

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY SUPPORTS REMOVAL OF FERAL CATS FROM SAN NICOLAS ISLAND

BETHESDA, MD – The Wildlife Society (TWS), a Bethesda-based international organization dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education, has announced its support of the plan by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to remove feral (wild) cats from San Nicolas Island, one of the Channel Islands of California.

“Feral and free-ranging domestic cats have been introduced to the Islands where they prey upon the small mammals, birds and amphibians that are native to San Nicolas Island,” commented Dr. Michael Hutchins, executive director/CEO of TWS. “We commend the approach outlined by FWS that will remove feral cats from San Nicolas Island, allowing the native populations of plants and animals to thrive.”

San Nicolas is the northernmost of the Channel Islands. Although the island is uninhabited, there is generally a small contingent of military and civilian personnel on the island at any time due to its use as a weapons and training facility for the U.S. Navy. Cats were thought to have been brought to the island probably originally as pets but later possibly for pest control -- large numbers of feral cats were roaming the island by the late 1950s.

Native bird populations, especially Brandt’s cormorant and western gull are threatened by feral cats and several federal agencies have been working to remove the cats in order to protect the seabirds’ nesting grounds. The cats also prey on two animals on the federal list of threatened species, the island night lizard and the western snowy plover. In addition, feral cats also compete for prey, particularly the deer mouse, with the San Nicolas Island fox, a state threatened species.

“According to the Environmental Assessment, USFWS’ preferred alternative removal plan calls for integrated adaptive management using a mix of live trapping (followed by euthanasia) and shooting (with or without specially trained dogs),” stated Hutchins in the letter. “Trap-neuter-release is not permitted on Navy property, and trapping the cats to relocate them to managed colonies elsewhere would simply transfer the management problem created by the cats to another habitat and is therefore unpalatable.”

TWS has a history supporting and encouraging the humane elimination of feral cat colonies and has consistently opposed the establishment of managed feral cat colonies, the public feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild.

“We are confident that FWS was correct in its analysis that removal of the cats through trapping and shooting is the best alternative,” concluded Hutchins. “This policy is consistent with wildlife management and conservation practices and principles. We are sympathetic to concerns about the welfare of individual animals; however the welfare of native species and the island ecosystem as a whole is also worthy of our concern, and that must be our highest priority.”

About The Wildlife Society

TWS, founded in 1937, is a scientific and educational organization dedicated to enhancing the ability of wildlife professionals to conserve diversity, sustain productivity, and ensure the responsible use of wildlife resources for the benefit of society. For a copy of TWS' letter to USFWS, please contact Laura Bies at (301) 897-9770 ext. 308. Find us on the web at www.wildlife.org

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