CEQA STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR RESTORATION PROJECTS (SERP) CONCURRENCE REQUEST

Completion and submission of this form is voluntary. This form may be submitted to request concurrence from the Director of Fish and Wildlife pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56.

The Lead Agency may submit this signed form (pdf) and all attachments via the Department's Environmental Permit Information Management System (EPIMS) Document Repository or via email at restorationpermitting@wildlife.ca.gov.

1. LEAD AGENCY

Lead Agency Name:	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Contact Person's Name:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Street Address:	Click or tap here to enter text.
City, State, Zip:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Contact Person's Telephone:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Contact Person's E-mail:	Click or tap here to enter text.

2. PROJECT PROPONENT ☐ Check Box and Skip to Number 3 if Same as Lead Agency

Business/Agency/Organization:	Santa Catalina Island Conservancy
Contact Person's Name:	Lauren Dennhardt
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3. PROJECT INFORMATION

A. Project Name:	Catalina Island Restoration Project
B. County or Counties:	Los Angeles
C. Lat./Long. Coordinates:	33.382117 N, 118.433406 W
D. Estimated Project Start/End Dates:	1/1/2026 – 1/1/2056

E. Provide a brief description of the future discretionary Project approval the Lead Agency is considering (see CEQA Guidelines sections 15352 and 15378) and an approximate date range for when the Lead Agency may make that approval if the Lead Agency obtains a SERP concurrence from CDFW.
The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is acting as the Lead Agency and will consider issuing a Restoration Management Permit (RMP) under Fish and Game Code 1672 for the Catalina Island Restoration Project (Project).

F. Provide a brief description of the Project location, size, and funding sources. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

The Project will occur throughout Santa Catalina Island (Catalina). The majority of the Project will occur on land owned and managed by the Catalina Island Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Catalina Island Conservancy (Conservancy) owns and manages roughly 88% (171 km2) of Catalina. Catalina is located approximately 34 km south of Long Beach, California, and is within the Channel Islands biodiversity hotspot. The Project area encompasses the entirety of Catalina Island, centering on 33.382117 N, 118.433406 W.

Currently, the Conservancy is providing funding for the Project. The Conservancy will also pursue grant opportunities to help fund the implementation of the Project.

G. Provide a brief Project description, including any post-restoration work, operation and maintenance, or other related activities. Summarize the Project's expected environmental benefits (e.g., acres or stream-miles restored/enhanced, species benefitted, etc.). Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

The purpose of the Project is to restore the ecological integrity and improve the climate resiliency of Catalina Island by protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of native plants and wildlife habitats (see Habitat Restoration and Monitoring Plan ("HRMP") HRMP, Section 1.2 and Restoration Project 10-Year Workplan (2026-2036) ("RW") RW, Section 1). The island ecosystem of Catalina has been degraded by a history of invasive ungulates, including invasive Mule deer, reducing vegetation cover and selectively browsing on rare and endemic plants, as well as the spread of invasive plant species that outcompete native plant communities resulting in habitat type conversion (Island chapparal has shifted to invasive annual grasslands in most cases) (HRMP Sections 2.1.6, 2.1.7, 2.2.1). These challenges have caused a loss in plant and wildlife biodiversity, extirpation of native species, and diminished climate resiliency on Catalina. The lack of vegetation cover has also led to increased soil erosion, decreased water capture, and reduction in quality wildlife habitat. The Project addresses these issues through active restoration (HRMP section 4, RW section 2), biosecurity measures (HRMP 4.3, RW section 3), and monitoring and documentation (HRMP section 5, RW section 4). Active restoration includes, invasive plant control and management; collecting, bulking, and reseeding; and fence building before removal of deer. Biosecurity programs include a comprehensive invasive plant program, annual fox monitoring and infectious disease surveillance, and the removal of invasive Mule deer. Monitoring and documentation include the fox annual report, monitoring active restoration locations; lepidoptera, bird, shrew, small mammal, and herpetofauna surveys, and landscape level vegetation monitoring.

