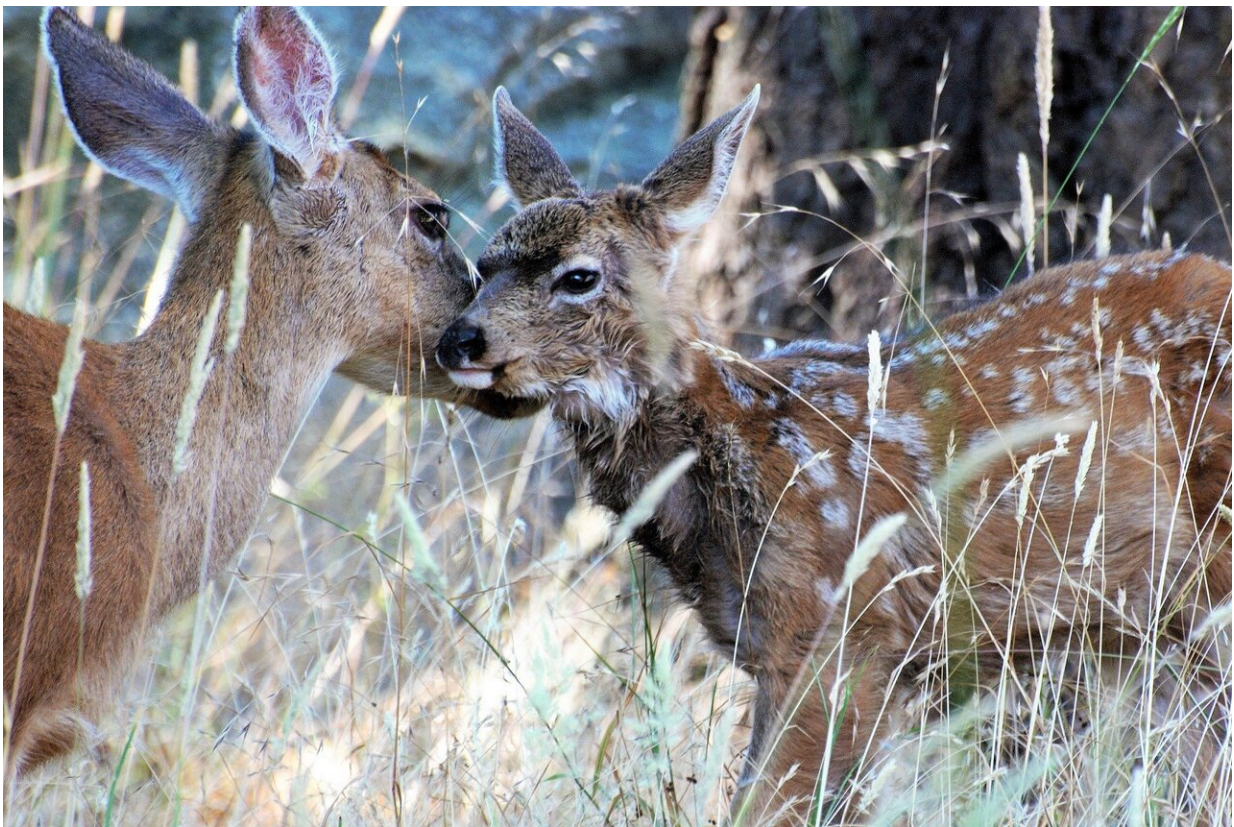


Plan to kill Catalina Island deer using sharpshooters in copters is opposed by LA County

April 24 2024, by Steve Scauzillo, Los Angeles Daily News



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A plan to kill all the mule deer on Catalina Island using aerial sharpshooters from helicopters was strongly opposed by the Los Angeles

County Board of Supervisors on April 23.

The controversial program as proposed by the Catalina Island Conservancy aims to eradicate up to 2,000 deer on the island that the conservancy says are destroying the island's native plants and animals and damaging the entire ecosystem.

"Eradicating Catalina Island's entire population of more than 1,770 mule deer through aerial shooting from helicopters is inhumane and drastic, and potentially dangerous to the public," concluded a motion approved by the board in a unanimous vote.

The supervisors suggested the conservancy try other and less drastic methods to thin the herd, such as mass sterilization or [birth control](#), relocation—and expanding the deer hunting season. The board's opposition to the aerial killing, and its request that alternatives be tried, will be included in a letter from the board to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

A permit to enact the program was submitted to the CDFW in August 2023 and is currently under review. "Nothing has been approved yet," said Tim Daly, CDFW spokesperson. He did not comment further on the status of the permit.

Fourth District County Supervisor Janice Hahn, whose district includes Catalina Island and was the author of the motion, said her office received about 500 calls and emails, most objecting to the deer eradication plan. Hahn said 90,000 signatures have been collected in opposition to the plan, including more than 70,000 from a Care2 online petition.

Hahn wants the CDFW to deny the permit, and then the conservancy would be forced to work on compromises that "would be better received

by the public."

But the conservancy said the other options will not work.

The island is home to 60 unique species of plants and animals that are being threatened by the mule deer, said Lauren Dennhardt, senior director of conservation for the Catalina Island Conservancy. "Unless we act now we can expect irreversible consequences," she told the board.

The [mule deer](#) are munching on selective plants unique to the island. Once these are eaten down to the stubs, they don't grow back. Instead, [invasive species](#) that are more fire-prone move in. That increases the possibility of wildfires, Dennhardt said during an interview.

The conservancy has planned a two-year ecosystem restoration using seeds of native plants. But that won't be successful with the deer present, Dennhardt said.

"In my perspective, this project is so critical for climate resiliency on Catalina," she said. She added that as a biologist it is difficult for her to see the deer eradicated but, she says, it's either the deer or the island's ecosystem. Julie Benson, also with the conservancy, said they have 24 letters of support from other organizations.

The helicopter snipers would need six to seven weeks to shoot the deer, and it would take place in the interior of the island, away from the human population. Dennhardt said aerial shooting has been used on Maui to thin the deer herd there.

Winston Vickers, a wildlife veterinarian who has done research on the island, said shooting deer is the most humane way to eliminate the herd. He supported the method, which has been used on islands throughout the world.

"They (deer) are scientifically shown to be very detrimental to the island and its ecology," Vickers said.

Many island residents said they don't want the deer killed off. Some said the deer are part of the culture of the island, are popular with children who visit, and are not a harm but a benefit.

Diane Stone, representing the Catalina Island Humane Society, called the planned aerial shooting "brutal, inhumane, unnecessary and dangerous," and added, "Mule deer are part of our island landscape and heritage."

The deer were brought to the island about 100 years ago for sport hunting. They've become island tourist attractions, like the Catalina Island bison and the island foxes.

The eradication was not supported by the California Rifle and Pistol Association, said Rick Travis, who spoke on the organization's behalf. He said the hunting community and animal rights groups have joined together to oppose the plan.

Some island residents remember the aerial shooting of goats, which they said traumatized residents.

Brie Broussard, owner of a business in Avalon, said tourists who've learned about the killing plan are upset and have expressed their displeasure. "They are turning away in disgust and many have vowed not to return to our island," she said.

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