



## Briefing Paper

DATE: March 1, 2006 STATE: CA

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FROM: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

SUBJECT: Federal Register Notice on Farallon NWR Restoration Project

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING DOCUMENT: The Refuge is beginning the public scoping process for a project to eradicate non-native house mice from South Farallon Islands. The FR Notice advises the public of our intentions to prepare either an EA or EIS, announces the 45 day public comment period, and a May 17<sup>th</sup> public meeting in San Francisco.

ISSUES:

- Non-native house mice are impacting breeding populations of burrow nesting seabirds on the Refuge through direct and indirect predation.
- The Farallon Islands are one of only 2 major breeding sites in the world for the Ashy storm-petrels, a rare and declining seabird.
- Petrel populations on the Farallons declined by over 40% during a 20-year period, primarily due to predation by owls, gulls, and mice.
- Over-wintering burrowing owls, artificially sustained by mice during the fall season, are forced to find an alternative food source once the mouse population crashes in the winter. They switch to eating storm petrels, causing significant mortality of adults. The owls are eventually killed by gulls, or starve to death because this unconventional diet of seabirds does not sustain them.
- If house mice are eliminated, burrowing owls arriving on the Farallons would continue their migration, dispersing from the island after a few days like other fall migrating landbirds. Without burrowing owls as a predation factor, the ashy storm petrel population is expected to reverse its decline.
- House mice also impact other ecosystem functions: they spread non-native weed seed, and eat native invertebrates and endemic plants.
- Aerial broadcast of bait pellets containing rodenticide is the most feasible method, as it would involve minimal access and disturbance of Refuge resources.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE: Eradication of house mice can take place with minimum impacts to non-target wildlife. Application of the rodenticide would take place when breeding birds and most landbirds are not present. Marine mammals would not eat the pellets, and there are no other native mammals present on the island. The bait is non-toxic to invertebrates and herptofauna.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE: The scientific and environmental community support the project. Cooperating/ supporting agencies and organizations include PRBO, CDFG, Island Conservation, USCG, Audubon, NFWF and the Lukenbach Oil Spill Trustee Council. The latter 2 are funding the project. Opposition from animal right's groups is possible.

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