

Commons Landscape Field Guide



From Mariner's Hedgerow to Longmeadow Drive and from the Forest Front to the Bluffs



March 2021

The Sea Ranch Association Commons Landscape Committee (CLC)

COMMONS LANDSCAPE COMMITTEE FIELD GUIDE

AREA 6: Longmeadow Pilot Project

From Mariner's Hedgerow to Longmeadow Drive and from the Forest Front to the Bluffs

PURPOSE OF THE FIELD GUIDE

As the landscape constantly changes, reviewing the Area Plans becomes necessary. These reviews can suggest revisions or additions to the Plan and can identify ongoing, regular management needs such as vegetation removal or replanting.

The Area Plans were developed with community participation and interaction, and member involvement remains key to the review process. Over the past three years, Field Meetings – member walking tours organized by the CLC – continue the participatory opportunities.

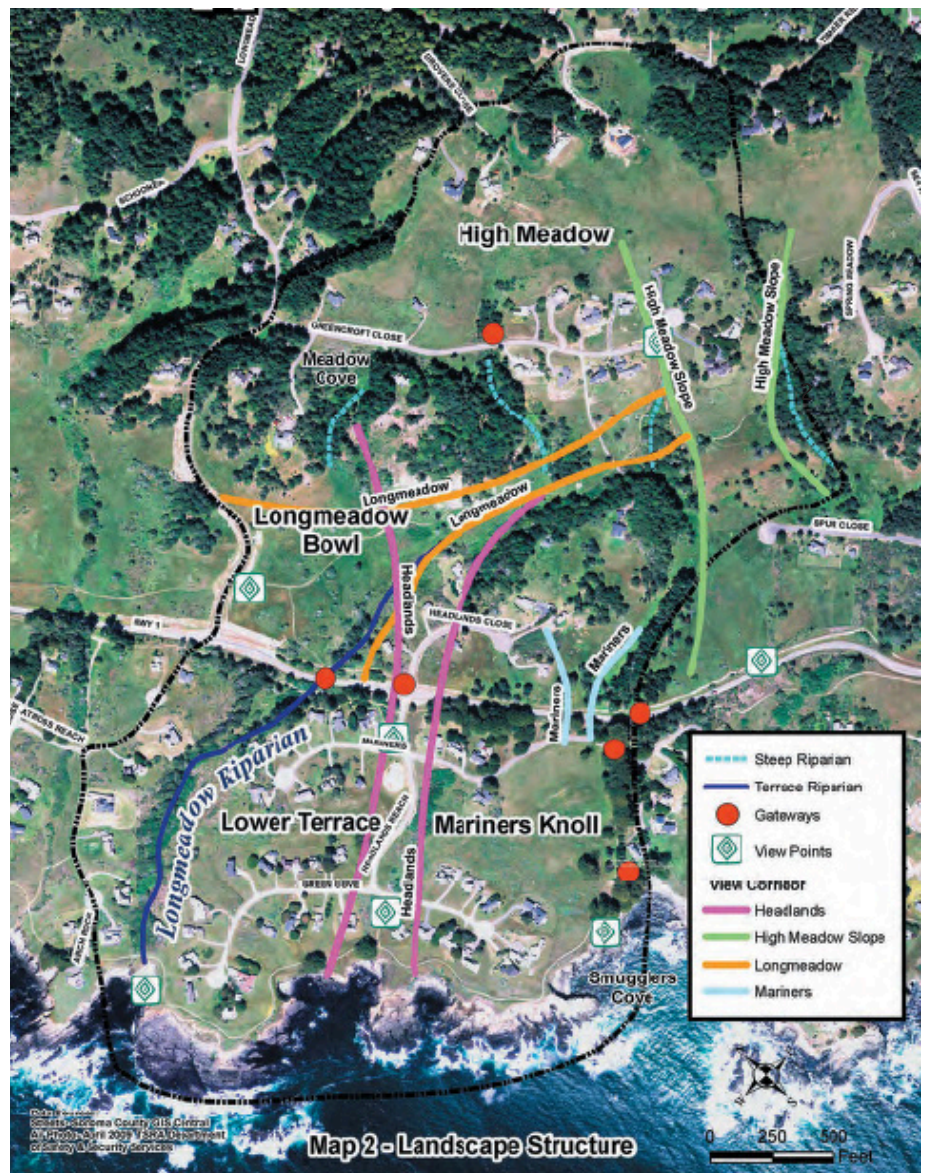
In place of in-person field meetings, this Guide serves as an aid for observing and understanding current conditions in the Commons landscape and for evaluating conditions according to the Area Plan recommendations. The Guide highlights certain recommendations that have been acted-on or that warrant special, on-going attention. The recommendations are noted in *italics*. A full listing of the recommendations is in the Area 6 Plan. Suggestions for places or trails for observing or experiencing the landscape are noted in *italicized, blue font*.