Planned restoration activities include, but are not limited to, invasive plant management through mechanical removal and chemical treatment, monitoring flora and fauna, removal of Invasive Mule deer, outplantings of rare and native plant species, native seed bulking, and seed dissemination for habitat restoration (HRMP and RW). The Conservancy has worked with Land IQ and the University of California Los Angeles to develop a landscape-scale habitat restoration and monitoring plan ("HRMP") that will guide restoration activities in conjunction with the construction of the seed farm and expansion of the Conservancy's plant nursery to include seed bulking. The native seed farm building will also house a micropropagation laboratory to allow for seed germination trials, viability testing, and the production of rare and endangered plants of special concern using micropropagation, cuttings, hydroponics, aeroponics, and air layering.

The HRMP is a supporting document and outlines all activities and locations restoration could occur. The RW is the 10-year implementation workplan for the HRMP. Restoration actions identified within the HRMP and subsequent RW include initial dethatching of accumulated non-native invasive thatch and litter; seed collection, bulking (on and off Island), cleaning, and storage; propagation of container plants from seed and cuttings for outplanting on the landscape; sourcing plants from conservation collections and storage of Channel Islands and Catalina endemic plant species (HRMP Section 1.3.8 and RW Sections 2.4 and 2.5). Potential seed application methods include but are not limited to sowing by hand, broadcasting by hand and with devices such

as a seed spreader, seed ball broadcasting, mechanical broadcast seeding with devices such as a push or motorized broadcast spreader, drill seeding manually or with a mechanized drill seeder, hydroseeding, imprint seeding, and remedial seeding. Selection of an appropriate technique for a site will be based primarily on conditions and accessibility.

Biosecurity measures to secure the Island from threats are a critical component of this Project. Biosecurity on the Island focuses on the prevention of introduction and spread of harmful species that threaten the ecosystem as a whole. The Catalina Invasive Plant Program (CIPP) prioritizes management of high-risk invasive plant species to mitigate their impact on the landscape and eradicate when feasible (HRMP Appendix A). Another critical component is the Conservancy's fox mortality monitoring and vaccination project which mitigates the threat of novel diseases being introduced into the populations. Activities include fox trapping, vaccination, blood draws, measurements, collaring, necropsies, telemetry, a fox hotline for mortality and injured fox reporting from the public, and euthanasia when sick/injured. Invasive Mule deer removal is a critical step to allow for landscape level restoration and will include sterilization, aerial/ground net capture, aerial/ground monitoring, aerial/ground transportation, dogs for locating invasive Mule deer, ground shooting during the day and night, collaring, shooting from a ground vehicle, baiting, thermal detection of invasive Mule deer, and euthanasia (RW 3.5).

The Conservancy has developed a long-term monitoring plan (RW 4.5) with the primary goal of measuring the biodiversity of plant and wildlife species across Catalina both before and after restoration activities. Monitoring is outlined in the Management Plan (HRMP Section 5.3) and 10-year Workplan (RW Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 4.) submitted as part of the Restoration Management Permit and includes lepidoptera capture and biodiversity analysis, Catalina Island Fox (*Urocyon littoralis catalinae*) (fox) population estimates, Santa Catalina Island Shrew (*Sorex ornatus willetti*) surveys, analysis of active restoration sites, 60 long-term vegetation monitoring plots, monitoring of all native small mammals and visual/audio bird monitoring (HRMP Sections 1.3.9, 5.3.4 and 5.3.5, and RW Section 4.6 and 4.7).

