

December 1, 2023

Re: Support for the Catalina Island Restoration Project

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of Irvine Ranch Conservancy (IRC), I am writing to express our organization's enthusiastic support for the Catalina Island Restoration Project. As climate change continues to exacerbate threats to the island's ecosystems, including invasive species, fire, and drought, an ambitious and comprehensive approach is essential to preserve and restore critical habitats.

As a mainland counterpart to Catalina Island Conservancy (CIC) with a shared mission, IRC is well positioned to evaluate and endorse this project. Both the State of California and the United States Department of Interior have designated nearly 40,000 acres of open space in Orange County as the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks, and my organization protects, restores, and enhances approximately 30,000 acres of this landscape on behalf of a collection of public landowners while ensuring environmentally responsible and sustainable public access. Like Catalina Island, this open space is contained within the California Floristic Province global biodiversity hotspot and is unique due to its proximity to major population centers. In our area, the major threats to habitat quality are also largely rooted in the legacy of grazing, in our case by cattle, which has led to the invasion of native shrubland by non-native grasses that in turn have contributed to increasingly frequent fire.

The challenges facing Catalina are even more urgent due to the more than 60 endemic species, isolation, and introduced deer, whose population is growing unchecked due to the lack of predators. The resultant overgrazing is destroying the ecosystem and pushing several endemic plants toward extinction while compromising ecological functions.

The Catalina Island Restoration Project arose out of an extensive strategic planning process and is consistent with best practices for ecological restoration practiced by my organization and others. Neutralizing critical threats, especially invasive plants and animals, followed by seed-based restoration of native habitats has proven to be a highly effective intervention in Southern California and beyond. Importantly, the limited wild seed collection with bulking at the seed farm will ensure a sustainable supply of genetically appropriate plant materials that will allow CIC to adaptively manage the project even in the face of stochastic conditions.

This project promises to help protect Catalina's precious biological resources for generations to come, and we at IRC look forward to contributing to its success in any way that we can.

Sincerely,



Nathan Gregory, PhD.
Interim Senior Vice President and Chief Programs Officer