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LAND TRUST**

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17 December 2024

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

Re: Support the Catalina Island Restoration Project

Dear Director Bonham,

On behalf of the Ventura Land Trust, I am writing to express our organization's support for a healthy, climate resilient, and fire-resistant Catalina Island where humans and nature can thrive for years to come.

Invasive species have had adverse impacts on the island for decades, and it is imperative to act now to halt and reverse the damage. Catalina Island is a special place for the many species who live on and visit the Island, with more than 60 endemic plant and animal species, 3,500 year-round residents, and a terrain that offers ample recreational opportunities for over one million annual visitors. The Catalina Island Restoration Project is critical to protect the biodiversity that will secure climate resilience for an important resource for communities across California to learn about and experience unique landscapes and species.

As part of the "Galapagos of North America", Catalina Island is profoundly special, requiring the science-based, bold management outlined in this restoration project that supports its unique ecology and highly specialized endemic species. My organization also manages extensive acreage of biodiverse wildlands, and I know how vital it is to support ecological function through invasive species management. Invasive species are considered the most significant threat to biodiversity after habitat loss and are pivotal in affecting both public safety and local economies. From a conservation perspective, it is absolutely vital to address invasive species threats in such a geographically limited, biologically exceptional protected area.

Ventura Land Trust supports the Catalina Island Restoration Project because Catalina Island serves as a gateway to science, education, and nature for Catalina Island residents and visitors. We urge the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to support the Restoration Project. 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 through hiking, camping, snorkeling, and much more. These visitors include thousands of youth per year who participate in overnight camps centered on outdoor science and adventures, creating a foundation for the next generation



of environmental leaders and stewards. Catalina Island's unique wildlife and recreation opportunities generate millions in visitor-driven revenue, supporting the people living and working on the island, many of whom have called the Island home for generations.

Catalina Island's ecosystems as we know them are 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, in which 10% of the Island burned and 700 residents and visitors were forced to evacuate. 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 highly polluting desalination plants. Support for 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, thousands of residents could lose their homes, and the world could lose species found nowhere else on earth.

I urge you to support this excellent opportunity to meaningfully protect the unique ecological resources on Catalina Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Daniel Hulst'.

Daniel Hulst
Deputy Director, Ventura Land Trust
(805) 643 8044 dan@venturalandtrust.org