The Project's environmental benefits include enhancing the diversity of native plants and wildlife habitats, increasing carbon sequestration through revegetation of the Island, increasing resilience to climatic variation, reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and restoring ecosystem processes such as soil stability and water retention across Catalina. The expected benefits will be to all 47,884 acres and the 80.47 acres of water bodies. Biodiversity of vegetation will increase through reduced browsing pressure on native plants and through propagating and outplanting of plant species. The Project will target invasive annual grasslands and restore them to coastal sage scrub, island chaparral, and native grassland. Currently, 31% of the Island chaparral on Catalina has been converted into invasive annual dominated grasslands since 1941 – a total loss of 1,988 hectares. The Conservancy seeks to reverse that trend through intensive invasive plant management and reseeding. This will lead to a greater diversity of wildlife habitats for refuge, breeding, and foraging. For instance, increasing preferred invasive Mule deer-browse species such as toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) and the endemic manzanita (*Arctostaphylos catalinae*) will increase forage availability for the federally threatened fox (HRMP Section 2.5). This will have an additional benefit of reducing flashy annual grass fuel loads and increasing fire resiliency.

Catalina's flora includes 60+ species with California Rare Plant Ranking (CRPR) status, three species with federal endangered status Catalina Island mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus traskiae),* Lyon's pygmydaisy *(Pentacheta lyonii)*, and Santa Cruz Island rockcress (*Sibara filifolia*); one with federally threatened status island rush-rose (*Crocanthemum greenei*) and two with California endangered status (*C. traskiae* and *P. lyonii*).

H. CDFW recommends direct coordination with all interested California Native American tribes. Please provide a summary of the Lead Agency's engagement with tribes. Be careful not to include any sensitive or confidential information. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

The Conservancy has conducted outreach with representatives of the Gabrieleno-Tongva tribes, including hosting site visits to Catalina in Spring 2023, 2024, and 2025 to discuss island restoration and other opportunities to collaborate. This outreach has resulted in the development of a Memorandum of Understanding which was signed September 2025 (included in permit application). Outreach to the tribes has resulted in inclusion of restoration work the tribes are interested in within the HRMP such as spiny rush enhancement. Other engagement points include Gabrieleno-Tongva inclusion as authors of a chapter in the soon to be published *Flora of Catalina Island*.

I. CDFW recommends public outreach and coordination with interested parties and public agencies. Please provide a summary of the Lead Agency's engagement with interested parties and public agencies. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

In 2022 and extending into mid-2023, the Conservancy began early conversations with stakeholders about the invasive Mule deer removal component of the prior proposal for the Island Restoration Project. The Conservancy spoke to over 70 community leaders in Avalon to receive their feedback and input on the proposal.

The Conservancy also hosted two advisory council meetings in June and July 2023. Invitees included representatives from local politicians, business leaders, and community stakeholders. Meetings included receiving input and suggestions along with visiting restoration sites.

Following this public outreach, the Los Angeles Times published a story about the planned invasive Mule deer removal on October 1, 2023. The Conservancy also posted FAQs on its website, which contained information about its proposal and set up an email to receive comments from the public.

On October 17, 2023, the Conservancy presented details about the proposed island restoration, including the planned invasive Mule deer removal, to the Avalon City Council during the City Council's regularly scheduled public meeting. Conservancy staff listened to public comment about the proposal before the Conservancy's presentation. The Conservancy's presentation is available online.

The Conservancy provided further public engagement by offering free tours of the Catalina Island Restoration Area. These tours were an opportunity to directly ask Conservancy staff questions. These tours were offered starting in November 2023 through January 2024, offering four to six tours per week, using extensive outreach in the local newspaper and on social media. In total, 30 local Island residents attended a tour.

Additionally, the Conservancy has been interviewed by a variety of media outlets to answer questions on its prior restoration propsal. Conservancy staff has been interviewed by The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, LAist, ABC7, The Catalina Islander, KTLA, GearJunkie, Fox News online, OpenSpaces, local radio station KISL, CBS National News, The Times of London, among others.

On December 13, 2023, Conservancy staff, attended a California Fish and Game Commission meeting to provide additional information on the Conservancy's prior restoration proposal during open public comment.

On January 31, 2024, the Conservancy hosted a Community Forum on the Island to discuss the then-proposed restoration plan and deer removal. Participants could attend in person and online and the event was translated into Spanish. A recording of the forum is also available online. After the Community Forum, the Conservancy posted answers to every question that was received online.

