

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 20, 2011

FARALLON ISLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT

Project No. 10-051-01
Project Manager: Amy Hutzal

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse \$150,000 to Island Conservation for habitat restoration planning for Farallon National Wildlife Refuge in the County of San Francisco.

LOCATION: Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, San Francisco County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Regional Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map \(Southeast Farallon\)](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Site Photos](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement to Island Conservation of an amount not to exceed one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to conduct planning for an invasive house mouse eradication project on Farallon National Wildlife Refuge. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, Island Conservation shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names of any subcontractors that it intends to employ for this planning work.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Section 31111 and Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the protection,

restoration and enhancement of natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas and other open space resources of regional importance.

3. Island Conservation is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$150,000 to Island Conservation to conduct planning for a future invasive species project to eradicate house mice to promote restoration of the Farallon Islands ecosystem.

The islands of the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, located 28 miles west of San Francisco, host the largest seabird breeding colony in the United States outside of Alaska and Hawai`i, providing habitat for thirty percent of California’s breeding seabirds (more than 250,000 individuals of 12 species). Between fifty and seventy percent of the world’s population of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed Endangered Ashy Storm-petrels breed on the Farallon Islands. Unfortunately, the presence of introduced, non-native house mice threatens this globally significant seabird colony.

This authorization would enable Island Conservation and its partners to engage in the planning that is necessary prior to the implementation of full invasive house mouse eradication efforts. House mice are known predators of Ashy Storm-petrel eggs and chicks. Every year as much as 12% of the eggs and chicks of this species are lost to predation on the Farallon Islands. The presence of house mice has an even greater impact on the Ashy Storm-petrel and other seabird species by altering the food web on the Farallones and enabling the native, migratory Burrowing Owl to un-naturally become resident on the islands every fall. As the mouse population cyclically declines leading into winter, these resident owls turn to seabirds for their diet. By spring, hundreds of Ashy Storm-petrels and other seabirds have been killed. The great irony is that most of the resident burrowing owls still die from starvation. By removing these invasive house mice, Island Conservation and its partners will protect the Ashy Storm-petrel and other seabirds from further population decline and restore the Farallon Islands ecosystem.

This project calls for multiple stages leading into implementation. Planning for field trials has already occurred with funding from the Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund. Luckenbach funds will be used to conduct field trials to assess the efficacy of rodenticide application methods. Conservancy funds will be used to conduct necessary pre-implementation planning and environmental assessment. Implementation and two years of ecosystem monitoring will be funded by an existing grant award from the Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund.

Island Conservation is a nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with government management agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders in island archipelagos. These collaborations remove invasive species from islands, build local capacity to undertake science-driven management of islands, develop invasive species removal techniques, and conduct applied research to inform island conservation action. To date, Island Conservation and partners have protected 263 species on 35 islands from the threat of extinction. Island Conservation has partnered with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) Conservation Science to remove invasive house mice from two of the seven

Farallon Islands. The objective of this work is to stop the mortality of Ashy Storm-petrels caused by the mice and to restore the Farallon islands ecosystem.

Site Description: The Farallon Islands were once part of the now submerged range of California coastal hills. Throughout the islands, the terrain is very rocky, although parts of the largest South Farallon Island are covered in dark soil. Southeast Farallon Island is characterized by steep slopes with an accumulation of rock debris at the base of its south and west shores. Introduced, non-native rabbits dramatically impacted native vegetation, but following their removal in 1974 a gradual yet distinct shift was noted in the native vegetative cover on the island, as well as the colonization of the previously common Rhinoceros Auklet. Spring and summer are typically windy, with cool marine air and fog, while winters experience intermittent stormy periods with very strong winds. The large seabird numbers and diversity on Southeast Farallon Island are due to copious amounts of prey attributed to the northwest winds which create nutrient rich waters through coastal upwelling. Migratory shorebirds, waterbirds, and landbirds arrive in the fall, and other mammals such as bats, particularly the hoary bat, have been sighted. Migratory whales—blue, humpback and other species—can also be seen foraging along the continental shelf, while grey whales often migrate over the continental shelf, with a few remaining resident near Southeast Farallon Island in the spring and summer. The Farallon Islands lie within a Marine Protected Area established in a Natural Heritage Conservation Area.

Project History: The Farallon Islands have been managed by the USFWS as the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge since 1909 and originally encompassed the North and Middle Farallon Islands but did not include the South Farallon Islands. The refuge was established as a preserve and breeding ground for marine birds by President Theodore Roosevelt under Executive Order 1043. In 1969, the Refuge was expanded to include the South Farallon Islands, and is still managed for the same basic purpose today. For over 30 years, PRBO Conservation Science scientists have provided year-round stewardship to wildlife on the Farallon Islands through a cooperative agreement with the USFWS. The USFWS and PRBO Conservation Science discovered that mice are directly and indirectly responsible for extensive Ashy Storm-petrel predation by Burrowing Owls that winter on the islands. To reduce the rate of Burrowing Owl predation on storm-petrels, the USFWS explored options to remove owls from the Farallon Islands and create additional habitat for burrow nesting seabirds. These options failed to substantially reduce predation by owls; therefore, the USFWS approached Island Conservation in 2005 to assess the potential for mouse removal. In 2006, the partnership submitted a comprehensive budget to the Luckenbach Oil Spill Trustee Council to fund the project. The Trustee Council was awarded funds in 2009 to benefit species most impacted by oil spills related to the sinking of the S.S. Jacob Luckenbach in 1953, and released the first phase of a two-part grant to Island Conservation for the Farallon Islands Restoration Project in 2010. Island Conservation, the USFWS, and PRBO Conservation Science are currently conducting planning to prepare for implementation of the project. This authorization will enable Island Conservation and its partners to continue pre-implementation planning and to initiate environmental assessment prior to implementation.

The Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund was established in 2009 resulting from a claim to the United States Coast Guard's National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC). The NPFC manages funds for the federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, which is authorized by the Oil Pollution Act for the payment of claims for uncompensated costs associated with removal and natural resource damage assessment, restoration, and compensation in cases where there is no responsible party

or in mystery spill cases. Federal regulations for the implementation of the Oil Pollution Act in cases in which there are multiple Trustees affected call for the Trustees to act jointly such that restoration can occur without double recovery of funds. The Luckenbach Oil Spill Trustee Council is comprised of the California Department of Fish and Game, USFWS, National Parks Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The *S.S. Jacob Luckenbach and Associated Mystery Spills Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan / Environmental Assessment* identifies restoration projects that focus on species and families that were most impacted by the spills. The Ashy Storm-petrel was significantly impacted by the spills. The Farallon Islands Restoration Project is an identified project to benefit the Ashy Storm-petrel.

PROJECT FINANCING

PLANNING

Coastal Conservancy	\$150,000.00
Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund	<u>497,539.00</u>
	647,539.00

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund	204,704.00
Other funds to be raised by Island Conservation	<u>133,398.00</u>
	338,102.00
Total Project Costs	985,641.00

The anticipated source of funds will be the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these funds for purposes of the protection of coastal waters and watersheds and to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands. (Public Resources Code Section 75060). Funds may be used for projects in accordance with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 75074). This project is also appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 75071 in that there are non-state matching contributions toward the restoration, stewardship or management costs and the project will contribute to the long-term improvement to the habitat value of the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge.

In addition to Conservancy funding, Island Conservation has obtained and will dedicate substantial funds from the Luckenbach Oil Spill Restoration Fund. Island Conservation has also secured in-kind services including donations of materials and volunteer hours to assist in the completion of the planning component of this project. Island Conservation is working to secure the remaining funds (approximately \$130,000) necessary for implementation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Pursuant to Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations such as the Island Conservation for the purposes of planning and feasibility studies.

Pursuant to Section 31162 (b) of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional importance. The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge is in the County of San Francisco and the house mouse eradication will restore the ecosystem on the Farallon Islands.

The Farallon Islands Restoration Project satisfies all of the criteria for determining project priority under 31163(c), since the project: 1) is supported by the 2009 USFWS's Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Farallon National Wildlife Refuge; 2) serves a regional constituency in that the project will help preserve habitat of threatened species on a site of international ecological importance; 3) can be implemented in a timely way in that completion of planning will allow implementation in November of 2011 and not later than November of 2012; 4) provides benefits that would be lost if the project is not quickly implemented; and 5) will include significant funds from other sources as described above.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective J** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will provide planning for the eradication of an invasive, non-native species that threatens important habitat in the San Francisco Bay Area.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Island Conservation is partnering with the USFWS as well as PRBO Conservation Science to conduct the Farallon Islands Restoration Project. Further public support comes from the California Audubon Society.
4. **Location:** The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge is in the County of San Francisco, which is one of the nine Bay Area Counties.

5. **Need:** Conservancy funds are needed to augment the Luckenbach funds and allow the project to move forward in a timely manner. While this project could be eventually possible without Conservancy funding, Conservancy involvement will allow the planning to be completed and implementation to occur in November of 2011, helping to prevent further population decline of Ashy Storm-petrels.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Farallon Islands host the largest seabird breeding colony in the contiguous United States, and as such are of international ecological significance.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Farallon Islands Restoration Project is not expected to be impacted by sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** The IUCN listed Endangered Ashy Storm-petrel is suffering decline due to the presence of invasive and non-native house mice. Delaying the eradication of this invasive species will only serve to continue the population decline of Ashy Storm-petrels.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Innovation:** Island Conservation is dedicated to the development of effective invasive species eradication techniques on island systems.
11. **Readiness:** Island Conservation is prepared to conduct this eradication project in November of 2011 and has the majority of funding in place for implementation following Conservancy authorization of planning funds.
12. **Cooperation:** Island Conservation is working closely with the USFWS and PRBO Conservation Science to conduct this project on Farallon National Wildlife Refuge.
13. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Climate change may have a variety of impacts on seabird populations. Eradication of house mice would reduce one significant stressor on seabird populations, particularly Ashy storm-petrels at the Farallon Islands.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Farallon Islands Restoration Project is not sited within the Coastal Zone and as such is not included in Local Coastal Programs, however the project is consistent with Article 5, Section 30240(a) of the California Coastal Act in that it protects environmentally sensitive habitat areas against significant disruption of habitat values.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed planning project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted or funded. Island Conservation will be undertaking environmental review as part of the planning process. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the Farallon Islands Restoration Project upon Conservancy approval.