, and obligations of the parties for interim management of the Property; and development of a land use plan to establish long-term resource management and protection goals for the Property, subject to certain deed restrictions.

The Coast Dairies Steering Committee was convened when BLM and State Parks originally agreed with TPL to accept the donation of the Coast Dairies property. The steering committee consisted of TPL, CDLC, Save-the-Redwood League, Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, and the California Coastal Conservancy. Since BLM and State Parks were selected as the permanent stewards of the property, both agencies served as non-voting members of the steering committee and participated in all public meetings related to the planning effort. Together, they prepared a vision statement to guide long-term management for the property.

In short, their vision for the Coast Dairies is to (a) protect and preserve those intrinsic natural and pastoral qualities that make the property important, (b) provide for sound, long-term stewardship of the property through cost-effective adaptive management designed to conserve and enhance its natural and cultural resource values and provide compatible recreation, and (c) allow for responsive stewardship of the natural and economic resources of the property, while creating opportunities for education in the field by integrating traditional economic and recreational activities, including programs designed to protect native biodiversity and other natural landscape values.

*Coast Dairies Long-term Resource Protection and Access Plan (Environmental Science Associates, 2004)*

Per the direction of the Coast Dairies Steering Committee, TPL commissioned the consulting firm, Environmental Science Associates, to prepare a land use plan proposal for the Coast Dairies property. This ushered in a series of scoping meetings and led to the development of the Coast Dairies Long-Term Resource Protection and Access Plan (ESA 2004). The Resource Protection and Access Plan was designed specifically to provide general direction to BLM for the management of the upland parcels of the Coast Dairies property based on extensive public feedback that was gathered at dozens of meetings from individuals, organizations, and local, State, and Federal government agencies. The Resource Protection and Access Plan identifies a three stage access program with a brief description of how each stage determines access and what additional planning documents and approvals are necessary. For the purposes of the Plan, the term “access” means both public access and other uses.

1. Immediate Access Stage: The simplest and most benign uses, or those which can be considered identical to existing conditions on the Property, were to be allowed first during the immediate access stage.
2. Interim Access Stage: As funding becomes available during the interim management stage, additional access may be provided, but only to the extent that significant impacts to the environment can be avoided.
3. Long-Term Access Stage: In the long term, BLM will develop an amendment to the Hollister Resource Management Plan that will identify allowable uses and other land use allocations. Even at this long-term access stage, future specific projects or implementation plans that interpret the general planning direction will require additional site-specific environmental review and analyses.

Environmental Science Associates also prepared a supplementary Existing Conditions Report for the Coast Dairies Property (ESA 2001) that provides valuable information regarding the natural and cultural resources on the Property that has been incorporated into this EA.

## **COAST DAIRIES LAND USE HISTORY**

The pre-historic and historic land use of the property is documented in Section 1.0 of the Coast Dairies Existing Conditions Report (ESA 2001). The information includes a thorough description of the Coast Dairies' historic significance to California native peoples, changes during the Mexican Era, then as a working ranch and dairy for over 100 years. During this time, all the upland marine terraces (including the Laguna Ridge Trail project area) were developed for agricultural row-cropping; timberlands were harvested extensively; and the local and regional demands for water resources and transportation shaped the current trends and conditions of resources on the north coast of Santa Cruz County.

## **BLM LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE:**

The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) donated the Coast Dairies property to the BLM in April 2014 with deed restrictions. As such, the FLPMA and other federal laws, the California Coastal Commission's coastal development permit (CDP 3-11-035, issued April 11, 2014), and the restrictions on the deed form the basic policy objectives for management of the area. These basic policies are designed to protect coastal resources while supporting interim and long-term public access for sustainable recreation opportunities on the Coast Dairies public lands.

The proposed action is subject to and in conformance with the Coast Dairies Interim Management Plan (BLM 2014). The Interim Management Plan (IMP) provides that recreation use of the property shall be consistent with the ability of the BLM to provide services and infrastructure necessary to ensure public health and safety and the protection of special status species; and designated trails are open to pedestrian access for day use only.

## **TIERING TO OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW DOCUMENTS**

In accordance with 40 CFR 1502.20, this Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the Existing Conditions Report for the Coast Dairies Property, prepared for the Trust for Public Lands, by Environmental Science Associates in June 2001. The Existing Conditions Report (ECR) provides a description of natural and cultural resource conditions on the Coast Dairies public lands. This information is incorporated into this EA by reference here and in other relevant resources sections within the document.

BLM's Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Southern Diablo Mountain Range and Central Coast of California (OEPC Control No.: FES 06-24) analyzed alternative land use allocations for the Coast Dairies property. A description of opportunities, affected resources, and environmental impacts related to the management of the Coast Dairies public lands can be found in the Proposed RMP and Final EIS (BLM 2006). This information is incorporated into this EA by reference here and in other relevant resources sections within the document.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT:**

All of the existing plans and agreements for the Coast Dairies property identify public access to the property during the “interim access stage” for sustainable recreation opportunities (i.e. day-use hiking) as an appropriate use for the Coast Dairies public lands.

For example, the MOU signed on August 8, 2000 explains the California Coastal Conservancy, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Packard Foundation made grants to TPL to acquire CDLC to protect the Property for the purposes of providing public access to and along the coast, protecting the natural and agricultural resources of the Property, and preserving open space. As mentioned in the MOU, these grant agreements required TPL to: (1) complete a management plan for the Property which specifies how the Property will be used to accomplish these purposes; and (2) assure that a portion of the Property is permanently dedicated for public access, open space, and natural and agricultural resource protection purposes, consistent with the intent of Public Resources Code Section 311 16(a)-(b) no later than three (3) years from the effective date (September 28, 1999) of the grant agreement. More than fifteen years have passed since the effective date of the MOU.

Therefore, the purpose for the project is to provide public access to the Coast Dairies public lands for recreational opportunities consistent with the ability of the BLM and other agencies to provide services and infrastructure necessary to ensure public health and safety and the protection of coastal resources. The project is needed because there are currently no designated open trails on the Coast Dairies public lands.

## **RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES:**

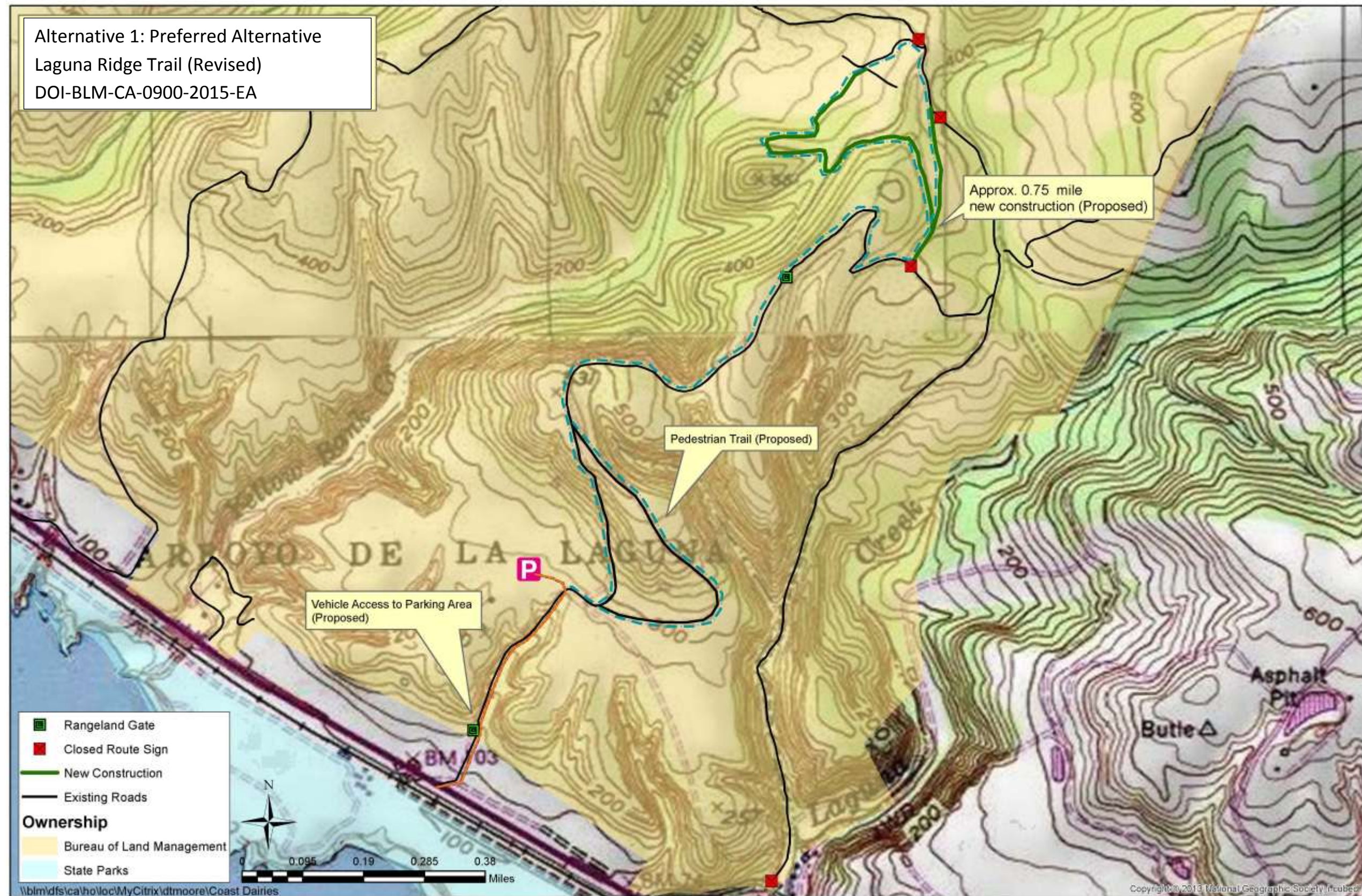
### **Alternative 1: Preferred Alternative (Revised)**

BLM proposes to develop a recreational trail with regularly scheduled, controlled access for the public to allow day-use hiking on the Laguna Ridge portion of Coast Dairies public lands. Refer to Alternative 1 map on the next page.

