

Science for a Blue Planet

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An important moment for conservation on the Farallon Islands

July 2, 2019

Just over fifty years ago, biologists from Point Blue Conservation Science (known then as Point Reyes Bird Observatory) landed on the Farallon Islands for the first time. We have maintained a continuous presence on the islands ever since: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A year after arriving, the South Farallon Islands became part of the Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and we entered into a unique, long-term partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to become stewards of the island and to provide baseline monitoring of the islands populations. Our role on the islands is simple: we use our expertise in biology, ecology, and conservation to provide rigorous science to the Service, helping them make decisions that will ensure a healthy ecosystem on the islands for generations to come.

Right now, the USFWS is considering an important decision and a significant opportunity for ecological restoration: the eradication of the invasive house mouse from the Farallon Islands. Point Blue would like to voice our strong support for this project and, if you agree, we encourage you to do the same by submitting a public comment letter to the California Coastal Commission (CCC) letting them know you support the Service's project to eradicate the invasive house mice. The CCC is meeting on July 10th to vote on the project and they [need to hear from you](#) by 5pm on **Friday July 5th** for your comment to be considered. Please reference "July 2019 Agenda Item Wednesday 14a CD – 0002 – 19" in any comments and see some key points at the bottom of this post you can include in your comment.



Background

Referred to by some as "California's Galapagos," the Farallones host the largest seabird breeding colony in the continental United States and 25% percent of California's breeding seabirds (more than 300,000 individuals of 13 species). Before human-caused disturbances, more than one million seabirds bred at the Farallones. Over the last 40 years, the USFWS has strived to restore the Farallones by removing invasive plants and animals that have negatively impacted the island ecosystem. As an example, introduced, invasive cats and rabbits were removed in the 1970's with positive ecological responses including the return of breeding rhinoceros auklets after a long absence.

Burrowing Owls, Farallon arboreal salamanders, Farallon camel crickets, and the islands' vegetation. Threats to the rare and threatened Ashy Storm-petrel's declining population are of particular concern.

Thirteen years ago, the USFWS began a thorough review of available options to remove mice from the island. This spring, the Service published one of the most thorough and scientifically rigorous Environmental Impact Statements on record, extensively referencing original, peer-reviewed science by Point Blue. The final product represents over a decade of careful study, with a final report of 322 pages supported by an appendix 577 pages long. Before publishing the final EIS document, USFWS reviewed each of the 553 public comments that were made on the draft EIS and addressed all substantive comments in its final report.

Invasive rodent removals have been successfully completed on nearly 700 islands worldwide. Land managers have successfully eradicated house mice from more than 60 islands worldwide. Nearly all of these successful projects utilized techniques like those proposed for the South Farallon Islands house mouse eradication.

The Farallon Islands are a world-famous local treasure. The USFWS has a unique opportunity in this moment to take a giant step forward in restoring the island's fragile ecosystem and protecting the many species that rely on it. We applaud the USFWS for their careful, transparent process and their commitment to science-based decision making. Based on our fifty years of experience studying birds and other wildlife on the islands, we strongly support the conclusions of the Service's EIS and [hope you'll do the same](#).

Addressing misinformation and misleading statements

Point Blue is aware that critics of this project have been spreading misinformation and misleading statements. Please visit [this page](#) where we clarify some of the important issues regarding the proposed project.

Comment letter instructions

To send a comment letter to the California Coastal Commission, please email EORFC@coastal.ca.gov and reference "July 2019 Agenda Item Wednesday 14a CD – 0002 – 19."

Your letter can be as long or as short as you want, but the CCC needs to hear from you by **5pm on Friday July 5th** for your comments to be sent to the commissioners who will vote on the project on Wednesday, July 10th.

Key points to consider including in letters to the California Coastal Commission

- The introduction of invasive, non-native house mice to the Farallon Islands has caused significant disturbance to the islands' sensitive ecosystem. The house mice have direct and indirect harmful impacts on the islands' breeding seabirds, especially ash storm-petrels, but also on Leach's storm-petrels, as well as on native salamanders, crickets and other invertebrates, and native plants.
- The only way to allow the ecosystem to recover is to ensure 100% eradication of the house mice. The survival of even a single pair of mice jeopardizes the whole project, as the mouse population can recover incredibly quickly.
- At present, there is only one known method that has proven effective for island eradications, and that is the "preferred alternative" (an aerial broadcast of the rodenticide Brodifacoum) identified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the Final Environmental Impact Statement published in March 2019.
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service has produced one of the most thorough and scientifically rigorous EIS documents on record. The final product represents over ten years of careful study, with a final report of 322 pages supported by an appendix 577 pages long. Before publishing the final EIS document, USFWS reviewed each of the 553 public comments and addressed all substantive comments in its final report.
- Invasive rodent removals have been successfully completed on nearly 700 islands worldwide, including on California's Anacapa Island in the Channel Islands National Park, three National Wildlife Refuges in the Pacific, two islands off the coast of Mexico, many islands off the main islands of New Zealand, and recently, multiple islands in the Galápagos Archipelago. Land managers have successfully eradicated house mice from more than 60 islands worldwide. Nearly all of these successful projects utilized techniques like that proposed for the South Farallon Islands house mouse eradication.
- The USFWS will follow best practices learned from successful eradications and has outlined in the final EIS all of the precautionary measures it will take to minimize any potential negative impacts of the eradication.