BACKGROUND FOR THE LONGMEADOW PILOT PROJECT

In August 2009, The Sea Ranch Board of Directors authorized a pilot project for landscape management planning for Commons, representing over 2,000 acres of open space.

The purpose of the project was to demonstrate the possibility and the value for the Association to undertake detailed planning for the management of Commons, and to outline a procedure and template for preparing plans for all Commons on The Sea Ranch.

The pilot project created a framework for guiding landscape management decisions, in coordination with existing management activities, by the Association staff, Design Committee, other committees, and individual members. With the designation of study areas the length of The Sea Ranch, the Pilot Plan was designated as Area 6. The plan was completed in November, 2010. The following month, the Sea Ranch Board of Directors approved the charter for the Commons Landscape Committee (CLC).



LANDSCAPE STRUCTURE

Map 2 Landscape Structure describes the major features in the project area, meadows, terraces, forests, hedgerows, riparian ways, and prominent gateways. “View corridors,” are stretches of commons that reveal land forms, establish boundaries between the forests, meadows and riparian areas, and ease the movements of wildlife and people through the area.

FORESTS, including the CPTZ, wrap High Meadow. The forest reaches down Longmeadow Road to form a gateway of deep shade, then opens again to the slopes of High Meadow once on Greencroft Drive. The forests in this area are discussed in more detail in the CLC Area 7 Plan and in the Forest Task Force Guidelines approved in 2020. The Guidelines emphasize the importance of a continuous forest front in maintaining forest health and the visual importance of integrating the forest front with private structures for screening, balanced with the careful creation of appropriate defensible space treatments. The Guidelines also recognize the need to control the advancement of the forest front and to allow for renewal of the forest edge over time. Stewardship has been a valuable tool in containing the advancement of the forest with repeated projects after the Longmeadow Pilot Project was approved.

HIGH MEADOW is a large grassland sloping up the ridge to meet the forest front. It is recurrently grazed, and it is an important feature of the environment, particularly for owners of ridge-line homes. High Meadow descends past Spur Close to Highway 1, forming a continuous, terraced view-corridor. White-tailed Kites often hunt here, and they have been known to nest on the forest edges.

LONGMEADOW BOWL is a large depression fed by streams and characterized by damp soils and related vegetation. It is edged by a riparian way to the south, Highway 1 to the west, a small knoll and Longmeadow Road along the north, and the face of the forest on the east. It is a distinct identifying feature that gives character to the landscape of the area.

Two riparian corridors initiate in High Meadow and the forests and pass through and along the Longmeadow Bowl (sometimes underground). They are channeled under Highway 1, one leading to the Lower Terrace to form a curving slope near the north boundary of the project site. This is an area for the native bunch grass *Calamagrostis nutkaensis*, willow, and some salal and Douglas iris. The flats are good habitats for night-time barn owl and daytime red-shouldered and red-tailed hawk hunting. Unexpected land birds – northern mockingbird, loggerhead shrike, cedar waxwings – have used the meadow. During winter, an American kestrel is often on the PG&E wires above Longmeadow Road.