Also in 2024, the Conservancy advertised and hosted four different community conversations (September 11th, April 8th, March 18th, and March 1st) about the importance of Island restoration and relevant science. These were advertised to all locals in the paper and mailers were sent out to all residents. We also hosted a Last Friday Lecture Series titled Preserving the Catalina Island Fox with the Conservancy's Wildlife Conservation Manager Katie Elder on Jul. 26, 2024

In 2025, the Conservancy put on two events as part of the Catalina Speaker Series: A Community Conversation About Wildfire Prevention and Collaboration on Feb. 28, 2025 and A Spotlight on Protecting and Restoring Catalina's Amazing Oak Ecosystem on Apr. 25, 2025.

In 2025, in response to community and stakeholder feedback regarding its prior restoration proposal, the Conservancy initiated the current Project proposal, which includes restoration and revegetation efforts in the Project's initial phase and removes aerial shooting of invasive Mule deer. The Conservancy also withdrew its permit application for the predecessor Island Restoration Project proposal. A detailed Island Restoration Workplan (RW Section 5) was developed to operationalize the HRMP as part of the new Project along with including the monitoring of sensitive species such as the Santa Catalina Island shrew, Catalina mountain mahogany, monitoring birds and lepidoptera (moths and butterflies), and more extensive vegetation monitoring.

4. REQUIRED DETERMINATIONS

Using substantial evidence and best available science, provide a determination and explanation for each SERP criteria listed below:

A. The Project is exclusively one or both of the following: (1) a project to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend, or (2) a project to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

The [Lead Agency Name] has determined the Project is exclusively a project to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend, [and/or] a project to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

Please provide an explanation supporting the above determination. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

This Project will result in the conservation and enhancement of unique native flora only found on Catalina Island and contribute to more biodiverse native wildlife populations through decreased pressure and occurrence of invasive and non-native species. Removal of invasive and non-native species and the Conservancy's revegetation efforts will create higher quality habitat across the Island resulting in increased opportunities for native wildlife species, like the Catalina Island fox, Catalina Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni unitti*), Catalina Island California Quail (*Callipepla californica catalinensis*), the three endemic bees species on the Island, and six endemic land snail species, to seek refuge, breed, and forage.

B. An eligible project may have incidental public benefits, such as public access and recreation.

The [Lead Agency Name] has determined that the Project [may/may not] have incidental public benefits.

Please provide an explanation supporting the above determination. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

The Project will reduce risk of fire ignition, with fire risk mitigated through the replacement of highly combustible invasive annual grasslands with native perennial species (HRMP 1.3.5 and 1.3.6). The Project will enhance public recreation by removing obtrusive exclosure fencing and cages currently located across the Island to protect sensitive native plants from invasive Mule deer browsing (HRMP 1.3.7). The Project will also promote plant and wildlife viewing opportunities. Incidental benefits to improve safety and utilities to residents and tourists include increased groundwater replenishment, benefiting the City of Avalon's freshwater supply. The Project will enhance recreational opportunities by providing more biodiversity to be viewed by the public, more shade on the landscape, and enhanced opportunities for birding.

C. The Project does both of the following: (1) Results in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and (2) Includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment.

The [Lead Agency Name] has determined that the Project does both of the following: (1) Results in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and (2) Includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment.