#### **A. Regularly Scheduled, Controlled Access and Parking**

The visiting public would park at an unimproved parking area on the first marine terrace above Laguna Ridge. Access to the parking area would be provided on an existing public easement through an agricultural field below Laguna Ridge. Temporary traffic control devices would be used to help ensure safe access and egress to the site. The unimproved parking area would be large enough for approximately 30 vehicles. Temporary fencing, flagging, or other visible markers would be used to define the unimproved parking area. A portable electric fence may be necessary to prevent conflicts with livestock and vehicles. Approximately once or twice per month (on regularly scheduled dates), BLM would open the existing (locked) range gate adjacent to the agricultural field below Laguna Ridge. BLM would allow visitors to drive highway-licensed vehicles from the agricultural field below Laguna Ridge to the unimproved parking area on the first marine terrace. On these regularly scheduled dates, BLM’s LE Rangers, Field Office staff, and/or volunteers would maintain a presence at the parking area and/or on the trail system to educate visitors, improve compliance, and enhance public safety. On days the trail is not scheduled to be open to the public, the range gate on the unimproved road would remain locked.







## **B. Trail Construction**

Construction of the proposed trail may be broken into separate phases based on available resources and funding to complete the project.

Section 1: Section 1 is an existing road on the marine terrace that connects to Section 2. Portions of Section 1 may be mowed.

Section 2: The only new trail construction would occur on a 3/4 mile segment connecting two dirt roads on the upper end of the proposed Laguna Ridge Trail. The new trail would be constructed manually by a crew with hand tools, and it would be 3 feet wide.

The proposed trail would be maintained by a combination of BLM staff and volunteers utilizing hand tools to remove overhanging brush and to repair sections of the trail, as needed, to prevent water channeling and erosion.

Range Gates: BLM proposes to modify two existing range gates to accommodate interim access on the proposed trail, as follows:

- (i) The existing range gate adjacent to the agricultural field would be hardened (i.e. reinforced) to prevent unauthorized uses during the interim access stage.
- (ii) A pedestrian walk-over or walk-through (i.e. turkey track gate) would be installed adjacent to an existing range gate on Section 1 of the proposed Laguna Ridge Trail to provide convenient ingress and egress for day-use hikers. The existing range gate would remain locked to prevent livestock from wandering outside the grazing allotments.

## **C. Trail Signs and Brochure**

BLM would place signs at intersections on the loop trail to keep the public on the designated loop trail. A brochure and map would be designed and available near the trailhead to maximize education and outreach to visitors.

Consistent with BLM's Interim Management Plan, signs would be posted to warn visitors that they must stay on the designated open trails to avoid creating a hazard. Additional information about natural hazards, including poison oak, ticks, mountain lions, and rattlesnakes may be posted to improve public safety.

## **D. Allowable Use(s)**

To ensure recreational use of the Coast Dairies public lands is consistent with the ability of the BLM and other agencies to provide services and infrastructure necessary to ensure public health and safety and the protection of special status species, BLM would enforce the following interim rules on the Laguna Ridge Trail:

- Visitors must stay on designated open trails to avoid creating a hazard, as indicated on BLM trail maps and signage at key points along the trail.

- Use and/or discharge of firearms is prohibited within 150 yards of recreation facilities, including public parking areas and designated trails.
- Campfires or other open flame fires are prohibited.
- Littering and the disposal of any commercial, industrial, or household waste is prohibited.
- The possession or discharge of fireworks or any explosive device or materials is prohibited.
- Collection of resources on public lands, including but not limited to forest products (i.e. wood, vegetation, mushrooms, etc.), geologic materials (i.e. rocks, soils), or fish & wildlife (i.e. insects, amphibians, etc.) is prohibited.
- Unauthorized disturbance to any archeological or historic site or structure is prohibited; collection of any historic or cultural artifacts, features, objects, or fossils without a permit is prohibited.
- Visitors with dogs would be required to keep their pets on a leash to prevent conflicts with livestock, wildlife, and other visitors.

### **Alternative 2: Laguna Rd. Trailhead & Parking**

Under this alternative, BLM would also develop a recreational trail on the Laguna Ridge portion of the Coast Dairies public lands. However, under Alternative 2, the proposed trailhead connects to an existing parking area adjacent to the intersection of State Route 1 and Laguna Rd. Refer to Alternative 2 map on the next page.

#### **A. Parking, Patrol, and Maintenance**

The visiting public would park at the (Santa Cruz County) public parking area at the intersection of Laguna Rd. and the Pacific Coast Highway (State Route 1) to access the proposed Laguna Ridge trail when the project is complete. There would be no changes to the existing parking area under the proposed action. However, extensive clean-up of the area surrounding the parking lot, including vegetation removal may be necessary to ensure public safety at the proposed trailhead.

BLM would maintain a frequent presence on the trail system to educate visitors, and provide regular law enforcement patrols to improve compliance and protect public safety.

After the initial trail construction, BLM would leverage volunteer support for periodic maintenance of the proposed recreational trail (and other projects) to promote awareness and improve stewardship of the Coast Dairies public lands.

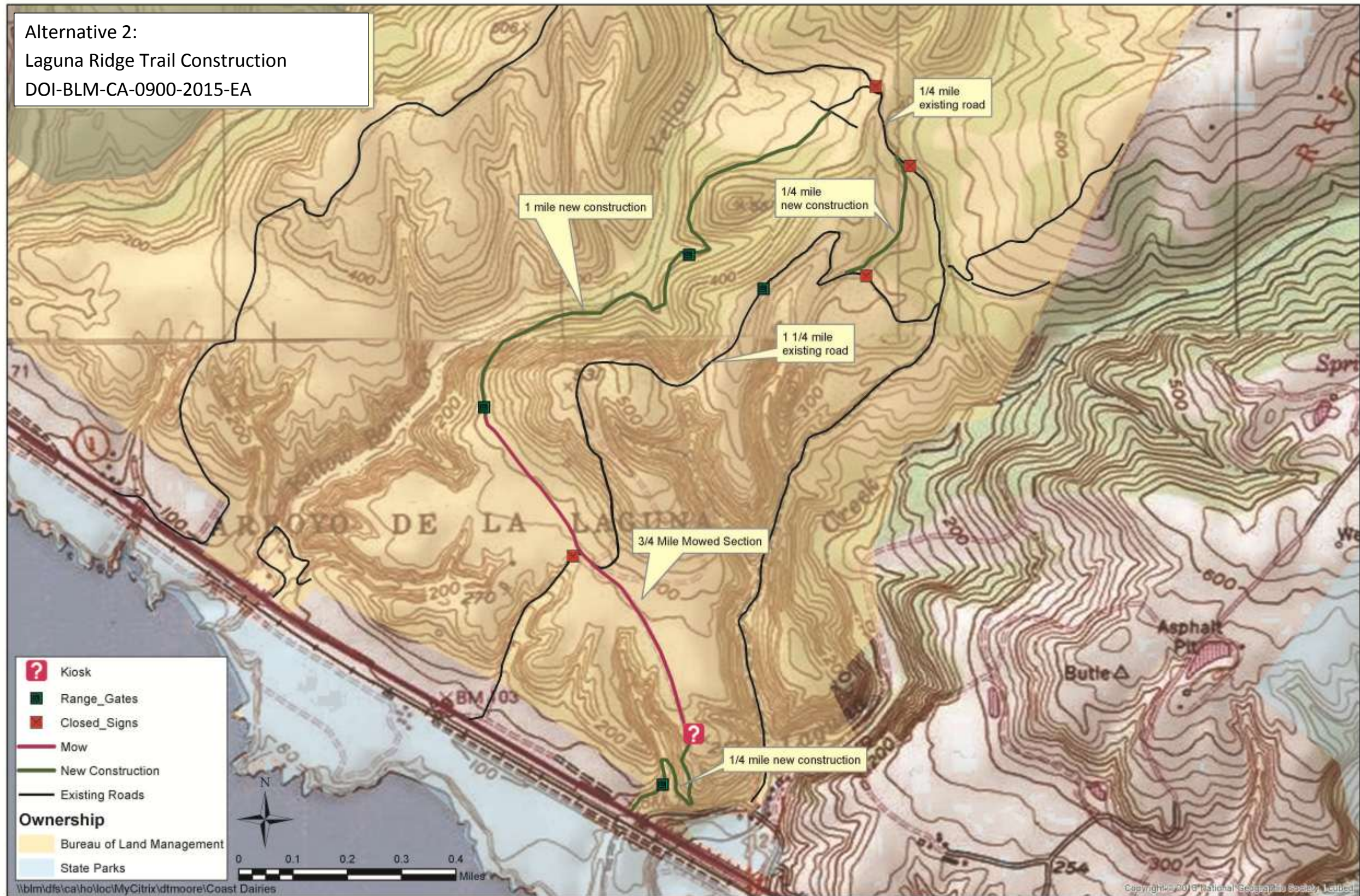
#### **B. Trail Construction**

The proposed trail is divided into four sections (see map) based on equipment needed for construction and the schedule for implementation, which may be broken into separate phases based on available resources and funding to complete the project.