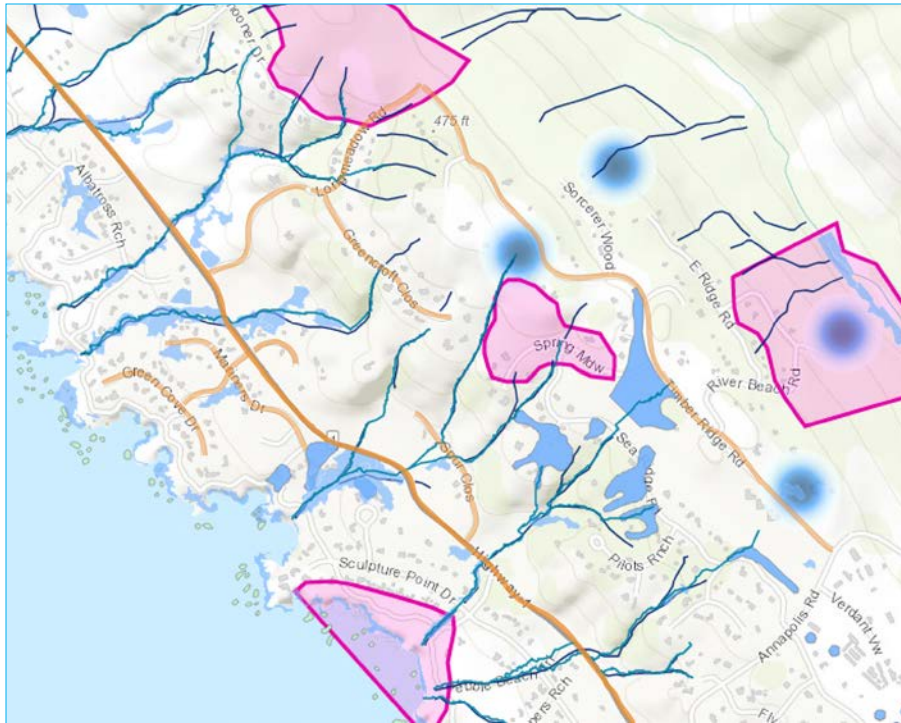
Ridge Trail at Sorcerer Wood

RIDGE TRAIL AND SAG PONDS TRAIL

The Ridge Line Trail sits just inside The Sea Ranch property and wanders deep into the redwoods.

LONG MEADOW AND SPUR CLOSE TRAILS

Driving up Longmeadow Road, or walking the Longmeadow Trail, provides a three-quarter mile overview of grasslands and terraces extending from Longmeadow slope, through the Bowl, across Long Meadow, north of the road, to the Ohlson Hedgerow. Longmeadow Trail passes through Longmeadow Bowl and ascends Longmeadow Slope to Greencroft Close. The trail offers exceptional views across long stretches of grasslands and terraces. As the trail ascends, High Meadow comes to view, continuing the grassland slopes to the forest front. From the top of the slope view corridors open along the length of Longmeadow, to the ocean bluff and Knipp-Stengel Barn. Portions of the trail are steep with an elevation change of about 200 feet from the Bowl to Greencroft Close. From Spur Close and along the Spur Close Trail, the grassland slopes descend from High Meadow all the way to Highway 1.



AREA 6 WATERWAYS

Area 6 is laced with waterways. Some dip underground; others can be seen and heard at the surface. A sag pond (indicated by the fuzzy blue circle) near Timber Ridge is the source of one long waterway. The pink outlined areas note places of high biodiversity, with many different species of plants. Some may be uncommon, like the pink star tulip in spring or the yellow supple daisy. These areas are given special management consideration when grazing and mowing, to protect special plants.

Recommendations for Longmeadow Slope view corridor:

Action 1. Keep the high meadow, including the cove-like feature, open and intermittently grazed with periodic mowing to remove emergent brush. Remove random independent trees unless they serve a specific visual or ecological purpose.

Action 2. Reinforce sense of continuity of this slope (Longmeadow Slope) by keeping it clear of trees and tall shrubs, particularly ... near private lots and the start of Longmeadow Trail.

Action 3. Widen the (Longmeadow Slope) view corridor by reducing forest on both the north and south edges of the slope to enhance views and to improve awareness of the riparian corridor on the south.

Action 4. Remove the cluster of trees downhill from the Longmeadow Trail near the intersection with Spur Close Trail and replace with lower-growing vegetation, such as madrone, to provide a place of shade and rest with panoramic views.

Action 5. Remove trees, in lower stretches of the slope, that will eventually block views and interrupt the sense of meadow continuity from Spur Close up to High Meadow.