For each criterion below, please provide an explanation supporting the above determination. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

Long-Term Net Benefits to Climate Resiliency:

. By restoring these areas with native vegetation and replacing the quick drying flashy fuels of invasive grasses with slower-to-dry native shrubs, the Project will create a more fire-resilient landscape, reducing the risk of wildfire ignition. The Project will address habitats type-converted to invasive grasslands on Catalina (HRMP Appendix C). These are areas where introduced ungulates have left a legacy of disturbance and more competitive non-native grasses have outcompeted and replaced native plant communities, often leading to increased fire risk and reduced biodiversity. As conditions continue to become hotter and drier, it is crucial to improve the resiliency of these landscapes to wildfires

The Project contributes to long-term climate resiliency through several strategies. By supporting revegetation across Catalina through plant and invasive Mule deer removal, extensive reseeding, and outplanting native species, the Project will bolster carbon sequestration (HRMP 1.2.1) through the transition of invasive annual grasslands back to coastal sage scrub and island chaparral (Caspi et al. 2019). Revegetation with perennial plants, and specifically chapparal, will increase the level of carbon dioxide absorbed by plants and stored in the soil, helping to reduce atmospheric carbon levels and mitigate climate change (Luo et al. 2007).

The Project will also help to improve soil stability and water capture on Catalina (HRMP 1.2.1). Increased native vegetation cover across the Island with perennial plants and their more extensive root systems will help prevent soil erosion, landslides, and other land degradation processes, ensuring the land's long-term health and productivity. By increasing soil stability and vegetation cover, the Project will also enhance the ability of the Island to capture and retain water, which otherwise runs off or is evaporated if not permeated into the soil or absorbed by roots. This improved water capture will support the health of plant and animal species on the island and increase the ecosystem's resilience in the face of potential droughts and rising temperatures due to climate change.

The Project’s contribution to climate resiliency also includes the protection of vital mesic habitats on Catalina, often found in canyons and slopes with north aspects that allow them to serve as solar refugia (HRMP 2.1.2). These habitats, which are characterized by a balanced moisture supply throughout the growing season due to the collection of fog on larger plants that then falls to the soil, are critical for numerous species native to the Southern California region as they provide more moderate, dependable conditions for plants and animals compared to other areas that may receive moisture for only short periods of the year. With changing climate conditions leading to potential range contractions for many species, protection and enhancement of these mesic habitats will provide essential refugia for these organisms, ensuring their continued survival.

Long-Term Net Benefits to Biodiversity:

This Project will not only enhance and preserve the unique flora found only on Catalina but also contribute to more biodiverse wildlife populations - many only found on the Island. The Project will achieve this by creating and expanding more diverse plant communities that serve as refuge, foraging, and breeding habitats for wildlife. By creating a more diverse and robust network of habitats, the Project will support a wider range of species, thereby promoting overall biodiversity on the Island. For example, the Catalina Hutton's Vireo depends on the endemic island scrub oak (*Quercus pacifica*) for habitat, which is currently not surviving to reproductive maturity due in part to the impacts of invasive species such as introduced invasive Mule deer.

The Project offers significant long-term net benefits to biodiversity on Catalina Island. One of the primary focuses of the Project is the mitigation of the negative impact caused by the invasive Mule deer population on the Island (HRMP 1.3.3, 2.1.6, 2.1.7., and 2.2.1). By removing this impact, the Project will foster significant revegetation, particularly of endemic and rare species that are currently underrepresented on Catalina due to the invasive Mule deer preferentially browsing on these species who have lost their defenses to browsing pressure. Populations of endemic species are critically low, the Santa Catalina ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus floribundus*) and Catalina Island mountain mahogany, are at 119 and 6 individuals remaining respectively. This jeopardizes the population's genetic diversity, which the Project will address.

The Project's biodiversity enhancement strategy also includes addressing the problem of invasive plant species (HRMP Appendix A). These invasive plants often outcompete native plants for resources, which can lead to a reduction in species diversity in the immediate area and habitat diversity across Catalina. There has been a documented reduction in the diversity of habitats on Catalina Island, in particular coastal sage scrub and island chapparal in favor of invasive grasslands due to grazing and browsing pressure (Longcore et al. 2018). Through focused efforts to control and reduce the proliferation of invasive species followed by reseeding and outplanting with native species, the Project will help to restore more biodiverse plant communities and allow for their natural expansion while reducing the flammability across the landscape.