Section 1: The short  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile segment connecting the County parking area to the terrace above would be constructed utilizing a SWECO trail machine, and it would be 4 feet wide. Extensive clean-up of the area surrounding the parking lot, including vegetation removal using heavy equipment (i.e. bulldozer, and/or front loader), may be necessary to ensure public safety at the trailhead.



Alternative 2:  
Laguna Ridge Trail Construction  
DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2015-EA





Section 2: Next, there is a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile segment on the marine terrace connecting the Section 1 and Section 3 that would be mowed.

Section 3: The majority of new trail construction would occur on a 1 mile segment traversing the hillside above Yellow Bank Creek. The new trail would be constructed utilizing a SWECO trail machine, and it would be 4 feet wide.

Section 4: A short  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile segment of new trail connecting two dirt roads on the upper end of the proposed Laguna Ridge Trail. The new trail would be constructed utilizing a SWECO trail machine, and it would be 4 feet wide.

Trail Brushing: Following the SWECO, Section 1, Section 3, and Section 4 of the proposed trail would be manicured by a combination of BLM staff and volunteers utilizing hand tools to remove overhanging brush and to level the dirt berm left by the SWECO on the downhill side of the trail, thereby preventing water channeling and erosion.

Pedestrian Gates: Numerous (~ 4) walk-through gates need to be installed at various points on the proposed Laguna Ridge Trail to prevent livestock from wandering outside the grazing allotments. These gates would be designed and located to minimize visual impacts and provide convenient ingress and egress for visitors to the public lands. For example, a turkey track gate would accomplish this goal. Other designs features may also be necessary, such as spring-loaded (swinging) gates and/or winged fences.

### **C. Trail Signs and Kiosk**

BLM would place signs at intersections on the loop trail to keep the public on the designated loop trail. A kiosk would be designed and located near the trailhead to maximize education and outreach to visitors, but away from the parking area to minimize visual impacts.

Consistent with BLM's Interim Management Plan, signs would be posted to warn visitors that they must stay on the designated open trails to avoid creating a hazard. Additional information about natural hazards, including poison oak, ticks, mountain lions, and rattlesnakes would be posted to improve public safety. The design for the proposed kiosk would adhere to the BLM Guidelines for a Quality Built Environment (USDI 2010). Examples are provided below.

Example: 1-panel kiosk



Example: 3-panel kiosk



#### **D. Allowable Use(s)**

Upon completion, the proposed trail would be designated “open” to non-motorized uses, “limited” to pedestrian day-use only. Consistent with BLM’s Interim Management Plan, visitors must stay on the designated open trail to avoid creating a hazard. Also, visitors with dogs would be required to keep their pets on a leash to prevent conflicts with livestock, wildlife, and other visitors.

To ensure recreational use of the Coast Dairies public lands is consistent with the ability of the BLM and other agencies to provide services and infrastructure necessary to ensure public health and safety and the protection of special status species, BLM would enforce the following interim rules on the Laguna Ridge Trail:

- Visitors must stay on designated open trails, as indicated on BLM trail maps and signage at key points along the trail.
- Use and/or discharge of firearms is prohibited within 150 yards of recreation facilities, including public parking areas and designated trails.
- Campfires or other open flame fires are prohibited.
- Littering and the disposal of any commercial, industrial, or household waste is prohibited.
- The possession or discharge of fireworks or any explosive device or materials is prohibited.
- Collection of resources on public lands, including but not limited to forest products (i.e. wood, vegetation, mushrooms, etc.), geologic materials (i.e. rocks, soils), or fish & wildlife (i.e. insects, amphibians, etc.) is prohibited.
- Unauthorized disturbance to any archeological or historic site or structure is prohibited; collection of any historic or cultural artifacts, features, objects, or fossils without a permit is prohibited.

#### **Best Management Practices (BMP’s) Common to Action Alternatives**

1. During trail construction, crews would avoid removing any mature toyons, coffeeberry, or other tree species.
2. To reduce potential for erosion, BLM would implement control measures to channel run-off away from the trail. Common methods used to reduce erosion may include water barring along the new trail or properly spaced cross drains or dips, as needed. Disposal of runoff would also be reduced by out sloping the new sections of trail.
3. To avoid or minimize adverse effects to the San Francisco Dusky Footed Woodrat, BLM staff would look for (dusky footed woodrat) nests in the project area. If potential nests are found in the project area, project activities will attempt to avoid disturbing nests or opening up that area to light which might result in increased susceptibility to predators. If nests cannot be avoided, BLM and partners will contact CDFW (staff person assigned to the project) to develop appropriate site-specific protection measures.
4. If construction activities cannot occur completely outside the bird breeding season, then pre-construction surveys for active nests shall be conducted by a BLM biologist within 1,200 feet of the construction zone no more than seven days before the initiation of construction that would occur between February 1 and August 15. If breeding birds with

active nests are found, a biological monitor shall establish a species-specific buffer around the nests for ground-based construction activities, 250 feet or 1,200 feet for raptor nests. Extent of protection will be based on proposed management activities, human activities existing at the onset of nesting initiation, species, topography, vegetative cover, and other factors. When appropriate, a no-disturbance buffer around active nest sites will be required from nest-site selection to fledging. If for any reason a bird nest must be removed during the nesting season, written documentation providing concurrence from the USFWS and CDFW authorizing the nest relocation shall be obtained. All nest removals shall occur after the nest is demonstrated to be inactive by a qualified biologist and have been shown to not result in take as defined by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

5. In the event of inadvertent discovery of Cultural Resources during implementation, the Field Office Manager shall be immediately notified by personnel responsible for implementation of the undertaking. All work shall cease at the site of discovery and all other work which may damage the cultural resource shall also cease. The Field Office Cultural Resource Staff shall make an assessment of the situation and in consultation with the Field Office Manager may prescribe the emergency implementation of appropriate physical and administrative conservation measures.

### **Alternative 3: No Action**

The proposed action would not be undertaken as proposed. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

### **Alternatives Considered, but not Analyzed in Detail**

NEPA's Section 102(2)(E) directs agencies to analyze an appropriate range of alternatives necessary to resolve conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.

### **Coast Dairies Comprehensive Access and Trails Plan Alternative(s)**

In their comments (ref. Attachment 1), the Sierra Club suggests that assessment of the property as a whole is necessary to make the best decisions relative to visitor access and resource protection. Similarly, the Rural Bonny Doon Association asserts that any new trail opening proposed should be preceded by a broader comprehensive plan. However, BLM has determined it is not necessary to develop a comprehensive access and trails plan alternative because consensus has been established concerning public access to the Coast Dairies property based on input from interested parties.

As mentioned previously, the original Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by TPL, BLM, and CSP, the Coastal Development Permit (CDP 3-11-035) issued April 11, 2014, and the restrictions on the deed form the basic policy objectives for management of the area. These basic policies are designed to protect coastal resources while supporting interim public access to the property for sustainable recreation opportunities on the Coast Dairies public lands.



### Molino Bank Trail and Liddell Creek Trail Alternative(s)

The BLM approved the Coast Dairies Interim Management Plan (IMP) on June 4, 2014. The IMP provides a general strategy to manage interim access for public visitors that can be implemented to protect natural, cultural, and social resource attributes.

The IMP and associated EA (#DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2014-29-EA) identified two trails that BLM considered for interim access pedestrian for day use only (pg. 10). BLM's IMP states "public use of designated parking areas and hiking trails would not be allowed until a site specific proposal (and funds) are available for the development of infrastructure and other actions necessary to support day-use pedestrian access on the Molino Bank Trail and Liddell Creek Trail" (pg. 31).

