

Cows vs Conservation: The Point Reyes Ranching Conflict

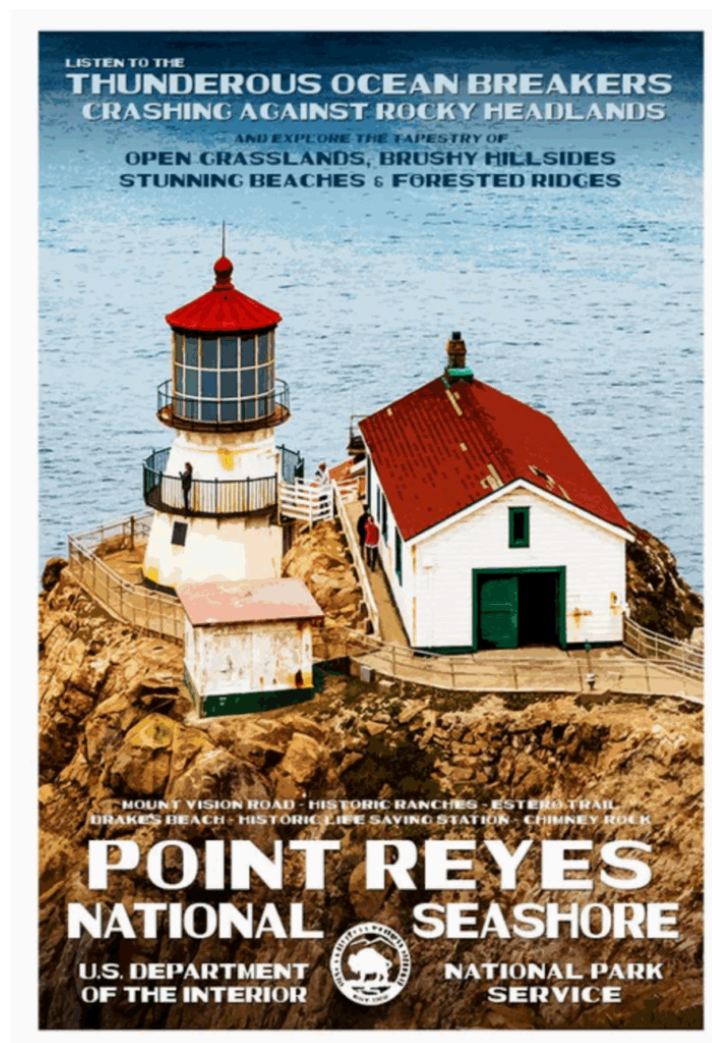


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LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Delegates, Club and Team Advisors, Parents, and Any Other MUN Folks,

It is my esteemed privilege to welcome you all to Davis Model United Nations Conference XXIII! My name is Brody Andrews, and I am honored to serve as your Secretary-General for the 23rd DMUNC. On the weekend of May 2-3, 2026, delegates will have the opportunity to engage in fruitful debate and cooperation, and hopefully, make lifelong connections.

As a senior at UC Davis, this will be my final DMUNC and my final Model UN Conference. I've been to over 30 conferences in the eight years I've been doing MUN but nothing I've gotten to do in my Model UN career has been as rewarding as DMUNC. Last year I got the opportunity to serve as the Director General of DMUNC XXII and it brought me so much joy to watch a massive number of future leaders bring their imaginative ideas to important debates. Thank you all for the opportunity to watch the magic unfold again, I truly cannot wait to see and be inspired by all of you in May.

I joined MUN my freshman year in high school and I could not be more grateful for the experiences it has brought me. Having been in your position I know how simultaneously nerve-wracking and exciting a MUN weekend can be. Whether this is your first conference or your 100th I'm happy you chose to come to DMUNC. In college, MUN has only become a larger part of my life. Not only has MUN afforded me educational and competitive opportunities, but it has also brought me lasting relationships with incredible people who continue to push and support me every day.