Long-Term Net Benefits to Sensitive Species Recovery:

The Project will provide substantial long-term net benefits to the recovery of sensitive species on Catalina Island (HRMP 2.4). The Project is expected to expand breeding, foraging, and refuge habitat for wildlife species (HRMP 1.5) such as the Federally and State threatened Santa Catalina Island fox, Catalina Hutton's vireo, two-striped gartersnake (*Thamnophis hammondii*), Catalina Island California quail, and the Santa Catalina shrew, each of which are designated as Species of Greatest Conservation Need by the 2015 CDFW State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). In particular, the Catalina Hutton's vireo is expected to benefit due to its use of oak woodland habitat which has had its natural regeneration impeded by diminished seed banks and continued targeted browsing from invasive Mule deer.

The Project will also aid in the recovery of sensitive plant species (HRMP 2.5), including Channel Island's California lilac (*Ceanothus arboreus*), the Federally and State endangered Catalina Island mountain mahogany, the Federally threatened island rush-rose, Catalina grass (*Poa thomasii*), southern island mallow

(*Lavatera assurgentiflora glabra*), Santa Catalina Island ironwood, Santa Catalina Island bush-mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus catalinensis*), the Federally and State endangered Lyon's pygmydaisy, the Federally endangered Santa Cruz Island rockcress, and Catalina nightshade (*Solanum wallacei*). Many of which are recognized by the California Native Plant Society with Rare Plant Rankings and are identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need by CDFW's 2015 SWAP. The plant species endemic to Catalina or the Channel Islands are expected to experience the most significant recovery due to their relative lack of physical and chemical defenses to herbivory from invasive browsers, such as Invasive Mule deer.

Procedures for the Protection of the Environment:

The Project includes procedures for the protection of the environment in each of its stages. The Project will include monitoring/vaccination of the fox (RW 3.2), trapping of shrew for purposes of monitoring (RW 4.7), collection and propagation of seeds (RW 2.4, 2.5, HRMP 4.5, 4.10), and the take of invasive Mule deer to prevent further ecological damage (HRMP 4.2, RW 3.5). Ethical considerations and animal welfare will be a priority during all phases of the Project. Regarding invasive Mule deer removal, the Project will follow the specifications by the American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals (RW 3.5).

The Project will minimize any impacts on the surrounding natural environment during all operations, including monitoring sites for sensitive species before application of herbicide to combat invasive species, avoiding seeding during nesting bird season, and use of non-lead ammunition for invasive Mule deer removal and retaining carcasses on the landscape (HRMP 4.2, RW 3.5). Carcasses will be removed from areas that are frequently used by people (i.e. in or near Avalon or inhabited areas or near trails/paths/roads) and placed in more remote areas to naturally decompose returning the nutrients back to soil. The carrion of large animals like invasive Mule deer is nutrient rich and has positive effects on local plant biomass and wildlife populations including arthropods, insectivorous birds and small mammals, and scavengers including eagles and top predators such as foxes.

In the area of seed production and management, measures include obtaining all relevant approvals to collect and handle protected species. During wild seed collection, best practices will be followed including collecting at appropriate times for each species and collecting a maximum 5-10% of individual plants' seed production and collecting from a maximum of 5-10% of individuals in a population (HRMP 4.5). Steps will be taken to ensure seed is collected from a variety of plants in a population to capture genetic diversity as well. The genetic integrity of plant populations will be secured through the bulk production of seed for restoration efforts from Catalina Island populations, and potentially from Channel Islands populations. If necessary, seeds will be bulked at the on-Island seed farm and processing facility, which will prevent the genetics of mainland populations from swamping or outcompeting the unique genetics of Catalina populations. If proper biosecurity measures are in place, bulking will also take place off-Island.