These recommendations for clearing trees and brush, and opening the view corridors were implemented in 2011 by F&R crew and contractors, to great effect. Stewards planted madrones.

High Meadow Slope view corridor at Spur Close



Recommendations for Longmeadow Bowl:

Action 7. *Maintain feathered, but defined, edges for forest/meadow boundary and for forest/riparian boundary along the southern edge leading towards the highway and ocean. Encourage low, wetland-type vegetation within the bowl as a firebreak. (Implemented in 2011.)*

Action 8. *Maintain strong forest face. Some thinning for views can be done if buildings do not become dominant as viewed from below. Clear understory for fuel load reduction, but maintain sizable pockets for habitat, consistent with reasonable fire-safe practices.*

Action 9. *Protect the cluster of wind-swept trees just north of Longmeadow Road (outside the limits of the project site) that help define Longmeadow Bowl, as well as the cluster of trees to the south of the road that make a transition to the forest.*

HIGHWAY 1 passes between the signature cypress hedgerow and the pine extension hedgerow, one of the few places along the length of the Sea Ranch where the hedgerow line passes across the highway. It is one of the places where the highway comes closest to the ocean, as the road is pushed west to move around the hills and land forms of the Headlands. The two hedgerows form a perceptual gate across Highway 1, marking progress along the length of The Sea Ranch. The pine trees in the hedgerow east of Highway 1 were planted to help protect properties along Spur Close from wind.

MARINER'S HEDGEROW, among the shortest on The Sea Ranch, has a mix of conditions. The cypress hedgerow from the bluff to Mariner's Drive spans commons and private lot lines, making it difficult to maintain. Some infill planting has resulted in a mixed-size, partial hedgerow. The older section of the cypress hedgerow adjacent to the knoll should be replaced to provide eventual continuity in size and height for this hedgerow. This location would have



Longmeadow Bowl



Longmeadow Slope



Rest log at Spur Close Trail



Mariner's Hedgerow as it spans Highway 1

abundant light and relatively little competition from neighboring secondary growth, giving it a high likelihood for success. The hedgerow from Mariner's Drive to the highway provides a strong landmark along the highway.

Recommendations for the Highway 1 corridor:

Action 16. *When the pines (East of Highway 1) die and need to be removed, replace the ones closest to Highway 1 with Monterey cypresses or some other suitable trees to retain the sense of a gateway. Keep the shore pines during the transition and study the wind impacts on the Spur Close lots before determining how much of the hedgerow should be replanted.*

Action 18. *The border of trees along the highway should remain, but the management of trees along this stretch, through thinning, topping, and removal, needs to be done in a coordinated way, reconciling various interests in a way that respects the whole. This area should receive specific overall design attention. Considerations include: maintaining a buffer between the highway and homes on the west side of the highway, screening houses along the west of Headlands Close, opening views, reducing risk of fires spreading across Highway 1.*

Action 19. *Remove saplings between Highway 1 and Mariners Drive. Use the help of a Commons Stewards group of nearby owners under staff direction.*

MARINERS KNOLL is a large mound west of Mariners Drive. Approaching from the north, the knoll is a distinctive land form, and it is a foreground for the tree-tops of Mariner's Hedgerow. The Knoll is divided into three lots, all developed.

Recommendation for the bluff cypress:

Action 23. *Protect, but contain with regular trimming, the two large bluff-top cypresses just north of Headlands Reach that are distinctive landmarks along the bluff trail.*

MARINER'S HEDGEROW AND BLUFF TRAIL

*Inside the Mariner's Hedgerow, the tight, double row of cypress create a dramatic trail experience, where inches separate towering trees. Stepping over exposed roots can make footing uncertain. Through the trees, the knoll rises out of the meadow. Emerging from the hedgerow, a large stand of bluff cypress and precipitous bluff edges divert the trail and views open up across the meadow to the rugged coastline and more signature bluff cypress. Notice the historical marker for **Smuggler's Cove**. Looking back from Smugglers Cove, the meadow stretches north and the knoll is a flat terrace, crowned with two houses. There is concern about the future of the bluff top cypress; they are threatened both by owners seeking to enhance ocean views and by the inexorable process of bluff erosion.*

Mariner's Knoll and Hedgerow





The Changing Landscape

These map and photos demonstrate the changes in the landscape over the course of almost 50 years. Note the changes in the forest front, the riparian ways, and the Mariner's Hedgerow.

