

Outreach Plan for Proposed Farallon Mouse Eradication

Issue:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is beginning the public scoping process and NEPA for a project to eradicate non-native house mice from the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge.

Basic Facts About The Issue:

The ashy storm-petrel is a small seabird that is found only in the California Current marine system of the west coast of North America. Ashy storm-petrels depend on fewer than 20 island breeding sites near the coast of California and extreme northern Mexico, however over 90% of the population is concentrated in two areas: The Farallon Islands and Channel Islands.

Biologists' best estimate is that there are fewer than 8,000 ashy storm-petrels, and studies have indicated that their population is undergoing a major decline. Between 1972 and 1992, the population of breeding ashy storm-petrels on the Farallons fell by 42%. This decline was attributed primarily to predation on adult breeding birds at the colony. The major known predators of adult ashy storm-petrels on the Farallons are native western gulls, a natural predator of ashy storm-petrels throughout their range, and burrowing owls that have chosen to over-winter on the island. The ashy storm-petrel reproduces slowly – it lays only one egg a year and there is an extended chick-rearing period – so adult mortality has a major effect on population stability.

House mice were introduced to the South Farallon Islands (SFI), composed of Southeast Farallon, West End, and numerous offshore rocks, early in the sequence of human activities, and were well established when the island was added to the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge in 1969.

On SFI, introduced house mice are negatively impacting the breeding success of burrow- and crevice-nesting seabirds, particularly the ashy storm-petrel, both directly as predators and indirectly as facilitators of predation by burrowing owls. Juvenile burrowing owls arrive accidentally on the island each fall. Most leave SFI after a few days, but some are enticed to end their migration and remain on the island because of the abundant mouse population present during the fall. Over-wintering burrowing owls, 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 preying on ashy storm-petrels, causing substantial mortality of adult petrels throughout the winter and spring. The owls in turn are eventually killed by gulls, or starve to death because this unconventional diet of seabirds does not sustain them.

If the Service removes the mice, a task that has been accomplished on over 20 islands worldwide, wayward burrowing owls will not over-winter on the island. This will protect ashy storm-petrels on SFI from what is now a serious threat to their population.

Communication Goals:

- Notify the public of the opportunity to comment on the proposed project during the scoping period, including a public meeting 5/17/06
- Provide factual information about the need for the project, possible alternatives being considered, and how impacts to wildlife and the environment will be avoided
- Provide a consistent message for the Service and its partners (IC, PRBO, Luckenbach Trustee Council) to respond to public and media inquiries

Message/Talking Points:

- Non-native house mice are impacting breeding populations of burrow and crevice nesting seabirds on the Refuge both directly (through predation) and indirectly (by supporting a population of predatory burrowing owls).
- The number of breeding ashy storm-petrels on the Farallons declined over 40% over a recent 20-year period. The major cause for the decline is predation by western gulls (a natural predator) and by burrowing owls, that are artificially supported earlier in the season by eating house mice.
- House mice also impact other ecosystem functions: they eat large numbers of native invertebrates and endemic plants, and possibly compete with the Farallon arboreal salamander.
- If house mice are eliminated, burrowing owls arriving on the Farallons will continue their migration, dispersing from the island after a few days like the many other errant migrating landbirds that arrive each fall. With the owls gone, the ashy storm-petrel population will have a much better chance at recovery.
- Without burrowing owls as a predation factor, the ashy storm-petrel population is expected to reverse its decline.
- The eradication of house mice will also benefit the island's plants, invertebrates, and salamanders. Researchers on other islands have documented significant increases in the numbers of invertebrates and herptiles (lizards and amphibians) after mouse eradication.
- Mouse eradication has been carried out successfully on over 20 islands worldwide.
- The rodenticide proposed for use has been specially formulated for use in conservation projects. The bait pellets, which consist of compressed grain infused with the minimum effective concentration of rodenticide (measured in tens of parts per million), will break down rapidly in the moist maritime environment of the Farallons. In similar eradication projects, rodenticide levels at the soil surface dropped rapidly after bait application, and were below detectable levels after six months.
- Eradication of house mice will take place with minimum impacts to non-target wildlife on the Refuge. The proposed method of aerial bait application lasts only a few hours, which makes it desirable for minimizing the impact of bait application activities. Bait will be applied during the late fall season when breeding birds and most land birds are not present. Hauled-out marine mammals present on the island would not eat the pellets, and there are no other native mammals present on the island.
- Introduced rabbits and cats were eradicated from the Refuge in the 1960s and 70s. House mice are the only introduced mammal still impacting the Farallons' ecosystem.