As someone who has done Model UN for so many years, I've had all the classic MUN experiences. Every author's panel, crisis update, closing ceremony celebration, and moderated caucus speech led me to DMUNC and I couldn't be happier. As graduation looms large, I want to remind all of you of the amazing joys that MUN can bring and all of the exciting things college has in store for all of you. When you love MUN, it loves you back. The skills you will improve, friendships you will form, and knowledge you will gain from even one MUN conference is enough to make having to explain what a crisis committee is to your non-MUN friends worth it.

I have had the honor of serving as the Director General of DMUNC XXII and as the crisis director for DMUNC XXI's The Muppets committee and DMUNC XX's Star Wars JCC on the Rebels side. With three DMUNCs and countless more conferences under my belt, I feel confident that my experience and passion will help make DMUNC XXIII a truly memorable conference. However, none of this would be possible without the hard work of the CONSEC and staff members who have worked tirelessly for months to prepare for DMUNC XXIII. Running DMUNC is in *no way* a one person job and I am eternally grateful to every single DMUNC staff member. My greatest thanks goes to my Director General Mae Tyson who has stepped up at every turn in extraordinary ways. Thank you Mae, CONSEC, head chairs, crisis directors, and all the DMUNC staff.

Delegates, we have been planning this weekend since August of 2025 and we're so excited for you to enjoy it. I encourage you to read through your committee background guides thoroughly and formulate collaborative resolutions. I look forward to the thought-provoking ideas that each of you will bring forth to your respective committees. Good luck! We truly can't wait to share this with you.

Sincerely,

Brody Andrews | Secretary-General

Davis Model United Nations Conference XXIII

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LETTER FROM THE HEAD CHAIR

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to DMUNC XXIII! DMUNC was the first conference I ever went to and was the place I learned to love MUN and debating. My goal is that in this committee you will have as much fun as I did at DMUNC.

This is my first year at Davis and I am an Ecology, Evolution, and Biodiversity major. And while this is also my first time chairing a committee, it is my fourth year of MUN.

I grew up in the Bay Area, where I would often visit Point Reyes watching elephant seals and eating delicious cheese. It surprised me when I found out about the ranching conflict last year as I always viewed the ranches in Point Reyes to be some of the more sustainable ranches and it shocked me to find out that they were battling it out with environmentalists. And it made me realize that a lot of the time while conservation efforts may seem clear cut, they often have negative effects on communities that are not recognized.

I am thrilled to see you all combine both conservation and MUN in this committee!

Katy Simpson

COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

This committee is a specialized committee based on both the history and current events surrounding Point Reyes National Seashore and ranching. While the conflict is still ongoing and developing this committee is set right before the 2025 landmark agreement between the government and ranchers. While you may take some inspiration from the agreement it is expected that delegates make their own negotiations and eventually come to some agreement on the future of Point Reyes ranching. These negotiations should primarily be focused on the effects of conservation (both positive and negative) on the local community, the local economy, and biodiversity.

As a specialized committee it will have crisis updates, but fewer than in a crisis committee. However, it will not utilize crisis notes or a backroom. In making committee propositions you will write several directives rather than one resolution at the end of committee. At the beginning of the committee there will be a review of proper committee etiquette and procedure.

In researching the topic and your character please read the background guide in addition to outside research. If you don't know where to start outside research go to the works cited in the guide and go from there. As this is a local issue please be aware that these 'characters' are actual people. Similarly it may be difficult to find background information on your character, but as long as you understand their motivations and information on the issue as a whole it should be enough for the committee. Lastly this committee is **tech free** therefore if you want to bring any research into committee please print or write it out before the conference. If you have any questions about committee procedure or research, please don't hesitate to contact your dais.

HISTORY OF POINT REYES

Before colonization the area now considered Point Reyes was inhabited by the Coast Miwok. However, during the late 1700's and early 1800's the majority of the Coast Miwok population were forced into missions or displaced. Around the same time in the early 1800's Mexican and American rancheros began establishing dairy operations in Point Reyes. These operations were so successful that Point Reyes quickly became a vital source of agriculture and dairy products in what would soon become California.

Then, accompanied by the environmental movement of the 1960's, there were growing calls from the public and environmentalists for the government to protect some of the land along the coast of California from development. In 1972 President John F Kennedy officially created Point Reyes National Seashore, the first National Seashore on the west coast.