During the regular meetings of local organizations, and through correspondence with individuals following the transfer of the Coast Dairies into public ownership, BLM was provided feedback on the issues and concerns associated with interim access for pedestrian day-use on the Molino pasture trail and the Liddell Creek trail. Following a meeting at the Swanton Pacific Ranch hosted by the Davenport North Coast Association on August 8, 2014, and another hosted by the Rural Bonny Doon Association on September 24, 2014, BLM received several letters that expressed concerns about impacts to traffic, public safety, and emergency response associated with the Molino pasture trail, as well as feedback with similar concerns about the impacts to traffic, public safety, and riparian resources from the development of the Liddell Creek trail and the parking facilities that would be required to support public access to these locations.

Based on the public feedback and discussions during site visits with the Santa Cruz County Public Works staff, BLM decided to postpone the implementation of the Molino pasture trail and the Liddell Creek Trail in favor of an interim access proposal that would avoid adverse impacts to traffic and public safety. The assumption is that the provisions of the IMP are designed to allow BLM to consider other alternatives for interim access that avoid potential adverse impacts, and that other proposals (i.e. Laguna Ridge Trail) will be reviewed under appropriate environmental regulations prior to implementation.

### **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

**Note to Reader:** In accordance with 40 CFR 1502.20, this Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the Existing Conditions Report for the Coast Dairies Property, prepared for the Trust for Public Land, by Environmental Science Associates in June 2001. The Existing Conditions Report (ECR) provides a description of natural and cultural resources conditions on the Coast Dairies public lands. This information is incorporated into this EA by reference here and in other relevant resources sections within the document.

Critical Element	Yes	No	Critical Element	Yes	No
Biological Resources		X	Special Designations		X
Cultural Resources & Native American Values		X	Special Status Species		X
Environmental Justice		X	Transportation	X	
Soils (including Prime or Unique Farm Lands)		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Recreation	X		Water Resources		X

The following elements of the human environment, subject to review specified in statute, regulation or executive order, are not located within the project area: Ecologically Critical Area, Floodplains, or Wild and Scenic Rivers.

### **Recreation Resources**

The Coast Dairies public lands are complex and exemplify the dramatic natural beauty of Santa Cruz County's North Coast. The scenery and resources have elicited a sense of connection to the land for many generations of residents and visitors. The area's importance in the consciousness of the local communities includes intangibles such as traditional rural character, "quality of life" (i.e. ambient healthful living conditions; aesthetics; and a strong sense of community).

Currently, there is no public access to the Coast Dairies public lands. However, in the nineteenth century, Laguna Creek was famous for a large stand of California laurel trees that grew upstream from its coastal lagoon, and early accounts describe the area as a picnic ground and a place of summer rest and joy to thousands (ECR, pg. 1-37).

It is common knowledge that existing trails in the region can be crowded, or prohibit specific visitor uses such as mountain biking and/or dog-walking. For example, there is a report on the National Trails Training Partnership website (hosted by American Trails.org) titled, "Studying recreation attitudes among hikers and bicyclists: Analyzing land-use conflict between hikers and mountain bikers in the Santa Cruz Mountains, California. By T.P. Osbaldeston, University of Liverpool Department of Geography". The report states that "the Santa Cruz Mountains, and the numerous State Parks and Recreation Areas which nestle within them are considerable magnets, if not for out of state tourists, then certainly for many of the area's resident outdoor recreationists." Other studies, including one titled "A Conservation Blueprint: An Assessment and Recommendations from the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, May 2011", report that "over a quarter of the county's protected landscape is open to public access, providing an array of opportunities for healthy recreation and environmental education. This wealth of natural recreation draws millions of visitors to the county each year, making tourism a critical part of our

local economy.” However, the study’s authors note “the county’s wealth of recreational opportunities is not evenly distributed”, and “the county’s array of nature centers and educational programs struggle to meet the need to teach future generations about nature.”

Nowadays, with good weather conditions, vehicles are regularly parked at nearly all the available pull-outs and/or unimproved parking areas along the highway on the north coast. The vast majority of these visitors are accessing local beaches on weekends and holidays. The parking area at the intersection of State Route 1 and Laguna Rd. is currently used by people that are going to Laguna Creek Beach. Laguna Creek Beach is managed by California State Parks and is used by a wide variety of people, including sunbathers, families, fishermen, musselers (in winter), unregulated overnight campers (some long-term), and surfers. The north end of the beach and the areas surrounding the wetland are most heavily used, because they provide shelter from summer winds.

Other regional parks and open spaces include numerous coastal beaches, seven state parks, and natural preserves administered by the City of Santa Cruz. Three state parks and one state reserve – Big Basin, Año Nuevo, Henry Cowell Redwoods, and Wilder Ranch – lie to the north, east, and south of Coast Dairies respectively. Gray Whale Ranch, a public open space administered by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), lies between Wilder Ranch and Henry Cowell Redwoods.

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Committee (SCCRTC) certified the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan on November 7, 2013. The Final EIR (SCCRTC 2013) anticipated vehicle trip generation for the regional trail project based on San Diego City park use and rates applied to the acreage of the proposed trail and its supporting land. The Final EIR (SCCRTC 2013) reports the volume of pedestrian trips expected to be generated by the entire 49-mile Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail at 500 or so pedestrian and several thousand bicyclists per day. Also according to the EIR, approximately 20 pedestrians per hour (pph) are anticipated on the Davenport segment of the trail on the north coast of Santa Cruz.

### **Transportation and Travel Management**

The Pacific Coast Highway (State Route 1) was straightened and leveled beginning in the late 1930s. Regional access to the Coast Dairies public lands is provided by State Route (SR) 1. SR-1 provides access to San Francisco to the north and Monterey to the south. Though the highway is oriented in an east-to-west direction at the intersection with Laguna Road, it is primarily aligned in a north-to-south direction for interregional travel. The highway is two lanes wide and the speed limit is 55 mph.

At the Yellow Bank Creek and Laguna Creek portions of the Coast Dairies property, the two-lane highway is at a level-grade sufficient to allow a clear line of sight for a minimum of 11 seconds when approaching from the north-bound and/or south-bound directions. There is existing (unimproved) parking area that is immediately adjacent to the east side of SR 1 and the intersection of Laguna Road. The unimproved parking area has a barrier chain and pylons. There

are two points where vehicles enter or exit: onto SR 1, or onto Laguna Road. Currently, this parking area is primarily used by the public to access the ocean.

There are numerous existing roads in the Yellow Bank Creek and Laguna Creek watersheds, including numerous routes (or ways) used by grazing leaseholders and the City of Santa Cruz Water Department. Section 4.2.8.2 of the Existing Conditions Report (ESA 2001) describes the road network at Coast Dairies. Figure III-5 of the Long-Term Resource Protection and Access Plan (ESA 2004) also maps the road network in the project area.

Traffic conditions are measured by average daily traffic (ADT), peak hour traffic volumes, level of service (LOS), average delay, and volume to capacity (V/C) ratio. Average daily traffic is the total number of cars passing over a segment of the roadway, in both directions, on an average day. Peak hour volumes are the total number of cars passing over a roadway segment during the peak hour in the morning (AM) or afternoon/evening (PM). “Level of Service” (LOS) is used to identify the magnitude of traffic congestion and delay at intersections. Intersections are rated based on a grading scale of LOS “A” through LOS “F,” with LOS A representing free-flowing conditions and LOS F representing congested conditions. The intermediate levels of service represent incremental levels of congestion and delay between these two extremes.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) published the Transportation Concept Report (TCR) for SR 1 in April 2006. The 2006 TCR and associated Fact Sheet for SR 1 in Santa Cruz County (Caltrans, September 2007), identify the 17-mile stretch of SR 1 from the City of Santa Cruz to the San Mateo County line as Segment 19. Annual ADT for Segment 19 in 2000 was 8,000, and the forecast for 2025 is 12,000 annual ADT. In 2007, Segment 19 operated at LOS D, but is projected to decline to LOS E by the year 2025. The TCR says Segment 19 will remain a two-lane conventional highway and that new access points should be minimized.

The TCR identifies Wilder Ranch State Park, Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, Davenport, and Big Basin Redwoods State Park as the major traffic generators on Segment 19.

### **Fire Management**

Santa Cruz County has a low frequency of lightning fires compared to other counties in the state. Research suggests the region’s redwood forests evolved in an environment characterized by infrequent but intense (hot, crowning) fires. The mean fire interval (MFI) under natural conditions would be 100 to 150 years, but human influence has decreased the MFI to 25-50 years. Like much of California, modern fire suppression has resulted in abnormal conditions, with periodic fire denied its regenerative role in forest ecology. The resulting vegetation changes on the Coast Dairies Property include increased fuel loading, greater tree density, and tree invasion of shrub (chaparral) areas.

### **Livestock Grazing**

The proposed trail/route is within two grazing pastures. Approximately 20-30 head of cows and calves, bulls, and/or stocker cattle graze the pastures most of the year. There are water troughs and corrals throughout the pastures and near the proposed trail/route. The grazing cooperators move and handle their livestock by horseback and ATV.



Dogs may chase the livestock and run them through fences and potentially into adjacent farming fields, private property, or Highway 1. Cows with calves will especially get agitated with dogs running loose and will charge dogs (and possibly owners) to protect their calves.

