



Safari Club International

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION ♦ DEDICATED TO CONSERVING WILDLIFE AND PRESERVING HUNTING



SCI CA Coalition

November 14, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Ste. 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Catalina Island Mule Deer

Dear Governor Newsom:

Safari Club International and the SCI California Coalition (jointly SCI) have read with dismay the articles and statements regarding the plan of the Catalina Island Conservancy to eradicate the mule deer herd on the island through an aerial slaughter. SCI opposes any eradication effort that does not have a sound scientific basis relevant to all non-native species on the island and fails to consider alternatives that would maintain public enjoyment of wildlife, harvest opportunities, and proper utilization of a lean, organic source of protein.

SCI is a leader in national and international conservation and has access to experts throughout the world on the management of wildlife. An overabundance of wildlife, whether native to that area or not, can create negative impacts to other species and the environment such as is happening in Zimbabwe with the over population of elephants. However, in that case the Zimbabwe government and conservationists have studied and documented the damage from elephants that currently number more than double what the conservationists have determined is the carrying capacity. For the proposed eradication of the mule deer herd, we don't see any similar robust effort to determine a carrying capacity for mule deer or bison or provide peer reviewed studies that have determined native fauna are unable to exist with either species present on the island. In fact, both species have existed on the island for nearly 100 years.

SCI finds it disturbing that the Conservancy seems to pick and choose what information to utilize in determining what is necessary for the island's ecosystem. After removing many bison and engaging in a birth control program, they then suggested they would introduce additional bison to expand genetic diversity in the herd. Evidence to support the bison herd remaining on the island was documented in the September 2022 edition of Smithsonian Magazine. In the article, a consulting biologist, Juanita Constible, said removing bison could imperil the island by increasing wildfire intensity given that there are not native species to the island that will eat the vegetation in the quantity necessary. This statement recognizes that non-native species can contribute to the overall ecological health of the island if appropriately managed.

Equally important, Juanita Constible is quoted stating, “Wildlife management is not just about the wildlife—it’s also about the human context.” This was made in reference to how the removal of the bison herd would hurt island residents, many of whom rely on bison tourism. As you have seen in articles, watched in community meetings, or received via multiple petitions, the “human context” is clearly evident in opposing the removal of the deer from the island. The Catalina Island Humane Society and a broad coalition of the hunting and conservation community have joined the chorus to express their disappointment and opposition to the Conservancy’s plan.

SCI supports the management of species to provide an appropriately sized herd related to the carrying capacity of the island. SCI is also willing to be a constructive partner and play a leading role in helping the Conservancy to better manage the size of the bison and deer herds. This can be done while providing increased recreational opportunities, especially among the youth in the greater Los Angeles area.

There are several ways that the Conservancy’s rules and requirements are likely limiting the harvest goals they have set to manage the deer herd. SCI is willing to discuss alternatives with the Conservancy if they will drop the plan to eradicate the deer herd by withdrawing the Scientific Collecting Permit Application or if the California Department of Fish and Game rejects the permit – as was done previously. It is necessary for the Conservancy to not have an active application for eradication so that SCI and the other stakeholders know that discussions can occur in good faith.

To that end, we encourage you to instruct your California Department of Fish and Wildlife to reject the Conservancy’s application at its earliest opportunity. As previously noted, SCI does not believe that the Conservancy has met the requirements to be granted a Scientific Collection Permit for the eradication of a species any more than they did when the previous permit application was rejected.

SCI looks forward to finding a solution that allows the Conservancy to conduct its conservation and educational activities while allowing the deer and bison herds to be sustainably managed in cooperation with the inhabitants of the island and those that come to recreate.

Sincerely,



W. Laird Hamberlin
CEO
Safari Club International



Lisa C. McNamee
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SCI CA Coalition