The creation of Point Reyes National Seashore paved the way for creation of other protected areas around the US that both allow for recreational use and protect the biodiversity of the land. Point Reyes is incredibly special in its own right, however. Considered a biodiversity hotspot, it contains a wide variety of habitats allowing hundreds of native species to thrive here. In fact 36 federally endangered species can be found in Point Reyes as well as 18% of all of California plant species. Additionally due to its location on the Pacific Flyway, a vital yearly migration path that millions of birds fly yearly, 45% of all North American bird species can be found here. Lastly, Point Reyes is home to an endemic and endangered species of elk called the Tule elk. Their population used to number in the hundreds of thousands and stretched from Northern California to Southern California. However, due mass killings during colonization the population was reduced to just a few individuals in the 1870's. Due to extremely robust and successful protection and reintroduction programs in the 1900's the population slowly rebounded and was reintroduced to Point Reyes, where the largest population of Tule elk now live. The Tule elk are not completely safe yet, though, as due to low population diversity they are extremely vulnerable. It is vital to protect them going forward however as they are considered a keystone species as they graze on shrubs, allowing native grasses to thrive and help to spread the seeds of native grasses. Without the Tule elk it is likely that the grassland habitat in Point Reyes would deteriorate, slowly destroying a habitat hundreds of species live in and use.

Since ranchers were still actively using the land at the time Point Reyes was formed the National Park Service made agreements with the ranchers to buy out their land but allow them to use the land through 25-30 yr leases. This agreement was made under the assumption that after the 25-30 yr period the ranchers and their families would have enough time to eventually relocate. However, after those leases ended ranchers made new agreements with NPS for renewable 5 year leases which have been continuously renewed up to 2025.

PRESENT DAY

Over time ranching has slowly harmed the environment, destroying Coast Miwok archeological sites, polluting the waterways, and limiting Tule elk habitat. Repeated trampling of the ground by cattle can destroy Coast Miwok artifacts and make sites significantly harder to study leading to an erasure of Coast Miwok cultural heritage. Manure from cattle farming slowly makes its way into water ways, increasing the percent of harmful bacteria in the water. Additionally when this polluted water makes it out to the ocean the additional nitrogen in the manure can lead to often algal blooms preventing plants underwater from photosynthesis and therefore killing a major food source for the ecosystem. These algal blooms have often been toxic in the past, killing marine life and birds. Therefore, oftentimes, pollution from cattle harms the very ecosystem Point Reyes tries to protect. Lastly, cattle directly compete with native Tule elk for the same food sources which has led to major contention between ranchers and elk. Ranchers in the past have claimed that Tule elk disrupt cattle operations by trampling fences. In response the NPS fenced the Tule elk herds which led to an increase in Tule elk deaths due to a lack of resources such as water. Only recently, in 2024, was the fence taken down and Tule elk allowed to roam free after a public outcry. However, NPS continues to manage the Tule elk population size, using lethal measures in order to appease ranchers. Due to the negative effects of ranching on protected land, environmentalists call for the NPS to end ranching in Point Reyes. While there have been many past lawsuits it has come to a head, now in 2025, when the Center for Biological Diversity, the Resource Renewal Institute, and the Western Watershed Project have all come together to sue the NPS to try to force them to end ranching for good.

The ranchers however, are also frustrated with the NPS. Recently due to pressure from environmentalists the NPS has been making renewing the 5yr leases more difficult leading to frequent legal battles. For ranchers it's also a personal battle though. Many have lived on the ranches since they were children and many families have ranched on the same land for over 100 yrs. Since the history of ranching in Point Reyes far predates the creation of the park, many ranchers believe they should be allowed to keep leasing the land for ranching. Many of these ranchers, like the Strauss family, have also pioneered and practiced environmentally friendly ranching practices such as methane capture, zero waste practices, and use new technology to reduce their impact on the ecosystem. Water quality tests by the NPS have also revealed that ranches can greatly reduce pollution in waterways such as managing manure, reducing runoff

from ranches, and keeping the cattle contained and many Point Reyes Ranches have already introduced many of these practices. Additionally, scientific papers have shown evidence that cattle grazing can lead to an increase in biodiversity of the grasses and a decrease in invasive grasses, therefore maintaining the health of the grassland ecosystem. If all ranches are forced to close this will cause the displacement of over 100 people in a small community. Many ranchers will likely have to find a new job rather than starting a new operation due to the high cost of land in Marin County. The majority of the people affected however are migrant workers who will be forced to find new housing and new jobs. Since the Point Reyes community and surrounding communities are largely based around the dairy industry it will likely upend the economy of many West Marin communities, possibly increasing the price of local dairy products.

