



November 10, 2023

Letter of Support for the Catalina Island Conservancy's Catalina Island Restoration Project

To Whom It May Concern:

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden has conducted research on the Channel Islands for nearly 100 years. Through this research, which has included documenting damage and recovery from years of ranching or other uses, it is clear that one of the most critical restoration activities for these island ecosystems is the removal of feral non-native animals. This action alone allows for the recovery of many native plants that cannot survive with grazing, browsing, or rooting pressure. Efforts to restore many native species without controlling these feral non-native animals have been unsuccessful. Alternatively, the control of feral animals on San Clemente, San Nicolas, Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel has yielded positive ecological benefits.

The Channel Islands are home to some of the most unique plant species on the planet, many of which are found nowhere else on Earth. These island species have had no need for protective chemicals, thorns, and other defenses that have otherwise protected mainland species from mule deer overbrowsing. Additionally, the natural predators that help to keep deer populations in check on the mainland do not exist on Catalina Island. The result is severe overbrowsing which destroys natural habitats, causes significant erosion problems, reduces groundwater recharge, and threatens the continued existence of many of the 60 plant species that occur only on Catalina Island as well as the native wildlife that they support. It's also important to recognize the impact on the deer population itself, as degraded environmental conditions lead to starvation and disease.

Even with the research showing the above effects, this type of intervention is not taken lightly, and I know the Catalina Island Conservancy has studied alternative solutions to impacts from introduced mule deer on the plant species of the island extensively. Other alternatives have already been attempted and failed. The only way to restore and maintain the native plant and animal diversity on the island is to remove these animals.

Precision hunting, which is the recommended means of removing these species on other California islands and island systems around the world is at once humane, safe, and effective at starting the fragile island systems on the road to recovery. We understand the concerns of those opposed to the removal of mule deer, but we urge everyone to consider the long-term impacts - on plants, other animals, and people - if we do not act. Please support these efforts to restore the island so it can flourish for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Windhager", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Steve Windhager, Ph.D.
Executive Director