Key Constituents:

US Congress Rep. Tom Lantos
 CA State Assembly member Leland Yee
 San Francisco Supervisor Jake McGoldrick
 US Coast Guard
 NOAA: Gulf of the Farallones Nat'l Marine Sanctuary
 NPS: Pt. Reyes Nat'l Seashore, Golden Gate Nat'l Recreation Area
 BLM: CA Coastal Nat'l Monument
 CA DFG Region 3

Audubon Society, other local & national NGOs
 Fund for Animals, PETA, Humane Society

Key Dates:

April 14, 2006: Notice of Intent to prepare EA published in Federal Register – official public scoping period begins

April 17, 2006: Letters to interested parties notifying of public scoping period & meeting

April 28, 2006: Notification posted in FNWR, GFNMS, PRNS, GGNRA visitor's centers

May 12, 2006: Notification appears in local newspapers

May 17, 2006: Public meeting

May 29, 2006: Official public scoping period ends

<u>Materials</u>	<u>Yes/No</u>	<u>Prepared By</u>
News release	In Progress	Island Conservation (contractor)
Fact sheets/Q&As	In Progress	Island Conservation (contractor)
Interested parties letter	In Progress	Island Conservation (contractor)
Talking points	Yes	Joelle Buffa, Refuge Manager
Key Contact Table	In Progress	Island Conservation (contractor)

Rollout Strategy:

See attached document

Prepared by Joelle Buffa, San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Joelle_Buffa@fws.gov; 510-792-0222; FAX 510-792-5828

March 30, 2006; Last updated April 27, 2006

Prepared 3/30/06

**Rollout Strategy for Public Outreach Plan:
South Farallon Islands mouse eradication NEPA Process**

Timeline

April 14, 2006:	Notice of Intent to prepare EA published in Federal Register – official
	public scoping period begins
April 14, 2006:	Informational website launched
April 17, 2006:	Letters to interested parties notifying of public scoping period & meeting
April 28, 2006:	Notification posted in FNWR, GFNMS, PRNS, GGNRA visitor's centers
May 12, 2006:	Notification appears in local newspapers
May 17, 2006:	Public meeting
May 29, 2006:	Official public scoping period ends
TBD:	Circulation of Draft EA*
TBD:	Circulation of Final EA/FONSI (or NOI for an EIS)

*Subject to change if significant impacts are found

Methods of notification

- Federal Register
- Letters to interested groups & parties
 - Audubon Society
 - Other conservation NGOs
 - Fund for Animals, PETA, Human Society
- Advertisement in local newspapers (TBD)
- Public postings in relevant agency Visitor Centers
 - SF Bay Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Complex
 - Gulf of the Farallones Nat'l Marine Sanctuary
 - Golden Gate Nat'l Recreation Area
 - Pt. Reyes Nat'l Seashore

Public meeting format & materials

- One-page fact sheets
- Frequently asked questions sheet
- Interpretive posters & displays
- FWS, IC, PRBO staff available to answer individual questions
- Confidential comments box provided
- Short presentation of proposed project

Website

- Ideal launch date: April 14, 2006
- Contents: project description, FAQs, fact sheets, links to more information

Other materials

- Press packet available from FWS, IC
- Interpretive displays/materials at FWS visitor center, other agencies if possible

Media outreach

- (May 8, 2006?): Press release distributed to limited sources for possible supportive articles

Response protocol for publicity

- *Positive press*: Make available on website if possible
- *Negative press*:
 - FWS to decide on response, on case-by-case basis, after discussing and reviewing possible options with IC
 - Options include: 1) no response, 2) press release, 3) meet with opposed groups/individuals to understand concerns (may want to do this through partners such as Audubon, Refuge support groups, etc).
 - Talking points will be pre-prepared for anticipated publicity

General responsibilities

FWS

- Public face of the project: all specifically project-related media statements to come from FWS
- Interpretive displays at FNWR visitor center
- Provide assistance w/ website administration
- Identify spokesperson(s)

IC

- Facilitate public meetings, events, etc.
- Prepare letters to interested parties, newspaper notifications, public postings
- Preparing general talking points, issue-specific responses
- Prepare press releases w/ assistance of FWS
- Prepare Frequently Asked Questions
- Prepare fact sheets
- Prepare or assist FWS in preparation of interpretive materials
- Maintain website w/ assistance of FWS
- Involve the scientific community in scoping
- Involve other conservation NGOs in scoping
- Make general statements about island restoration thru eradication as necessary