



Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico.
November 22, 2023.

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Letter of Support for the Catalina Island Restoration Project.

On behalf of Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (GECI), I want to express our strong support for the Catalina Island Restoration Project led by The Catalina Island Conservancy.

For 25 years, our organization has been devoted to the ecological restoration of Mexican Islands. Based on our experience, it is clear to us that the only way to restore the native flora of an insular ecosystem is through the removal of invasive alien species, followed by active restoration. We have witnessed examples of severe degradation of entire vegetation communities due to the presence of introduced herbivores. Guadalupe, Socorro, and María Magdalena islands in the Mexican Pacific are examples of how goats, sheep, and introduced white-tailed deer modify the native flora composition and promote soil erosion, with negative impacts on the entire ecosystem's functions and services.

On Guadalupe, after goats were introduced, the plant communities either disappeared or remained as isolated individual plants. At least 26 plant taxa became extinct or were extirpated. On Socorro, the ecosystem was impacted by feral sheep for more than 150 years. A vast area on the island was transformed from a rich community of ferns, vines, shrubs, and trees to a savanna-like open habitat with dominance of exotic plants and heavy sheet and gully erosion. On Magdalena Island, introduced white-tailed deer are threatening the populations of at least six plant species, some of them endemic to the archipelago.

On big islands with complex terrain such as Guadalupe, Socorro, and Catalina, the most efficient and therefore humane method to knockdown the population of ungulates is using a skilled hunter targeting animals from a helicopter. This is a method that has been used widely on islands across the world and proved successful in aiding in reducing the duration of eradication campaigns and animal suffering in consequence.

The alteration of these unique ecosystems is the consequence of human intervention, so we are thus ethically responsible to reverse our impact and promote recovery as much and as fast as we can. After sheep were eradicated from Socorro vegetation cover immediately started to increase. Only four years after the eradication, 11% of the island's bare ground surface recovered the vegetation layer. In addition, soil erosion started to decrease, as well as soil compaction which facilitated the recolonization of plants. The island harbors a lot of endemic animal species, such as landbirds and a lizard. As the habitat started to recover, the abundance of these species did. Guadalupe, and the other Channel Islands where herbivores have been removed, are great examples of how insular ecosystems can recover once herbivores are removed. Guadalupe Island shares 153 plant species with Catalina Island. Catalina nightshade (*Solanum wallacei*), Feltnleaf ceanothus (*Ceanothus arboreus*), and Island oak (*Quercus tomentella*) have recovered remarkably on Guadalupe once pressure by herbivory was released. On Catalina these species are still considered the highest priority based on rarity, they continue to be threatened by deer browsing. The Catalina Island Conservancy is seeking to change that.

Sincerely,

Dr. Federico Méndez Sánchez
Director General

Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, A.C.

Av. Moctezuma 836, Zona Centro, Ensenada, B.C., México 22800 Tel. (646) 173 4943 y 173 4997
www.islas.org.mx federico.mendez@islas.org.mx FB: Conservación de Islas