



November 28, 2023

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the California Botanic Garden, I am writing to express our strong support for the *Catalina Island Restoration Project*. With more than 86 acres and 95,000 people served annually, California Botanic Garden (CalBG) is the largest botanic garden dedicated to California native plants. We have a mission to conserve California's plant diversity and to enhance human well-being by inspiring and educating the public and the scientific community. Beyond the garden walls, CalBG is regarded as a leading center for research and conservation. The Garden's work has a special focus on California plants including those of Catalina Island. Resident scientists have published a flora of the Island and, more recently, our researchers contributed to the understanding of the evolution of a rare grass native to the Island, *Dissanthelium californicum* (Catalina grass). Further, our living collection, seed bank, and nursery support numerous collections of rare and endemic plants from Catalina Island, providing a safeguard for the unique and irreplaceable botanical diversity.

Catalina Island is a special place for plants. The Island supports 34 plants that are endemic to the Channel Islands, eight of which are restricted to Catalina Island and live nowhere else on earth. One of these extremely rare and endemic species, *Cercocarpus traskiae* (Catalina Island mountain-mahogany) is considered one of the rarest trees in California, with only seven known individuals. *One of the major threats to this extremely rare species is habitat degradation from introduced herbivores*. This threat was recently cited as ongoing in the latest five-year review published for the species by the US Fish and Wildlife in 2021.

The Catalina Island Conservancy manages 48,000 acres on Catalina Island or 88% of the Island. As such, their stewardship is critical to the long-term conservation of the rare, threatened and endemic plants that call the Island home. The *Catalina Island Restoration Project* focuses on three key areas: 1) Habitat restoration to combat soil erosion, conserve endangered species, and reduce wildfire risk. 2) Plant restoration, fostering a seed supply of local native seeds which is essential to reintroducing native plants to the landscape. 3) Non-native species removal including the removal of mule deer and invasive plant species. Invasive species removal is a particularly key component of the restoration project because invasive species are known to have significant impact on islands ecosystems and have been found to be a leading cause of species extinctions on islands.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that the removal of non-native and invasive animals contributes significantly to the restoration and recovery of island ecosystems and species. For example, four federally listed plant species endemic to San Clemente Island, San Clemente Island (SCI) bush-mallow (*Malacothamnus clementinus*), SCI paintbrush (*Castilleja grisea*), SCI lotus (*Acmispon dendroideus* var. *traskiae*), and SCI larkspur (*Delphinium variegatum* subsp. *kinkiense*), were removed from the List of Federal Endangered and Threatened Plants based on species recovery in 2023. Specifically, the US Fish and Wildlife

**California Botanic Garden**

1500 North College Avenue, Claremont, CA 91711  
info@calbg.org | (909) 625-8767 | [www.calbg.org](http://www.calbg.org)



Service review indicated that the U.S. Navy's successful removal of non-native herbivores (goats, sheep, pigs, cattle, mule deer) led to recovery of vegetation in areas of severely degraded habitat on San Clemente Island which in turn led to the recovery of these four plant species, such that they no longer require protections under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

As the primary land stewards of Catalina Island, the Catalina Island Conservancy has the important task of ensuring the longevity of imperiled plant species such as the Catalina Island mountain-mahogany. We commend the Catalina Island Conservancy for proposing a comprehensive restoration program that will support restoration and recovery of the Island's biodiversity from multiple angles, including invasive species removal. We look forward to learning of the recovery of endangered species that will result from the removal of invasive non-native herbivores, as has been demonstrated across the other Channel Islands. The plants of Catalina Island deserve this important action for their protection. As the indigenous inhabitants that give Catalina Island its unique sense of place, the native plants of Catalina are an irreplaceable treasure not only to Californians, but also to the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucinda A. McDade". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lucinda A. McDade, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Judith B. Friend Director of Research