ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE
DEDICATED TO ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

December 3, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Charlton Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Catalina Island Restoration Project – *Support*

Dear Director Bonham:

Endangered Habitats League (EHL) *supports* ecological restoration and climate-resilient actions on Catalina Island as provided in the Cataline Island Restoration Project. For your reference, EHL is a Southern California regional conservation group dedicated to ecosystem protection and sustainable land use.

EHL is concerned that invasive species such as deer have had adverse impacts on the island for decades, and it is imperative to act now to halt and reverse the damage. Catalina Island has more than 60 endemic plant and animal species. The Catalina Island Restoration Project is critical to protect the biodiversity and integrate management for island residents and visitors.

The Channel Islands are unique ecosystems in their own right, and natural communities have evolved apart from the mainland. It is important to respect these attributes. As the only accessible island in Southern California, Catalina is an important entry point for millions of people in Southern California to connect with one of the richest island ecosystems in the world. The Channel Islands can offer a chance to see what California was like prior to European arrival.

EHL supports the Catalina Island Restoration Project because it will provide the proper basis for science, education, and nature. We thus urge the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to support the Restoration Project, *including the most humane and effective programs available to remove invasive species.* Eradicating the mule deer is a vital and foundational component of the Restoration Project, and will enable the ecosystem to recover from overgrazing and trampling. Studies have shown that aerial hunting, as proposed in the permit, is the most humane and effective method of deer removal, minimizing stress levels of deer significantly more than translocation and birth control. Despite Catalina Island having the longest recreational hunting season in the state, the mule deer population continues to grow unchecked, indicating that recreational hunting alone is not a viable method of controlling mule deer population.

Catalina Island's ecosystems as we know them are truly at risk. Without protective measures, many native and endemic species face extinction, and the Island may no longer be able to withstand climate change or support diverse ecosystems for years to come. The effects of disappearing species are already evident, as native chaparral habitats disappear and transition into invasive annual grasslands. Native plants on the Island absorb and retain water and are drought-resistant, acting as natural protection against wildfire and providing important habitat for native animal species. When these native plants are threatened by non-native wildlife and other risks, the Island is vulnerable to devastating climate threats such as wildfire and drought. A catastrophic wildfire is inevitable, such as the 2007 Island Fire. Droughts

are similarly unavoidable and disastrous, such as the 2011-2017 drought on the Island, which caused wildlife to die of dehydration and starvation in large numbers and residents to rely on polluting desalination plants. The Catalina Island Restoration Project will safeguard the Island from similar catastrophic impacts, lessening the damage to the Island and bolstering the Island's ability to recover.

The Catalina Island Conservancy is an exemplary steward of Island resources, successfully balancing conservation, education, and recreation. Their Catalina Island Restoration Project is a science-based, comprehensive plan to protect the Island's biodiversity, reduce erosion, prevent wildfires, and create a sustainable environment where nature and humans will thrive for years to come. The implementation of the Restoration Project is urgent due to the heightened climate threats to the plant and animal species, residents, and ecosystems of the Island. Without the Restoration Project, communities across Southern California could lose access to one of the largest and most unique outdoor classrooms, residents would be prey to climate-induced stresses, and the world could lose species found nowhere else on earth.

We thank you for your time and greatly look forward to working together to ensure that Catalina Island will be preserved for generations to come.

Yours truly,

Dan Silver
Executive Director