For invasive plant management both in wildlands and in the seed farm production area, the Project adheres to all California Department of Pesticide Regulation rules and regulations for storage, mixing, and application of pesticides. Pesticides will be applied only by individuals appropriately licensed, certified, or trained, in the lowest concentration and quantity necessary to achieve management objectives consistent with the pesticide product label (HRMP 4.8). When appropriate and viable, mechanical removal methods will be utilized to minimize pesticide use. Biomass will be removed from the landscape if it poses a fire risk and disposed of appropriately, and if biomass is to be left behind then management will occur prior to seed set to reduce the spread of invasive seeds. Timing of invasive removals will be determined by the phenology of each species, often targeting a plant prior to producing seed to reduce the seed bank and avoid accidental spread of the seed.

At restoration sites, precautions will be used to prevent soil erosion (HRMP 4.7), particularly at steep locations. The use of jute cloth and wattles will help secure loose soil and stabilize slopes, thereby preventing soil loss and facilitating successful revegetation. Care will be taken to sterilize soil for plants intended for outplanting at restoration sites to reduce the risk of spreading pathogens. Container plants will be weeded prior to planting at restoration sites as well. Outplanting and seeding will be completed in the fall and winter seasons when conditions are cooler and wetter to promote higher survival and germination rates. All specific protocols are included in the attached HRMP.

Ongoing Management for the Protection of the Environment:

The Conservancy's mission is to be an exemplary steward of Island resources through a balance of conservation, education, and recreation. Following this mandate, the Conservancy will continue to protect the 88 percent of Catalina Island's approximately 48,000 acres that they manage in perpetuity. Additionally, the Project plans for the ongoing management for the protection of the environment through several strategies, including an adaptive management approach, Long-term Monitoring Plan for plant and wildlife populations, and conducting watering and survival studies at outplanting sites.

The Project will utilize an adaptive management approach by reassessing and adjusting restoration strategies based on changing conditions and emerging data collected through the Long-term Monitoring Plan (HRMP 5.4, RW 4). This plan includes regular monitoring of plant and wildlife populations to track trends and determine if further interventions are necessary. To enable regular and detailed monitoring, biodiversity monitoring stations and vegetation transects will be established across Catalina. These stations will serve as data collection points, recording information on the health of the ecosystem, including the diversity and abundance of plant and animal species as well as abiotic conditions. This data will provide insight into the success of the restoration efforts and guide future decision-making.

An important aspect of the ongoing management is the study of outplanting success. Regular field assessments will monitor the survival and growth of outplanted individuals and populations. These checks will help identify any challenges to successful establishment, such as pests, diseases, or environmental stressors. The amount of water used to support outplantings will also be monitored to ensure water resources are utilized efficiently and effectively based on plant species, community, and location.

Protection of the environment also includes continued invasive plant species management. The existing control and monitoring program will be continued to manage and control the spread of invasive species. An additional component will be monitoring for which invasive plant species were suppressed by the presence of other invasive plant species and invasive Mule deer and adapting management strategies to address any potential new threats.

D. The Project does not include any construction activities, except for construction activities solely related to habitat restoration.

The [Lead Agency Name] has determined that the Project does not include any construction activities, except for construction activities solely related to habitat restoration.

Please provide an explanation supporting the above determination. Please cite and attach any supporting documents.

The Project includes farming seed on Island, which is inherently necessary to achieve habitat restoration on Catalina. The habitat restoration activities require significant reseeding of areas where the native soil seed bank has been depleted due to a combination of fire initiating germination followed by the immediate overbrowsing of new growth by invasive Mule deer in addition to the decades of diminished native and endemic plant populations not contributing to the seed bank due to the presence of invasive ungulates. Some plowing of ground and irrigation will be necessary on these land plots.

Before the deer are removed, active restoration will require exclosure fencing.

5. CERTIFICATION

I certify that I have the authority to determine whether a project is exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15025(a)(1), and this Project meets all the requirements described in Public Resources Code section 21080.56, and that I have submitted all the determinations required therein necessary to obtain the concurrence of the Director of Fish and Wildlife.

_____ Date: Click or tap here to enter text.

Lead Agency Signature

Printed Name and Title: Click or tap here to enter text.