Now in 2025 a solution is needed to finally end the conflict between ranchers, environmentalists, and the NPS. Should ranching end for good in Point Reyes in order to preserve the ecosystem? Or is the ecosystem and community overall better off with ranching in its future?

CHARACTER LIST

Kevin Lunny

Kevin Lunny is a rancher in Point Reyes. The “G” ranch (or Lunny Ranch) has been in his family for 75 years and he grew up ranching. The G ranch stretches 1,500 acres and started out as a dairy ranch but switched to a beef ranch in the 1970’s. His ranch was the first in Point Reyes to have an organic herd, which is less impactful on the ecosystem and more sustainable. Lunny also was the owner of Drakes Bay Oyster Farm which was shut down in 2014 after the NPS did not renew the lease due to conservation concerns.

Tom Kehoe

A third generation rancher whose family has leased “J” ranch since 1939. The ranch operates as a dairy on 9,647 acres in Point Reyes. Like other Point Reyes ranchers the argument to end ranching threatens his home as well as his livelihood. The ranch follows sustainable practices including rotational grazing and is a certified organic dairy.

Nicolette Niman

Nicolette Niman is a former environmental lawyer and owns Niman Ranch in Point Reyes with her husband, Bill. The Niman Ranch is a larger group of ranches in the bay area focused on sustainable food production. Their Point Reyes ranch is 50 acres and is one of the only ranches that holds a lifetime lease on the land in Point Reyes. Due to Nicolette’s background as an environmental lawyer the ranch focuses on having minimal impact on the ecosystem such as through rotational grazing. Nicolette also focuses on the positive impacts that ranching can have on the landscape such as reducing the amount of invasive species.

Joylnn McClelland

A rancher who runs two organic dairies, including “L” ranch which has been in her family for three generations and covers over 3,000 acres. Like other Point Reyes ranchers the argument to end ranching threatens her home as well as her livelihood.

Albert Straus

Albert Straus is a rancher who runs Straus Family Farm just outside of Point Reyes in Marshall, CA. His parents started ranching in the area in the early 1900’s and were some of the first to use

sustainable ranching practices. This led to the farm being considered the first organic dairy operation in the US. While Albert runs the dairy farm he also is the CEO of Straus Family Creamery, which purchases local milk from around Northern California (including Point Reyes ranches) and processes it.

Jared Huffman

Jared Huffman is a US Representative from California's second congressional district, which includes Point Reyes. His main concern is to resolve any conflict between ranchers and environmentalists as well as to ensure the rancher's wellbeing. He has been a strong activist for continuing ranching in Point Reyes and even lobbied the NPS to extend leases.

Lily Verdone

Lily Verdone is the executive director of the Marin Agriculture Land Trust, or MALT. MALT's goal is to preserve small scale agricultural operations and farms in Marin. They focus on both conservation and agriculture as small scale farms are often much more sustainable than larger operations. MALT helps to protect agricultural land by financially supporting local farmers so they are not forced to sell their land to larger operations in return for an agreement protecting the land's habitat/ ecosystem as well as farmland. They also help represent and draw attention to agricultural issues around marin.

Anne Altman

Anne Altman is the Superintendent of Point Reyes. Her job is to conserve the Point Reyes habitat and ensure that the ecosystem stays healthy as well as protected. Additionally, since Point Reyes was founded on the idea of balancing both conservation as well as ecosystem uses her job is also to maintain the commercial uses of the park. In doing this she has to work with both ranchers and environmentalists to balance the goals of Point Reyes.