Photos this page and top next page: Kenneth and Gabrielle Adelman, California Coastal Records Project, www.californiacoastline.org

LANDSCAPE PRINCIPLES

The CLC accepts the following principles for managing The Sea Ranch landscape. The committee expects the list will be refined or modified on the basis of experience.

Recognize that our landscape is defined by the ocean, by hedgerows and open meadows spaced along the length of the coast, and by a continuous band of forest and internal meadows descending its slopes.

Retain the sense of large landforms and special features that create differing places within The Sea Ranch.

Reinforce the awareness of streams and drainage paths that help shape the land and that sustain wildlife and plants.

Design and manage commons in accordance with the founding concept of clustered houses and vegetation.

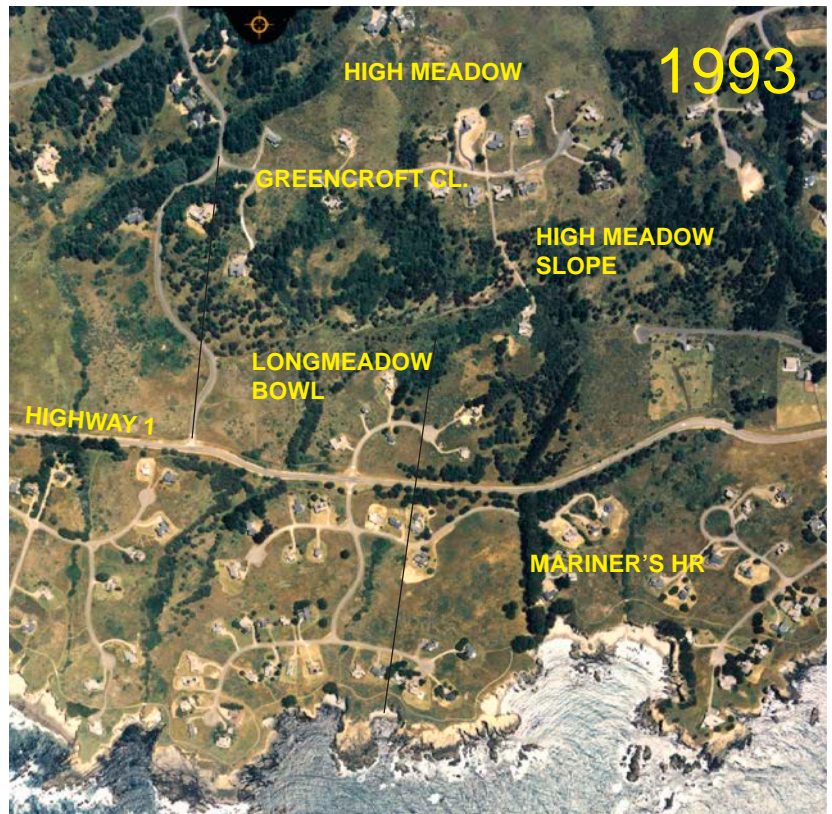
Nurture strong neighborhood identities to aid in understanding and finding distinct locations within the community.

Understand that our landscape allows multiple layers of experience, from horizons and slopes to butterflies and mollusks.

Manage vegetation to ensure abundant wildlife habitat and to provide for the safety and well-being of the community.

Organize the landscape to provide environmental benefits: wind shelter, solar access, and appropriate water flows and retention.

Recognize that landscape is always dynamic, and that it requires management in order to fulfill these guiding principles.



RESOURCES

CLC Area Plan Reports for Commons Landscape Management. (CLC web site)

THE SEA RANCH COMMONS LANDSCAPE: Commons Landscape Planning and Management 2010–2016. (CLC web site.)