## **Lands & Realty**

There are existing authorized lands uses in the general project area. In particular, there is one existing residence and an agricultural operation that may be affected by the use of the existing parking areas and/or roads to access the Laguna Ridge portion of the Coast Dairies. The City of Santa Cruz Water Department employees regularly operate vehicles and other equipment on the existing routes in the project area, including Laguna Road, which forms the uppermost portion of the trail system.

## **Biological Resources**

Section 3.0 of the ECR (ESA 2001) provides a comprehensive evaluation of the biological resources on the Coast Dairies property, including a characterization of vegetation communities and fish and wildlife that are likely to occur in the Laguna Ridge area.

### Fish and Wildlife

Wildlife habitats are not as delineated as vegetation communities, which are characterized by certain plant species adapted to specific environmental conditions. The project area (where surface disturbance would occur) does not include streams, ponds, or other typical habitat for amphibians or aquatic species.

### Vegetation

The project area is divided into three general sections, as follows.

Section from State Route 1 to the first marine terrace: The agricultural fields are not considered habitat because they are cultivated lands. Near the existing parking area at Laguna Rd. there is a collection of invasive exotic plants including wild radish (*Raphanus sativus*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and invasive grass species. The area directly behind the cut bank above the parking area consists of a thick patch of willows, including arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*). Previous construction has changed the hydrology of this riparian area, but water accumulates in this area, which has sustained this willow patch. The remainder of this section consists of maritime scrub with dominant shrub species: California sage (*Artemisia californica*), coyotebrush (*Baccharis pilularis*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), and coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*). Wild cucumber (*Marah fabacea*) is present on many of these shrubs.

Section(s) on the first and second marine terrace(s): These sections have been used as agricultural fields in the past, and are currently utilized as cattle grazing areas, which consist primarily of non-native (i.e. invasive) annual grasses with occasional native species including California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) and poison oak. These sections are connected by existing ranch roads that are used and maintained regularly by grazing operators.

Section on the upper end of loop trail: This section consists mainly of shrubs species, including coffeeberry and poison oak. The proposed trail would connect to a small second-growth redwood grove. This section also crosses a relatively flat area at northernmost portion of the proposed loop trail that has a mix of poison oak, and coyotebrush with an understory of invasive exotic grasses and connects to a redwood grove. For the redwood grove section of the trail, it is possible to place the trail between redwood trees (rather than necessitating removal of redwood trees).

### Special Status Species

It is BLM policy to conduct inventories to identify known occurrences and determine the potential for special status species and their associated habitats to exist on lands managed by BLM to evaluate the impacts of federal actions on any special status species that might be within the area of a proposed project. Based on multiple site-visits and a review of the best available Coast Dairies data, BLM biologists determined there are no known occurrences of special status species within the proposed project area where surface disturbances from parking, trail use, and new trail construction is proposed under the range of alternatives analyzed in this EA.

### ***Federally Listed Fish and Wildlife Species***

California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*); Steelhead salmon (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*)

The California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) is federally listed Threatened. The central California distinct population segment of steelhead salmon (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) is federally listed Threatened. The central California distinct population segment of Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) is federally listed Endangered.

California red-legged frog, Steelhead salmon, and Coho salmon have all been found in some of Coast Dairies property watersheds. However, based on biological surveys to identify potential habitat areas on Coast Dairies occupied by California red-legged frogs and the listed salmon species, the project area where surface disturbance would occur from trail use and construction activities does not include the habitat necessary to support these species.

### Ohlone Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela ohlone*)

The Ohlone Tiger Beetle (OTB) was listed as an endangered species in 2001. The OTB is associated with coastal prairies that occur on former marine terraces in and near the city of Santa Cruz, California. Historically, changes in land use practices and colonization by invasive weeds and annual grasses altered the plant species composition and structure (i.e., increased plant density, accumulation of thatch, and/or reduced amount of bare or sparsely-vegetated ground) of the coastal prairie habitat to the detriment of the OTB (USDI, 2012).

According to Knisley and Arnold (2013), who discuss extensive surveys conducted between 1996 and 2012, the species is restricted to Watsonville loam soil, and was found at only 17 of over 200 sites of this habitat type. Most sites were unsuitable because they lacked bare ground surface needed by adults and larvae. During the same period, OTB disappeared from eight of these sites as a result of land use changes that destroyed the habitat totally or altered it by

eliminating sufficient bare soil due to increased vegetation. These studies suggest that this insect is seriously threatened by increased vegetation growth and at most sites the bare or sparsely vegetated area occupied by OTB is maintained by animal or human disturbances, including those by cattle, horses, mountain bikers, and pedestrian foot traffic. Arnold, et. al., (USDI, 2012) actually report the cessation of grazing and low-levels of recreational uses contributed to recent and historically extirpated OTB sites.

This species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property. Its currently known range includes occurrences on marine terraces in and near the city of Santa Cruz, California. The species is known to have current and historic (extirpated) occurrences predominately between the eastern side of Wilder Ranch State Park and the City of Santa Cruz (USDI 2012, Knisley and Arnold, 2013).

Previous attempts to characterize and classify subsites identified many variations among the occupied areas and among the unoccupied areas in grasslands and road/trail habitats (USDI 2012). They concluded that OTB opportunistically takes advantage of a wide range of conditions, or restricts its use to suitable subsites when the habitat conditions are favorable (USDI 2012). In light of this information, BLM determined it is not likely that OTB occurs in the project area where parking, visitor use, and new trail construction is proposed to occur.

#### California Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*)

California Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) is federally listed as threatened. This species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property. BLM determined it is not likely that CTS occurs in the proposed project area because it lacks suitable characteristics and it would be an extension of the known range of the species.

#### San Francisco garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*)

San Francisco garter snakes are listed as endangered. The species is found in coastal prairies with low shrub cover, near wetlands. Suitable habitat for this species is not present in the project area. BLM determined it is not likely that the San Francisco garter snake occurs in the project proposed area because it lacks suitable characteristics and it would be an extension of the known range of the species.

#### Raptors & Migratory Birds

Use of Coast Dairies by a variety of raptors and migratory birds is a widely noted phenomenon. Local birdwatchers, ornithologists and raptor enthusiasts have recognized that raptors can be regularly seen during the winter months on the north coast of Santa Cruz. However, no listed bird species are known to occur on Coast Dairies.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects a large number of migratory birds under federal statute, including the American raven and crow. The Act prohibits “take” of these species, defined by regulation as “to pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect.” 50 C.F.R. 10.12. The MBTA provides

criminal penalties for persons who commit any of the acts prohibited by the statute in section 703 on any of the species protected by the statute. See 16 U.S.C. 707.

### ***Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas***

Regarding the potential for the following ESHA's to occur on the property: The Coast Dairies Existing Condition Report says:

Maritime Chaparral: Several significant vegetative communities, including northern maritime chaparral, northern coastal salt marsh, and Monterey pine forest are documented as occurring within the vicinity of the Property. None of these documented vegetative communities have been observed on the Property (ESA 200, 1pp. 3.1-2 & 3.1-3).

Coastal Prairie: The coastal terrace prairies, comprising a diversity of perennial bunchgrasses and wildflowers and historically covering much of the landscape, have been virtually eliminated by agriculture and grazing and replaced by low diversity non-native grasslands and crops (ESA 2001, pg. 3-1.32). The coastal prairie that once dominated the terraces and slopes has been extirpated from most of the Property. Purple needlegrass is a component of the coastal prairie and still occurs in Analysis Zone YBS-1 [Yellow Bank Creek watershed] (ESA 2001, pg. 3.1-33).

### ***Federally Listed Plant Species***

#### **Santa Cruz tarplant (*Holocarpha macradenia*) (Threatened)**

[http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five\\_year\\_review/doc4365.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five_year_review/doc4365.pdf)

Santa Cruz tarplant (*Holocarpha macradenia*) is a federally listed Threatened annual plant species in the Asteraceae (sunflower) family. Its currently known range includes disjunct occurrences in the in the East Bay region between Hayward and Pinole and the Monterey Bay area between Watsonville and Santa Cruz (USFWS 2014). The species is not known to occur north of Santa Cruz. The species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property or the project area.

Primary habitat for the species is coastal prairie grassland on Watsonville, Tierra, Elkhorn, Santa Inez, and Pinto soil series (loam soil texture). Light to moderate livestock grazing is known to promote the species through reduction of competition with invasive annual grasses (USFWS 2014).

### ***BLM sensitive (CRPR list) Plant Species***

#### **Point Reyes Horkelia (*Horkelia marinensis*) (CRPR 1B)**

Point Reyes Horkelia (*Horkelia marinensis*) is a California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR) list 1B.2 species. The species has historically been reported on the Coast Dairies property in the San



Vicente Creek drainage and at other locations near and around the property including Ben Lomond Mountain, Swanton, and the UC Santa Cruz campus (Calflora 2015). The species is not known to occur within the project area.

Primary habitat for the species consists of sandy soils on coastal flats.

Santa Cruz Microseris (*Stebbinsoseris decipiens*)

Santa Cruz Microseris (*Stebbinsoseris decipiens*) is a CRPR 1B.2 species. The species has been reported most frequently in the Santa Cruz Mountains region around Swanton (Swanton Road). The species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property or the project area.