Laura Cunningham

Laura Cunningham is the Western Water Project's California director. The Western Water Project (WWP) recently sued the NPS over ranching due to water pollution. The WWP's main goal is to keep waterways on public land clean in order to keep ecosystems healthy, especially from runoff from agriculture.

Jeff Miller

Jeff Miller is a Senior Conservation Advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity and works specifically in Oregon and California. Along with the WWP the Center for Biological Diversity also recently sued the NPS for putting commercial operations over the health of the ecosystems. The Center for Biological Diversity is an environmental organization that fights for protections for endangered species as well as for ecosystem diversity.

Chance Cutrano

Chance Cuatrano is a California environmentalist and the Director of Programs of Renewal Resource Institute (RRI). In 1970's they worked to raise money for the National Park Service to buy out the ranches in Point Reyes, which did not happen. The RRI, with the WWP and Center for Biological Diversity, recently sued the NPS over concerns of ranching harming the landscape and the NPS not doing their job of protecting the ecosystem.

Scott Webb

Scott Webb is the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Turtle Island Conservation Network (TIRN). TIRN is an environmental non-profit that works to keep coast ecosystems, oceans, and waterways clean and free of pollution. With many other environmental groups they have sued the NPS many times over the last decades over concerns that the NPS wasn't doing their job of protecting the ecosystem from the negative effects of ranching.

Greg Richardson

Greg Richardson is the Point Reyes Project Director for the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a major environmental organization focusing on preserving biodiversity and slowing climate change. The TNC first helped to protect land around Tomales Bay in the 1960's which set the foundation for the creation of what is now Point Reyes. In many environmental conflicts the TNC acts as a mediator between parties and with the ultimate goal of protecting the natural landscape. As a major nonprofit organization they use their funds to further their causes and fund sustainable and renewable practices/ technology.

Stacy Carlsen

Stacy Carlsen is the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner. His job is to protect Marin agriculture as well as to encourage sustainable agricultural practices. He represents the interests of Point Reyes ranchers and supported the removal of Tule Elk in order to reduce competition for ranches. He views ranching as vital to Point Reyes as it provides food for the community, provides jobs, maintains the Point Reyes economy, and ranches practice sustainable agriculture, limiting the impact on the ecosystem.

David Evans

David Evans is a rancher in Point Reyes who is also the founder of Marin Sun Farms. He grew up and now operates the Grossi Ranch or “H” ranch which has been in his family for over 130 years. He focuses on sustainable beef production and maintaining a healthy ecosystem on his ranch.

Joe Mueller

Joe Mueller is a Marine Biology professor at the College of Marin and has been an outspoken advocate to end ranching in Point Reyes. He argues that sustainable agriculture isn't enough to keep the ecosystem healthy as well as that overgrazing harms the ecosystem and increases the amount of invasive species.

Dennis Rodonni

Dennis Rodonni is the Marin County Supervisor. He is focused on mediating the situation and ensuring that all the individuals affected by whatever decision there is are supported. Since he represents a community of both environmentalists and ranchers, instead of being a supporter of one cause, he is prepared to handle the fall-out of the situation.

David Szymanski

David Szymanski is the regional director of the Pacific West region for the NPS. Similar to Anne Altman his job is to prioritize the protection and health of the ecosystem as well as maintain its commercial uses. However, David focuses on the larger impact the decision may have on other protected areas.

Ted McIsaac

Ted McIsaac is a rancher who leases the McIsaac Ranch in Point Reyes. The beef ranch has been in his family for over 150 years. Like other ranchers the short leases have given little opportunity to plan for the future leading to economic troubles especially more recently. Similar to other Point Reyes Ranches he uses sustainable practices and participated in a project to decrease water pollution. He is also the head of the Point Reyes Ranching Association which represents and supports Point Reyes Ranches.

Julie Phillips

Julie Phillips is a Tule Elk biologist. Her work involves studying and speaking out for Tule Elk. Due to the negative effect of ranching on the Tule elk population, such as fencing and culling, she would like to see the ranches gone. Therefore the Tule elk population can roam freely and grow.

