



Notice to hikers of poison baits in New Zealand. Sign found on the walk from Oneroa to Matiatia wharf on Waiheke island. Waiheke is possum free, but not rat free, hence the use of Brodifacoum. Photo commons.wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Target the Pest, Not the Ecosystem The Farallones and Dangerous Chemical Brodifacoum Op-Ed

Jan 6, 2020

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By Richard Charter

Why Would Anyone Try to Justify Dropping Poison in the Middle of Our National Marine Sanctuary with a Personal Attack?

While enjoying Christmas with my family, I found Peter Pyle's personal holiday attack on me in the Sonoma County Gazette as mystifying as it was misleading, but not really surprising given the growing public rejection of what is now clearly an obsolete poisoning scheme at the Farallones. I am not going to respond in kind with a similar personal attack on him or on his essay, expressing opinions to which he has every right. There is more than enough of that sort of thing going on in our world right now. Instead, I will simply make a couple of observations about what's likely driving the current Administration's recently seated Monsanto-trained Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ms. Aurelia Skipwith, to rush to try to resurrect the increasingly controversial push to use helicopters to spread 1.5 tons of multi-species second-generation rodenticide poison on the Southeast Farallon Island as early as next fall. The Administration's problem here is that the tide of public opinion and emerging scientific advancement has already clearly turned against this particular poison. As a result, California policymakers are right now proactively taking action to simply preclude the use of the very same dangerous chemical, brodifacoum, lest we cause the potential extinction of mountain lions, bobcats, and several other species. **Brodifacoum** (<https://duquark.com/2019/12/23/secondary-poisoning-and-ecological-effects-of-anticoagulant-rodenticides/>) has long been banned from retail sale in California, available only to licensed professional applicators. Legislation is right now moving in our state legislature in the form of a two-year bill (AB 1788 was passed by the Assembly in 2019) to stop use of this poison on land in the state, subject only to certain narrow exceptions, in order to protect endangered wildlife and prevent unnecessary poisoning of pets and even children.



California policymakers are right now proactively taking action to simply preclude the use of the very same dangerous chemical, brodifacoum, lest we cause the potential extinction of mountain lions, bobcats, and several other species. Photo: pxhere.com-Creative Commons CC0

Malibu has just adopted a prohibition on brodifacoum rodenticide and similar compounds as an integral part of their Local Coastal Plan as of December 9, 2019, following the lead previously set in 2014 by the County of Los Angeles throughout the Santa Monica Mountains. See <https://beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog/2020/01/malibu-california-passes-pesticide-ban-in-a-big-win-for-local-wildlife/> (<https://beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog/2020/01/malibu-california-passes-pesticide-ban-in-a-big-win-for-local-wildlife/>). The Center for Biological Diversity has recently filed a notification to the state that a lawsuit to halt the use of this chemical is soon to follow. Why? Because brodifacoum bioaccumulates and thus concentrates up the food chain and 70 percent of some of our most iconic predator species bioassayed in California have been found to have this poison in liver tissue. Birds of prey are also harmed by the same poison as they go about their role of consuming small mammals. The looming prospect of the increasing loss of valued species in our state, and even the possibility of extinction of some of them, is making our society search more aggressively for safer and more effective alternatives, and the good news is that we're finding them.

Have you heard the news out of California?

SenesTech offers a solution to aid in replacing the use of Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides, while minimizing secondary exposure.

California Certified Organic Farmers has provided approval to Lundberg Farms, one of the largest organic rice farms in the state, to use ContraPest, a contraceptive bait with none of the dangers posed by conventional anticoagulant rodenticides. Image: facebook.com/SenesTechInc

Given the recognized national treasure that is the **Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary** here, we have a clear mandate to carefully explore the potential of available non-toxic contraceptive rodent baits that hold the promise of accomplishing the same goal of successful invasive mouse eradication, without the downside adverse impacts posed by the current poison proposal. California Certified Organic Farmers has provided approval to Lundberg Farms, one of the largest organic rice farms in the state, to use **ContraPest**, (<https://senestech.com/contrapest/>) a contraceptive bait with none of the dangers posed by conventional anticoagulant rodenticides, with EPA approval granted as of Sept. 9, 2019. Contraceptive rodent bait is also gaining approval for use in poultry farms throughout California.