Primary habitat for the species is sandy soils or shallow soils in grassland.

San Francisco campion (*Silene verucunda* spp. *verucunda*)

San Francisco campion (*Silene verucunda* ssp. *verucunda*) is a CRPR list 1B.2 species. The species has been reported most frequently in the Santa Cruz Mountains region around Swanton. The species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property of the project area.

Primary habitat for the species is poorly vegetated mudstone.

Blasdale's bent grass (*Agrostis blasdalei*)

Blasdale's bentgrass (*Agrostis blasdalei*) is a CRPR list 1B.2 species. The species has been reported most frequently in the Santa Cruz Mountains region on coastal bluffs at Laguna Creek Beach, Greyhound Rock State Park, and Pigeon Point. The species is not known to occur on the Coast Dairies property of the project area and is highly unlikely to occur there.

Primary habitat for the species is coastal bluffs. Although the species may occur on coastal bluffs on State Parks property to the south and west of Highway 1, the species is highly unlikely to occur on Coast Daires property proper due to the absence of coastal bluffs.

## **Soil Resources**

The soil series from State Route 1 to the first marine terrace: Bonnydoon-Rock outcrop complex, 50 to 85 percent slopes.

First and Second Marine Terraces: Watsonville loam, thick surface, 2 to 15 percent slopes; Watsonville loam, 2 to 15 percent slopes; Bonnydoon-Rock outcrop complex, 50 to 85 percent slopes.

Slope above Yellow Bank Creek: Bonnydoon-Rock outcrop complex, 50 to 85 percent slopes; Sur-Catelli complex, 50 to 75 percent slopes; Maymen stony loam, 30 to 75 percent slopes; Diablo clay, 9 to 15 percent slopes

Section at the north end of the loop trail: Santa Lucia channery clay loam 30 to 50 percent slopes, isomesic, MLRA 4B-7; Ben Lomond-Felton complex, 30 to 50 percent slopes

### **Water Resources**

The Laguna Creek watershed serves as the natural boundary for analysis of effects of the range of alternatives considered in this EA. However, the Coast Dairies public lands only include a portion of the Laguna Creek watershed. The headwaters originate from the steep interior of the Santa Cruz Mountains and eventually discharges to the ocean.

Near the proposed trailhead, there is a natural drainage area that is occupied by a dense grove of willow trees. The drainage appears to retain water but there are no signs of surface water. Historically, the natural drainage area would have connected to Laguna Creek. However, due to construction of the railroad and highway systems, a culvert was installed to direct water to a small canyon on the State Parks lands. Therefore, this drainage is no longer connected hydrologically to Laguna Creek.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

There are no known archeological sites within the proposed project area. There is a historic water retention feature (non-operational) within ¼ mile of the proposed project area and a recorded archeological site with prehistoric and historic remains also within ¼ of the project area. There are no known Native American values directly associated with the proposed project area, however there are Native American values associated in general with the Coast Dairies property as it relates to native plant utilization for members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.

### **Environmental Justice**

AMBAG is the MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) for the Monterey Bay Area. As the MPO, AMBAG is required to produce certain documents that maintain the region's eligibility for federal transportation assistance which include the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The Metropolitan Transportation Plan and the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) is the federally mandated long-range transportation plan for the Monterey Bay Area.

The Final 2035 MTP/SCS and its Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was adopted at the June 11, 2014 AMBAG Board of Directors meeting. The EIR identified Environmental Justice communities through analysis of demographic and socioeconomic data for minority and low-income populations based on 2010 U.S. Census data, 2007-2011 American Community Survey data, AMBAG population estimates and AMBAG employment and population projections.

To be considered an environmental justice community, the area needs to either have a 50% or greater minority population or have a higher poverty rate than the national average. The tables below provide the relevant information for the census defined populations associated with the Coast Dairies public lands.

*Population, Race, and Ethnicity in the AMBAG Region (2010)*

Location	Total Population	White, not Hispanic or Latino	Black, not Hispanic or Latino	American Indian, not Hispanic or Latino	Asian, not Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander, not Hispanic or Latino	Other, not Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino	Minority
Bonny Doon	2,678	88.3%	0.3%	0.3%	1.9%	0.1%	2.69%	6.3%	11.7%
Davenport	408	50.5%	1.5%	0.7%	1.7%	0.0%	3.43%	42.2%	49.5%

*Income and Poverty in the AMBAG Region (2010)*

Location	Median Household Income	Poverty Rate - Households	% Unemployed
Bonny Doon	\$90,147	8.0%	9.0%
Davenport	\$61,563	4.8%	8.0%

Based on the information in the EIR (AMBAG 2014), the Davenport population is considered an area of environmental justice concern given their high concentrations of low income and minority populations.

### **Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

Behind the cut bank and up the hill from the existing parking area at Laguna Rd., there is a dense grove of willow trees on the Coast Dairies public lands. This grove is a known destination for illegal dumping and other illicit activities for many years. Extensive hazardous and solid waste materials are present in this area. There are no other known sites with hazardous or solid wastes along the Laguna Ridge trail identified in the range of alternatives for this EA.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:**

### **Alternative 1: Preferred Alternative**

#### **Recreation Resources**

Based on visitor use estimates from regional trails and surrounding parklands, up to 20 pedestrians per hour (pph) could be anticipated on the Laguna Ridge Trail on popular weekends and holidays. The preferred alternative would have minor direct benefits on recreation opportunities because it would provide regularly scheduled recreation opportunities for day use hiking on Coast Dairies public lands. The project would also have indirect benefits because leveraging volunteer support to develop the proposed recreational trail is likely to increase stewardship and appreciation of the Coast Dairies public lands.

On the other hand, increasing the number of visitors to the Coast Dairies would increase the potential for negative impacts due to visitor use conflicts between new and existing uses at the

parking area, trailhead, and along the trail. These include potential for negative interactions between visitors, dogs, transients, and other recreationists accessing the coastal beaches. Other negative impacts as a result of the proposed action may include additional crime, noise, litter, and trespass onto private lands. However, these impacts are considered to be minor and would be less likely to occur under the preferred alternative because of the provisions for regularly scheduled, controlled access, and other measures to educate visitors.

### **Transportation and Travel Management**

Under this alternative, the visiting public would be routed onto an unimproved (dirt) road through an agricultural field east of State Route 1 approximately ½ mile north of Laguna Road.

The preferred alternative would be expected to generate new vehicle trips to the Laguna Ridge trailhead from recreational users, tourists, and for management purposes. This increase may be balanced regionally by the potential reduction in vehicle trips to other major traffic generators on SR 1.

Based on the estimates in the Final EIR for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (SCCRTC 2013), the Laguna Ridge Trail project may result in an increase in daily and peak hour trips on local roads once or twice a month, but would not cause SR 1 (Segment 19) to decline from the existing LOS D.

Access for emergency response vehicles would be provided on existing roads, and intersections in the project area would continue to operate at acceptable levels in accordance with Caltrans standards. While the project would increase vehicle trips in the area, the contribution to regional traffic would not increase response times by emergency vehicles to the area. Thus, the preferred alternative would not result in creation of hazards due to design of the trailhead or result in provision of inadequate emergency access.

### **Fire Management**

Public access to Coast Dairies increases the potential for wildfire to negatively impact local communities and sensitive receptors in the region. However, the BLM's interim rules are designed to ensure public safety and minimize potential risks of wildfire by prohibiting campfires and other open flames, as well as other activities that could lead to unintended ignitions, such as use and discharge of firearms, fireworks, and other explosive devices.

Additional management actions necessary to mitigate the risk of wildfire from public uses on Coast Dairies include law enforcement patrol and continuing cooperation with other local, state, and federal agencies for emergency response or search and rescue operations.

### **Livestock Grazing**

Under the preferred alternative, a walkthrough gate will need to be installed along the road where there currently is a wire gate to prevent livestock from escaping from the pastures. The public has a tendency to leave gates open, even when they are signed "Keep Gate Closed", so a "turkey track" type gate is the best solution for keeping livestock in their respective pastures.



The parking area would be in an existing grazing allotment. The public and their dogs would have short-term negative impacts on livestock grazing once or twice a month because they discourage livestock from using the area. Dogs on leashes will help prevent disturbing the livestock near the trail.

## **Lands & Realty**

The preferred alternative will not have direct affects on existing land use authorizations. There may be indirect impacts on operators utilizing the same roads accessed by the public, but BLM's existing agreements prioritize access for recreation on public easements that cross the agricultural fields adjacent to State Route 1. BLM would notify operators of the regularly scheduled dates the public would be allowed access, and BLM would educate visitors with signs and other information to reduce the potential for impacts on residences and other land uses.

## **Biological Resources**

### *Fish and Wildlife*

The preferred alternative would have no direct adverse impacts on species associated with aquatic and/or riparian habitats because there are no ponds or streams within the project area where proposed activities would occur. There may be some negligible, short-term negative impacts on wildlife in the project area during construction activities. These negative impacts would be limited to noise and disturbance from a hand crew manually constructing approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of trail. Similar short-term disturbances to wildlife would be likely to occur from public day-use hiking on the proposed trail once or twice a month. It is possible that dogs would chase wildlife (including birds), but the requirement for visitors to keep them leashed would reduce these potential adverse effects of dogs on wildlife.