Andrew Giacomini

A lawyer representing over 150 agricultural workers and their families who live on ranches in Point Reyes. The majority of the workers on the ranches have not been included in any negotiations regarding ranching, despite the fact many have lived and worked there for most of their lives. His job is to represent the ranch workers and their interests.

Peter Coyote

A prominent actor and environmental activist, who has worked with the group In Defense of Animals which strongly opposes ranching due to the harm on tule elk populations. He has been a vocal advocate for the interests of tule elk in the past, including eliminating fencing and allowing tule elk to roam free.

Theresa Harlan

A vocal Coast Miwok activist who supports ending ranching in Point Reyes. Her family was forced out of their home when the National Seashore was created. She created the Alliance for Felix Cove in an effort to help restore her family's native home. Part of this mission includes restoring Point Reyes, by eliminating ranching and its effect on the environment.

Greg Sarris

Greg Sarris is the chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, representing the interests of the Coast Miwok. He is strongly against ranching at Point Reyes due to the harm it can cause the natural environment as well as important Native American archeological sites in the area.

Rodd Kelsey

He is the California Land Program Manager for the Nature Conservancy. Part of his job is to oversee Nature Conservancy projects in California, including the mediation of an agreement between the ranchers and NPS in Point Reyes.

Judy Teichman

A retired environmental lawyer and author for the Point Reyes Light living close to Point Reyes who has become a vocal advocate for maintaining ranching in Point Reyes due to its historical roots and vital role in the community.

William Nunes

A rancher whose family has leased "A" and "E" ranch since 1919. He, like other ranchers in Point Reyes, don't want ranching to end as it would force them out of their homes and out of a job. The Nunes ranch sells milk to the Strauss Family Creamery and utilizes sustainable practices such as managed grazing to protect the grasslands. However they were accused of having an illegal dump on their land causing possible contamination and harm to the environment.

Burr Heneman

Burr Heneman has held many roles surrounding Point Reyes conservation in the past. Most importantly he was an executive director at Point Blue Conservation Science and helped plan out the creation of Point Reyes National Seashore. Additionally he has helped to draft important legislation including the California Marine Life Protection Act He has continued to be a vocal advocate for marine conservation and the preservation of Point Reyes. He opposes ranching due to its long-term impact on the ecosystem and water contamination it can cause.

TIPS TO PREPARE FOR COMMITTEE

1. Speak at least once in a moderated caucus. Speaking in front of a group of people you barely know can be scary, especially if it's your first conference. But, it will get much easier after you speak in front of everyone once.
2. Work with everyone. The key to a great committee is teamwork. Even if your characters' motives or ideas don't align, try to come up with solutions together. We would love to see delegates talking to different people instead of sticking with one group the whole time.
3. Think outside the box. Often in committee many people have very similar ideas to each other because they are logical. Try to come up with something new even if it's a little crazy. This makes the conference more interesting and fun for everyone.
4. Be aware of the sensitivity of the topic. Unlike many other committees, this is a committee based around a small community. Please be aware that these topics may be personal to some delegates as well as the 'characters' you are playing are ordinary people and to treat both with sensitivity, respect, and understanding.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q1: How does the outcome of this conflict possibly affect other protected areas around the US?

Q2: If ranching does end in Point Reyes, what can be done to assist individuals who are affected by this decision?

Q3: How does ranching impact not only the economy of the local community but also the bay area?

Q4: Does the fact that many of these ranches follow sustainable practices and do their best to have a minimal impact on the ecosystem affect the decision if ranching should continue?

Q5: Should only certain ranches be allowed to stay? Who would determine who stays and leaves and what would be the criteria (size of ranch, ecosystem impact, economic impact, etc.? How do we determine if similar conflicts don't arise in the future if some ranches stay?

Q6: If ranches already exist on the land and have an outsized economic impact, should ranching be expanded in Point Reyes?

Q7: What should the NPS's job be in managing Point Reyes? Does it serve the local community? The ecosystem? Both? And what changes should be made in the future to make the NPS more effective in this role?

Q8: What are the benefits of small scale ranching compared to large commercial ranching operations?

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