

POINT REYES LIGHT

Volume LX No. 32/ Point Reyes Station, California

October 4, 2007



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Gonacon Blue, an experimental vaccine used to contracept fallow deer on the Point Reyes National Seashore, looks like Elmer's glue and cuts off all sex hormones for an unknown period of time. Photo by Tony DeNicola.

Verizon seeks cellular tree on Barnabe

by Samantha Gilweit

If Roger Hopsenberger's proposal is approved by the Marin County Planning Commission, a new 78-foot pine tree may grow rapidly on Mount Barnabe in the San Geronimo Valley.

Verizon Wireless has made plans to lease a 10 acre parcel from Hopsenberger's Lagunitas property in order to install a 70-foot high pole, disguised as a pine tree, that would support six 8-foot long panel antennas. Once operational, the pine tree would bring cell phone coverage to a wide area, reaching Nicasio, Lagunitas, and Point Reyes Station.

Cell phone trees are becoming a common way of disguising telecommunica-

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Fishermen face more red tape

by Jacoba Charles

Two weeks ago, the first Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) went into effect along the central coast of California. The sanctuaries, an unprecedented step toward protecting the ocean's ecosystems, will be established along the state's 1,100-mile coastline in the next four years. Planning has already begun for the north central region, which spans the coast from Santa Cruz to Fort Bragg.

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Her long chin hairs are none of your business

Park deer get experimental dose

by Jacoba Charles

This summer, scientists from the Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) and White Buffalo Inc., a non-profit wildlife management research group, began contracepting fallow deer in the park.

"Our mandate at the National Park is to preserve native ecosystems, and eliminate non-native species where reasonable and feasible," said Natalie Gates, the lead wildlife biologist with PRNS. "Obviously, that's a lot harder when you're dealing with long-lived charismatic megafauna like the fallow and axis deer."

The project was the first step in the PRNS non-native deer management plan

that was finalized in 2006 and calls for eliminating fallow and axis deer herds within the park by 2021 through contraception and culling. It is, simultaneously, a scientific study of an experimental contraceptive vaccine, Gonacon Blue. And it began with a needle.

Approximately half of the 80 does that were injected with Gonacon were sedated via dart gun, said Tony DeNicola, president of White Buffalo.

The rest were captured in remotely controlled deer traps in the rolling hills of Olema Valley.

For two weeks during July, snares

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>> Fishing

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With dramatic changes to the marine landscape imminent, local fishermen in Bolinas and Bodega Bay have begun to worry about the impact MPAs will have on their future.

"If they put a sanctuary where you're fishing all the time, then you're out of business," said Harold Ames, a tan and vigorous local who has been fishing out of Bodega Bay for nearly all of his 79 years. Jeremy Dierks, a Bolinas fisherman, echoed the sentiment.

"I'm all for protecting areas and protecting species, but it has to be done right," Dierks said.

Many of the local fishermen feel that their way of life is already threatened. In the Bodega Harbor, sailboats' single masts and speedboats' sleek fiberglass hulls bob amid the more rugged company of commercial vessels.

"Bodega Bay used to be a much more booming port," said Tom Moore, a biologist with the Department of Fish and

Game who has been stationed in the bay for nearly two decades. In 1988, 3.5 million tons of Chinook salmon were brought ashore. Last year, only 440,000 tons were landed.

"In the early 90s there were 13 big trawlers in here delivering millions of pounds every month," Moore said. "Now we see small or medium sized trawlers every few months."

Despite inevitable year-to-year fluctuations, a similar decline can be seen in the landing figures for Tomales Bay and Bolinas. The main commercial catches in the bay today are crab, salmon and albacore. Other fisheries, such as rockfish and urchins, have been severely curtailed.

Moore says that the change comes from a confluence of increased regulations and costs to fishermen and the relatively stable market price of fish.

The MPAs will add another layer of complexity, and some fishermen worry that the overlapping laws will restrict them from fishing entirely.

"It seems like the right hand is not talking to the left hand," Dierks said. He describes the Farrallone islands, which are almost certainly going to be established as an MPA, as the only

place left where it is still legal for him to catch rockfish. There are few enough locals doing certain types of fishing that Dierks hopes that the plan can include an exemption for them.

"If they take both islands for an MPA, that could be the end of the story for us," Dierks said. "We already have a law that says you can't fish in less than 60 feet or more than 180, which basically forces us into one teeny area around the island. If we lose that, there's nowhere left."

Moore said that these fears are not unwarranted. "Based on the MPAs that already went in, the fishermen probably should be worried," he said. "Fishermen need to stay involved: you have all these different stakeholders in there fighting for access."

Not all areas that are included in an MPA will be completely closed to fishing. Of the 29 MPAs that were established in the central coast area, 15 are conservation areas that allow some commercial and recreational fishing. All fishing is prohibited in 13, and one allows recreational fishing only.

"The idea is that there will be such an abundance of fish that they'll spill over into the areas outside of them,"

said Chamois Andersen, spokeswoman for the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative, the agency that is in charge of designing the sanctuaries. "But that takes time, so there's going to be some short term impacts to the fishermen." She added that the fishermen do have a seat at the table.

The north central coast sanctuaries are expected to be up and running by the end of 2008, said Andersen. The Department of Fish and Game will select a final plan from several options, which are currently being developed by a group of 23 regional stakeholders under the supervision of a scientific advisory committee.

The stakeholders include Josh Churchman, a commercial fisherman from Bolinas, Don Neubacher, the superintendent of the Point Reyes National Seashore and Fred Smith, director of the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin.

"California is the first state in the nation to develop parks in state waters," Andersen said. "There are already a bunch of marine parks, but they have never been managed under one system. This is making them more cohesive and more connected along the coast."



MPAs will restrict fishing in the north central coast within the coming year. Commercial fishermen such as Harold Ames, who operated the Sea Farmer out of Bodega Bay for many years, are concerned that Marine Protected Areas will be the final blow to an industry under strain. Photo by Jacoba Charles.