TSR Landscape Management Programs slide show by Bill Wiemeyer. (CLC web site)

Various TSR Fire Safety and Fuel Management Plans. (TSR Fire Safety Task Force web site)

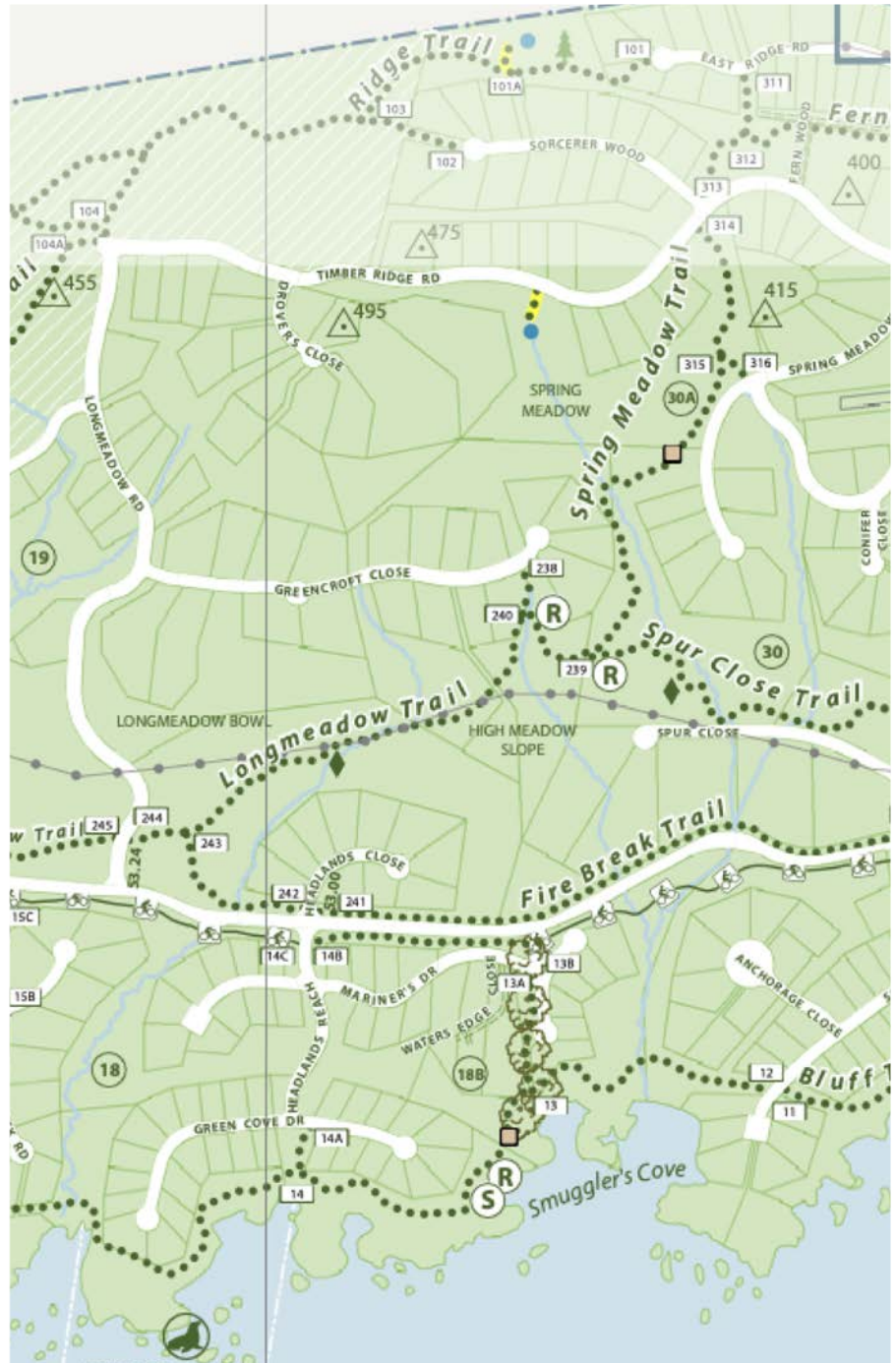
Condition and Management of the Vegetation at The Sea Ranch. Joe McBride, 2012-13. (Forest Task Force web site.)

TSR Hedgerow Rehabilitation Plan. (CLC web site.)

Protocols for CLC Neighbor Group Stewardship. (CLC web site and DCEM)

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Area 6 portion of the TSRA Trails Map