

CBH/SAA Opposes Catalina Island Conservancy's (CIC) plan to eradicate mule deer on Catalina Island

Click [HERE](#) to sign the petition on change.org

[SoCal locals brought this issue to our attention](#) in early October and it has picked up a lot of steam with coverage in mainstream media including FOX News and the LA Times. In summary, on August 9, 2023 the [CIC submitted an application](#) to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for a Scientific Collection Permit (SCP) that describes a plan to eradicate mule deer on Catalina Island beginning in Summer 2024 using a combination of baiting, netting and “bolting” (e.g., method to stun animals prior to slaughter) near the City of Avalon and other human populated areas and “aerial culling” (e.g., shooting from a helicopter) in the island interior. Deer carcasses in the island interior would be left in place due to the difficult logistics involved with recovering carcasses in these remote areas.

This is not the CIC's first attempt to eradicate deer on Catalina Island. Let's step back to 2007 when the CDFW denied the CIC a depredation permit for deer. According to an [email written by CDFW](#) scientists following a visit to Catalina Island obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, CDFW (then called the California Department of Fish and Game [DFG]) found that:

“For a depredation permit to be let, the following must be demonstrated:

a) **Significant economic loss or property damage – Not demonstrated.** Poor planning on CICs has created their problem. Not using the [\[Private Lands Management\]](#) PLM to its full potential, not implementing DFG years of recommendations, and not drafting a land management plan for the entire island to explore ramifications of a variety of their actions.

b) **Need for improving health of the herd – Not demonstrated/False Pretense.** In virtually all CIC documents regarding vegetation that were provided to DFG (very late in the game) describes the need to remove all deer from the island. If the motivation is to, over time, eradicate all the deer – why then would herd health be of concern? Yes, some deer may be in bad shape due to the effect of continued drought conditions on forage and disease. Both conditions are currently occurring on the mainland and have been observed by DFG staff. No one likes to see animals in bad shape, however, that is life, and it is a natural process of population control.

c) **All methods to prevent a) and b) from occurring have been exhausted. – Not demonstrated.** The PLM has never been used to its full potential in favor of tourism, premium hunting operations (\$\$\$) and perception of general hunting activities that are not based on facts. Also, no real effort has been put into educating the island's citizens on hunting and no feeding of the wildlife that is causing the perceived “dangerous deer”. No discussions with the 2 Cities about deer wise plantings, deer fencing options, etc. No pursuit of DFG recommendations of adding deer fencing to the existing pig fencing to work toward exclusion of deer in sensitive zones of the island.”

The email also noted that “The current habitat condition throughout the island is a result of centuries of livestock damage to soil and vegetation, **not** deer browsing.”

Again in 2016, the CDFW denied the CIC a SCP to “conduct research on non-native deer on Catalina Island.” The basis for denying the permit was because the stated need for the permit revolved around efficacy of removing deer rather than the ecosystem-based restoration and monitoring. The CDFW was “not supportive of studying deer on the island as a test of the efficacy/methods of removal.” The [letter of denial](#) also stated that there “needs to be a commitment from the CIC to conduct advanced outreach to the public given the expectation of controversy regarding deer removal. ... [The CDFW has] not seen an indication that this outreach is being planned or implemented.”

Back to the present... The CIC has not addressed any of the concerns raised by CDFW in 2007 denial of the depredation permit or the 2016 denial of the SCP.

After submitting the SCP application in August 2023, the CIC reached out to our lobbyist Bill Gaines in early October and set up a meeting with him and two independent wildlife biologists to present the “science” behind their plan to eradicate deer. However, Bill and the independent biologists unanimously concluded that the CIC is grossly overestimating the size of the deer population because of flawed survey methodology and the impact of deer on the native habitat is also grossly overestimated and based on cherry picked photos of browsed shrubs and incorrectly attributing habitat impacts to deer and not drought conditions and historic livestock grazing operations. Finally, the CIC enclosed habitat area is supplemented with irrigation and mature plantings from nursery stock and is not an accurate

representation of what the island habitat will look like following eradication of deer. In other enclosures that are not irrigated and planted, there is no discernable difference between vegetation/habitat where deer are able to graze. CBH/SAA supports wildlife management decisions backed by scientific data and research and we have serious concerns that the science behind the Conservancy's plan is flawed. During the meeting, Bill asked the CIC to consider partnering with the CDFW in a 5-year scientific study to assess what number of deer the island habitat can sustainably support and if eradication was required. The CIC was firm in their belief that they have already performed the required research and that the right number of deer on Catalina is zero.

Leading the opposition, Catalina residents and the Coalition Against the Slaughter of Catalina Deer initiated a change.org petition, which you can sign here: <https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-slaughter-of-mule-deer-on-catalina-island>. As of November 25, over 14,000 individuals signed the petition! Additionally, residents showed up in force at the Avalon City Council meeting and provided 2 hours of testimony in opposition to the CIC proposal to eradicate deer. Two weeks later, the City Council responded by updating City ordinances to prohibit the baiting, trapping, and bolting of deer within the City limits. A solid victory for the Coalition Against the Slaughter of Catalina Deer! They also organized several demonstrations with signs and dialogue helping to educate the island residents and mainland tourists on this issue including lack of science behind the decision, deer as a public resource, and potential impacts to tourism and residential enjoyment of island wildlife.

Concurrent with these efforts, CBH/SAA, Bill Gaines, and our partners in the California Hunting and Conservation Coalition also met with the CDFW on several occasions to share our concerns and advocate for the CDFW to perform their due diligence regarding the CIC SCP application including a peer review of current studies and challenging the use of a SCP as an appropriate process for approving deer eradication. Notably, CDFW staff were under the mistaken impression that the California Deer Association (CDA) and the California Mule Deer Foundation were in support of the eradication! Bill also coordinated an email campaign to CDFW through [HOWL for Wildlife](#) resulting in over 2200 emails sent to CDFW staff in opposition to the eradication. I encourage you to sign up for HOWL and take action on a variety of conservation and hunting issues in California and beyond. Next, CBH/SAA and Bill Gaines are seeking an additional meeting with CDFW leadership on this issue in early December and we will continue to be strong in our opposition of the CIC proposal and advocacy for sound science and management of sustainable deer populations.

If you would like to contribute to our efforts to oppose the CIC proposal to eradicate deer on Catalina, please donate to the CBH Legislative Defense Fund here: <https://cbhsaa.net/Legislative/Donate>