BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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JANICE HAHN
Board of Supervisors

January 26, 2026

Valerie Termini
Interim Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Termini,

First, I would like to congratulate you on your new role as Interim Director and wish you success as you take over leadership of this important department. I am writing to reiterate my strong opposition to the Restoration Management Permit application submitted by the Catalina Island Conservancy, which proposes the eradication of the island's mule deer population.

With the exception of the City of Avalon, Santa Catalina Island is unincorporated Los Angeles County and is governed by the Board of Supervisors. The island is part of my district, and in 2024 my colleagues and I voted unanimously to oppose the Conservancy's previous permit application. My concerns remain unchanged.

While I acknowledge that the Conservancy has abandoned the proposal to use aerial sharpshooting, the revised plan—to systematically eradicate the island's entire deer population over a five-year period using professional hunters—continues to represent a drastic and inhumane approach. This plan disregards the deeply held values of many Catalina residents and visitors. I continue to hear from my constituents who have lived on the island for decades and have come to cherish these deer. Mule deer have been part of Catalina's landscape for nearly a century, and their presence has become an important part of the island's identity.

The Conservancy has recently claimed the deer worsen the threat of wildfires on the island. The evidence shows the exact opposite. Enclosed is a memo I received from Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone outlining his concerns that eliminating the deer could actually raise fire risk. Without deer consistently grazing on vegetation, fuel loads on the island would increase significantly.

We have a responsibility to manage wildlife humanely and to respect the strong public connection to these animals. Many have suggested a pathway forward where a smaller population of deer are preserved and managed more appropriately by the Conservancy. For these reasons, I urge the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to reject this permit application and instead work with the Conservancy on a management strategy that balances environmental stewardship with compassion, transparency, and meaningful public input.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

JANICE HAHN
Supervisor, Fourth District
County of Los Angeles

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
FIRE DEPARTMENT

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ANTHONY C. MARRONE
FIRE CHIEF
FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

"Proud Protectors of Life, the Environment, and Property"

January 7, 2026

TO: THE HONORABLE JANICE HAHN
SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT

FROM: ANTHONY C. MARRONE, FIRE CHIEF

MULE DEER MANAGEMENT ON CATALINA ISLAND

This memorandum outlines the key facts, operational considerations, and recommended course of action regarding mule deer management on Catalina Island, with a focus on ecosystem impacts, wildfire behavior, and fuels management.

Background

Mule deer are a non-native species on Catalina Island. Scientific research indicates that mule deer browsing can influence vegetation dynamics, particularly following disturbance events such as wildfire. Fire return intervals of less than seven years significantly increase the likelihood of vegetation type conversion from chaparral to grassland.

The most recent large wildfire on the island was the Island Fire in 2007. While grass fuels are considered more receptive to ignition and rapid spread, they generate a significantly lower Energy Release Component (ERC) than chaparral fuels and are generally more manageable during suppression operations.

Ecological Considerations

Catalina Island supports a unique ecosystem with native and endemic plant and animal species. In the island's natural condition, the island fox serves as the apex predator, preying on smaller native mammals. Removal of mule deer would reduce invasive plant seed dispersal and allow vegetation communities to trend toward native conditions. If mule deer are removed, the introduced bison would remain the only non-native large herbivore on the island.

However, mule deer browsing also impacts native vegetation. Highly palatable native species are preferentially consumed, potentially inhibiting regeneration and facilitating the spread of invasive plants. Without population control, deer numbers may increase, exacerbating vegetation type conversion following disturbance events.

Fire and Fuels Management Considerations

From a wildfire risk perspective, complete removal of mule deer presents operational concerns. In the absence of herbivory, chaparral fuel loads would increase, resulting in higher tons per acre and elevated ERC values. Fuel age classes exceeding 25 years are extremely difficult to manage during wildfire incidents and significantly increase suppression complexity.

Increased fuel loading would elevate wildfire risk to developed areas, particularly in Avalon and other locations where heavy fuels are present within 200 feet of structures. Conversely, maintaining a reduced mule deer population can provide a measurable reduction in understory vegetation and seedling establishment, moderating fuel continuity and, under certain conditions, improving firefighting effectiveness depending on weather, fuels, and topography.

Conclusion

Both ecological integrity and wildfire risk must be considered in mule deer management decisions. An actively managed population provides the most balanced approach, limiting long-term vegetation type conversion while helping moderate fuel loading in proximity to communities.

If mule deer are fully removed, additional long-term costs would be incurred to implement and maintain a comprehensive fuels management program, particularly adjacent to developed areas. Active population management represents a lower-cost alternative with measurable fire risk reduction benefits.

Recommendations

Based on these considerations, it is recommended that land managers determine an appropriate ecological balance through an actively managed mule deer population. Population regulation should focus on minimizing type conversion and long-term habitat

change, with particular emphasis on removing female does as the most effective population management strategy. If a decision is made to remove all mule deer from the island, a comprehensive fuels management program should be implemented, especially in areas adjacent to development and human occupancy.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-6180.

ACM:es

c: Kyla Coates
Chloe Cheney-Rice