The potential for take of migratory birds (as defined by the MBTA) and/or raptors would be avoided by the implementation of BMP's identified as *common to all action alternatives*.

### *Vegetation*

There would be direct, short-term negative impacts to vegetation on the upper portion of trail ( $\frac{3}{4}$  mile). Mowing on the terrace area is not expected to create adverse effects to existing vegetation since this area is dominated by invasive exotic species. Mowing the terrace area is not expected to create adverse effects to existing native vegetation. Potential for proliferation of invasive plants would be reduced by keeping vehicles and equipment clear of debris between sites.

### *Special Status Species*

There would be no effects on the California red-legged frog because there are no ponds or streams in the project area, and the trail is at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away from the riparian corridors of Yellow Bank Creek or Laguna Creek, which precludes effects on other listed (aquatic) species.

There would be no effects on the Ohlone Tiger Beetle, California Tiger Salamander, or San Francisco garter snake because the project area where surface disturbance would occur lacks suitable habitat and Coast Dairies is outside the known range of these species. The proposed trail

starts in one pasture for livestock grazing on the first marine terrace and follows existing ranch roads up to the another pasture for livestock grazing on the second marine terrace. Historic uses of the project area have converted the marine terraces to annual grasslands. Other portions of the project area are dominated by shrublands and large patches of poison oak, especially where the new trail construction is proposed.

Day-use hiking has been shown to be consistent with the continued presence of listed species on other public lands in Santa Cruz County (USDI 2012). Actually, these same studies suggest trail use and maintenance may be beneficial to the species that have potential to occur in the project area. Therefore, BLM determined there would be no adverse effects on Federally-listed species with potential to occur in the project area.

### **Water Resources**

The preferred alternative would have no negative impacts on water resources because the new (proposed) 3/4 mile trail construction is at least 1/4 mile away from riparian areas. BLM proposed limits on allowable uses also minimize the possibility of increase sediment transport or erosion in the Yellow Bank Creek and Laguna Creek watersheds.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

The preferred alternative would not adversely affect cultural resources or Native American values; the trail is designed to avoid impacting known cultural resources in the proposed project vicinity.

### **Environmental Justice**

The preferred alternative would not have disproportionate adverse impacts on low-income or minority communities because there would be no adverse effects on public health (or safety) and the proposed trail would be available to everybody for use and enjoyment of the public lands.

### **Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

The preferred alternative would have less potential impacts on management of hazardous and solid waste because it avoids directing visitors to locations with known hazardous materials and solid waste.

### **Alternative 2:**

#### **Recreation Resources**

Based on visitor use estimates from regional trails and surrounding parklands, approximately 20 pedestrians per hour (pph) are anticipated on the Laguna Ridge Trail on popular weekends and holidays. This alternative would have more (minor) direct benefits on recreation opportunities than the preferred alternative because it would establish the first designated open trail for day use hiking on Coast Dairies public lands. Alternative 2 would have the same indirect benefits as the preferred alternative because it would also leverage volunteer support to increase stewardship and appreciation of the Coast Dairies public lands.

Under Alternative 2, the potential for negative impacts due to visitor use conflicts between new and existing uses at the parking area, trailhead, and along the trail is greater than the preferred alternative. This is primarily due to the likely conflicts near the parking area between visitors, dogs, transients, and other recreationists accessing the coastal beaches.

The potential for Alternative 2 to increase crime, noise, litter, and trespass onto private lands is greater than the preferred alternative, but these problems are already occurring on the property, so BLM considers the likely increase from an interim access trail to be minor. The potential impacts of visitor conflicts could be reduced with regular law enforcement patrols, and by installing a kiosk and other signage to educate visitors.

### **Transportation and Travel Management**

Under Alternative 2, the visiting public would be routed to an existing parking area that is immediately adjacent to the east side of SR 1 and the intersection of Laguna Road. The unimproved parking area is protected from the SR 1 and Laguna Road by a chain and pylons with two points where vehicles enter or exit: at SR 1, or at Laguna Road. Currently, this parking area is primarily used by the public to access the ocean.

Alternative 2 would be expected to generate new vehicle trips to the Laguna Ridge trailhead from recreational users, tourists, and for management purposes. The new vehicle trips would have a minor, direct negative impact on other visitors that regularly fill the parking area to access the local beaches. This increase may be balanced regionally by the potential reduction in vehicle trips to other major traffic generators on SR 1.

Based on the estimates in the Final EIR for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (SCCRTC 2013), Alternative 2 would result in an increase in daily and peak hour trips on local roads, but would not cause SR 1 (Segment 19) to decline from the existing LOS D.

Access for emergency response vehicles would be provided on existing roads, and intersections in the project area would continue to operate at acceptable levels in accordance with Caltrans standards. While the project would increase vehicle trips in the area, the contribution to regional traffic would not increase response times by emergency vehicles to the area. Thus, Alternative 2 would not result in creation of hazards due to design of the trailhead or result in provision of inadequate emergency access.

### **Fire Management**

Public access to Coast Dairies increases the potential for wildfire to negatively impact local communities and sensitive receptors in the region. However, the BLM's interim rules are designed to ensure public safety and minimize potential risks of wildfire by prohibiting campfires and other open flames, as well as other activities that could lead to unintended ignitions, such as use and discharge of firearms, fireworks, and other explosive devices.

Additional management actions necessary to mitigate the risk of wildfire from public uses on Coast Dairies include law enforcement patrol and continuing cooperation with other local, state, and federal agencies for emergency response or search and rescue operations.

## **Livestock Grazing**

Walkthrough gates will need to be installed at the parking area, beginning and ending of the proposed 1 mile SWECO trail construction, and along the road where there currently is a wire gate to prevent livestock from escaping from the pastures. The public has a tendency to leave gates open, even when they are signed “Keep Gate Closed”, so a “turkey track” type gate is the best solution for keeping livestock in their respective pastures.

A small portion of the mowed section of the proposed trail will be near an existing water trough and a small corral. Cattle tend to congregate at water troughs during the middle of the day. With the water trough close to the trail, the public and their dogs may discourage livestock from using the trough. Dogs may also chase the livestock and run them through fences and potentially into adjacent farming fields, private property, or Highway 1. Cows with calves will especially get agitated with dogs running loose and will charge dogs and possibly the dog owners to protect their calves. Dogs on leashes will help prevent disturbing the livestock near the trail.

## **Lands & Realty**

Alternative 2 would not adversely affect any existing land use authorizations.

## **Biological Resources**

### *Fish and Wildlife*

Alternative 2 would have no direct adverse impacts on species associated with aquatic and/or riparian habitats because there are no ponds or streams within the project area where proposed activities would occur. There may be some negligible, short-term negative impacts on wildlife in the project area during construction activities. These negative impacts would be limited to noise and disturbance from a hand crew manually constructing approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of trail. Similar short-term disturbances to wildlife would be likely to occur from public day-use hiking on the proposed trail once or twice a month.

### *Vegetation*

Section from State Route 1 to the first marine terrace (0.25 miles): There would be direct impacts to the willow patch and the maritime chaparral vegetation on the segment connecting the parking lot to marine terrace (0.25 miles): including California sage (*Artemisia californica*), coyotebrush (*Baccharis pilularis*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), wild cucumber (*Marah fabacea*), coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*) bushes and the arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*).

Section(s) on the first and second marine terrace (1 mile): There would be direct, short-term negative impacts to vegetation from new trail construction on section connecting the first marine terrace to upper portion of trail the upper portion of trail above Yellow Bank Creek. To avoid adverse impacts to trees, including oaks, redwoods, and Douglass firs, the SWECO would avoid all trees over 10” DBH to the maximum extent possible.

Mowing on the terrace area is not expected to create any adverse effects to existing vegetation since this area is dominated by invasive exotic species. Mowing the terrace area is not expected to create adverse effects to existing native vegetation.

Section at the upper end of loop trail: There would be direct, short-term negative impacts to vegetation from new trail construction on the 1/4 mile section of trail connecting two existing dirt roads.

### Special Status Species

The impacts of this alternative would be similar to Alternative 1. BLM determined there would be no adverse effects on Federally-listed species with the potential to occur in the project area based on results of inventories and management practices similar to what is proposed for the Laguna Ridge trail under Alternative 2.

The proposed trail starts in one pasture for livestock grazing on the first marine terrace and follows existing ranch roads up to the another pasture for livestock grazing on the second marine terrace. Historic uses of the project area have converted the marine terraces to annual grasslands that are dominated by large patches of coastal shrub and poison oak where approximately 2 miles of new trail construction would occur.

### **Water Resources**

Alternative 2 would have no negative impacts on water resources because the proposed construction activities would occur during the summer season, when there is no surface water in the project area. Additionally, the proposed trail design and BLM's best management practices for trail construction would prevent increase sediment transport or erosion into streams in the Laguna Creek watershed.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

Alternative 2 would not adversely affect cultural resources or Native American values; the trail is designed to avoid impacting known cultural resources in the proposed project vicinity.