The proposed brodifacoum "poison drop" on the Farallones has now been opposed in writing, and on the Coastal Commission hearing record, by most of those who worked so hard for many years to create the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, including Lynn Woolsey, Leon Panetta, and local elected officials in the adjacent coastal counties of Sonoma, Marin, Mendocino, and Santa Cruz. As for the unwarranted "bykill" of non-target wildlife anticipated as a result of the aerial poisoning being planned for the Farallones, it was the lead U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staffer presenting to the July 2019 California Coastal Commission meeting who made the claim that the poison drop proponents had been able to "downsize" the actual number of Western Gulls that would die as a result of the poison to "only" 1,050 birds. And it is in fact Region IX of the EPA that wrote a letter to the Wildlife Service cautioning that the public will need to be made fully aware that the Western Gull carcasses that will likely wash up on our mainland beaches as a result are to be carefully treated as hazardous waste.

It is time for our region to stop the proposed poison drop in the midst of our Marine Sanctuary and fishing grounds and then emulate the protections now in place in Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains by banning brodifacoum and similarly hazardous second-generation pesticides in the currently-pending Sonoma County update of our Local Coastal Plan, along with addressing the predicted washed-up dead Western Gull carcasses that will eventually wind up on our beaches if the poison drop offshore is allowed to proceed. And the public will soon have a key opportunity to be directly involved in decisions about the Farallones poisoning scheme at an upcoming meeting where the **Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council** is expected to vote on the issue, on **February 19 at the Bodega Bay Firehouse from 9 am to 4:45 pm**. See <https://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/sac.html> (<https://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/sac.html>) for the precise timing of the public comment opportunity there. Public comments are welcome at all Sanctuary Council meetings at the appointed time. For your remaining questions, or to take action in writing, please see <http://PoisonFreeSanctuary.org> (<http://PoisonFreeSanctuary.org>).



Sanctuary Advisory Council at a retreat. Photo: farallones.noaa.gov/manage/sac.html



The proposed helicopter dispersal of 1.5 tons of rat poison pellets in the middle of the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary are again being solicited by the California Coastal Commission. Photo: poisonfreesanctuary.org

Target the Pest, Not the Ecosystem.

Richard Charter

Senior Fellow

[The Ocean Foundation \(https://oceanfdn.org/staff/richard-charter/\)](https://oceanfdn.org/staff/richard-charter/)

Bodega Bay

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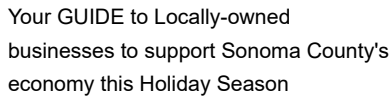
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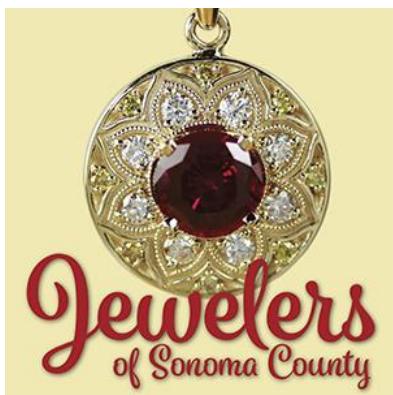
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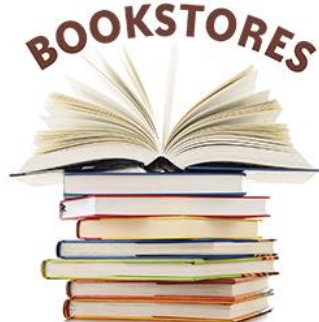
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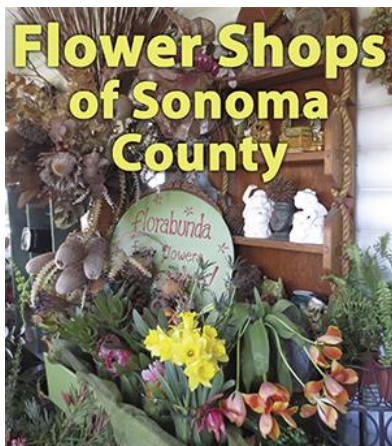
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