### **Environmental Justice**

Alternative 2 would not have disproportionate adverse impacts on low-income or minority communities because there would be no adverse effects on public health (or safety) and the proposed trail would be available to everybody for use and enjoyment of the public lands.

### **Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

Alternative 2 would have direct beneficial impacts on management of hazardous and solid waste because the proposed trailhead location would be cleared of all the hazardous materials and solid waste. The designation of the trail for public recreation would have indirect benefits because frequent visitor use of the trailhead would reduce the potential for illegal activities to continue at this location.

### **Alternative 3: No Action**

**Livestock Grazing:** The no action alternative would have no effect on the livestock grazing.



**Lands & Realty:** The no action alternative would have no effect on existing land use authorizations.

**Biological Resources:** The no action alternative would have no effect on biological resources.

**Water Resources:** The no action alternative would have no effect on water resources.

**Cultural Resources and Native American Values:** The no action alternative will not adversely affect cultural resources or Native American values.

**Recreation Resources:** The no action alternative would have more of a negative impact on recreation resources than the proposed action because the lack of a designated trail system has prompted many visitors to trespass illegally to recreate on the Coast Dairies public lands. This would likely continue under the no action alternative, increasing the risk of unauthorized uses and impacts to public safety.

**Transportation and Travel Management:** The no action alternative would have less negative effects on transportation and travel management than the proposed action because there would be less visitors to Coast Dairies.

**Environmental Justice:** The no action alternative may have disproportionate adverse impacts on low-income or minority communities because the project would not be undertaken. Davenport, CA is considered an environmental justice community and the authors of the Conservation Blueprint note “the county’s wealth of recreational opportunities is not evenly distributed”, and “the county’s array of nature centers and educational programs struggle to meet the need to teach future generations about nature.” The Trust for Public Land also conducted a park equity analysis for the San Francisco Bay Area that links information about park locations with census data by race and income to map underserved areas. Their analysis shows that living in an underserved area more than one-quarter mile from safe and well-equipped parks or natural areas is a major contributing factor to the alarming rates of obesity and chronic disease that result from physical inactivity.

**Hazardous or Solid Wastes:** The no action alternative would not have any effect on management of hazardous material or solid waste.

## **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Cumulative effects are those impacts on the environment which result “from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.” (40 CFR 1508.7).

The Coast Dairies Existing Conditions Report (ESA 2001) provides a thorough review of prehistoric, historic, and other past actions related Coast Dairies land use since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ECR also describes how these past actions helped influence the current trends and conditions of resources on the north coast of Santa Cruz County.

The spatial and temporal scale for analysis of cumulative impacts may vary based on specific resources; but the BLM has determined the appropriate spatial and temporal scale, respectively, for analysis of cumulative effects from the range of alternatives for interim public access to the

Laguna Ridge portion of the Coast Dairies property is limited to the Laguna Creek and Yellow Bank Creek watersheds, including State Route 1 (Segment 19) for the next 3-5 years.

During this period, BLM's IMP authorizes use of the Laguna Ridge and Yellow Bank portions of Coast Dairies for livestock grazing and scientific research and education. At the same time, the present and reasonably foreseeable development resulting from buildout of unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville may result in additional adverse impacts on State Route 1 (Segment 19), which is likely to decline from the existing LOS D.

On the other hand, present and other reasonably foreseeable future actions on the Coast Dairies public lands (including Coast Dairies State Beach) will be shaped in light of the federal, state, and local conservation goals and objectives. For example, BLM and all the interested parties agree that a comprehensive management plan is needed to establish allowable use and ensure long-term resource protection for the Coast Dairies public lands. Even at this long-term access stage, future specific projects or implementation plans that interpret the general planning direction will require additional site-specific environmental review and analyses. As envisioned by the California Coastal Conservancy, the County of Santa Cruz, the California State Parks (CSP), and others interested in coastal preservation, both interim and long-term access for pedestrian recreation opportunities on the Coast Dairies property would have beneficial cumulative effects on the quality of life in Santa Cruz because it would increase recreation, tourism, and environmental stewardship in conjunction with other regional trails and conservation projects planned in Santa Cruz County.

#### **Alternative 1:**

Based on existing public land policies, agency agreements, and nearly twenty years of planning for public access to Coast Dairies, BLM has determined the preferred alternative would not have any adverse cumulative effects on the human environment because the development of the trail would have no effects on known scientific values. Also, the proposed limits on allowable uses, and provisions for regularly scheduled, controlled access are consistent with the ability of the BLM and other agencies to provide services and infrastructure necessary to ensure public health and safety and the protection of coastal resources.

#### **Alternative 2:**

BLM has determined Alternative 2 would not have any adverse cumulative effects on scientific, scenic, ecological, and archeological values because the trail location and design avoids sensitive resources. However, the proposed use of the existing, unimproved parking area at the intersection of State Route 1 and Laguna Rd. would have more of a negative effect on transportation (i.e. traffic) and public safety than Alternative 1.

#### **Alternative 3: No Action**

The no action alternative would have no cumulative effects on State Route 1 and resources associated with the Laguna Ridge and Yellow Bank watersheds. However, this alternative would preclude beneficial cumulative effects on the quality of life of additional recreation opportunities in Santa Cruz because there would still be no designated trails on the Coast Dairies public lands.

## MITIGATION MEASURES

Appropriate measure to alleviate the impacts of the range of alternatives are incorporated into the best management practices *common to all action alternatives*. No additional mitigation measures are needed.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To promote partnerships and enhance the stewardship of the Coast Dairies public lands, BLM made the preliminary Laguna Ridge Trial EA (DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2015-21-EA) available for a 30-day public review and comment period that ran from June 10, 2015 through July 10, 2015.

## ISSUES AND SCOPING:

In total, BLM received twelve (12) letters with comments on the EA from one (1) state agency: California Coastal Commission; one (1) tribe: Amah Mutsun Land Trust; two (2) organizations: Rural Bonny Doon Association (RBDA) & Sierra Club; and eight (8) individuals: representing private landowners in the community. In response to public comments, BLM incorporated additional information into the relevant resources sections within the document and developed a new preferred alternative to reduce potential effects on transportation (i.e. traffic) and public health and safety.

## REFERENCES

Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments: *2035 MTP/SCS and RTPs for Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz EIR*. 2014

Calflora. 2015. [www.calflora.org](http://www.calflora.org) Accessed August 25, 2015.

City of Santa Cruz *General Plan 2030 EIR [SCH#2009032007]*. June 26, 2013.

Environmental Science Associates (ESA)

2001 Existing Conditions Report for the Coast Dairies Property. San Francisco.

2004 Coast Dairies Long-Term Resource Protection and Access Plan. San Francisco.

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission: *Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan EIR*. November 7, 2013.

Knisley and Arnold, 2013. Biology and Conservation of *Cicindela ohlone* Freitag and Kavanaugh, the Endangered Ohlone Tiger Beetle (Coleoptera: Carabidae: Cicindelinae). I. Distribution and Natural History. The Coleopterists Bulletin, 67(4): 569-580.

United States Department of the Interior (USDI)

2006 Proposed Resource Management Plan / Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Southern Diablo Range and Central Coast of California. Hollister Field Office, Bureau of Land Management California.

2010 BLM Guidelines for a Quality Built Environment. First Edition, prepared by Belt Collins.

2012 Review of Historical and Current Land Use Practices, Characterization of Suitable Habitat, and Habitat Management Recommendations for the Endangered Ohlone Tiger Beetle, *Cicindela ohlone* (Coleoptera: Cicindelidae); Richard A. Arnold, PhD. Entomological Consulting Services, Ltd.; Ventura Field Office U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

## CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Consultation efforts continued throughout the planning process for the acquisition of Coast Dairies, including site visits with representatives from federal and state wildlife agencies, and with tribes. BLM also coordinated with these agencies and tribes on the proposed trail project.

## LIST OF PREPARERS

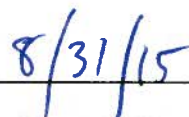
Interdisciplinary Team	Title	Organization
Christine Sloand	Lands & Realty Specialist	BLM
Michael Westphal	Ecologist	BLM
Michael Powers	Natural Resource Specialist (NRS)	BLM
Ryan O'Dell	NRS (Botany/Soils/Paleontology)	BLM
Stacey Schmidt	NRS (Range Management)	BLM
Erik Zaborsky	Archeologist	BLM
Gregory Middleton	Geologist	BLM
David Moore	Outdoor Recreation Planner	BLM
Sky Murphy	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	BLM

## NOTIFICATION

BLM announced the intention to develop public access to the Coast Dairies at several community meetings in Davenport, CA and Bonny Doon, CA. The EA was made available for a 30-day public comment period from June 10, 2015 – July 10, 2015. BLM also posts information about proposed actions that are under environmental review on their NEPA [website](#).

## DOCUMENT REVIEW

  
Planning and Environmental Coordinator

  
Date