

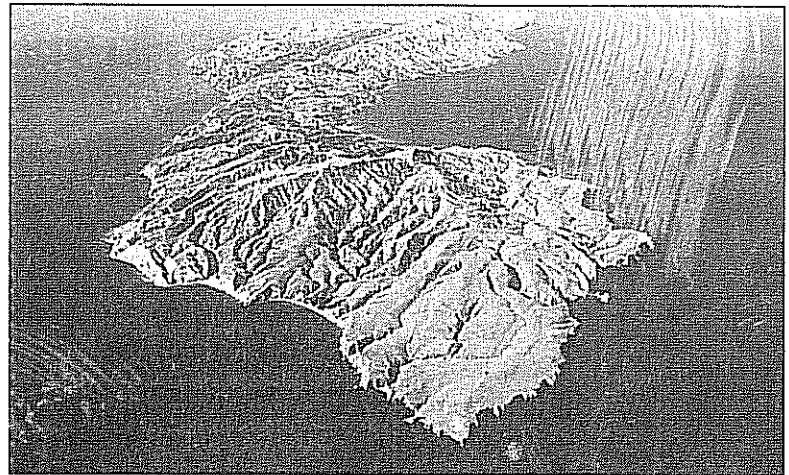
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OUR OPINION



NEWS-PRESS FILE PHOTO

Yet more killings on Santa Cruz

They're at it again. The National Park Service and Nature Conservancy have found another species to kill on Santa Cruz Island.

The island's so-called caretakers have imported gunmen from New Zealand for a multi-year,

the island as well.

The above explanation, which is the company line from the Park Service and Nature Conservancy, is full of holes. For starters, the island's managers have never explained why, suddenly, after 150 years on the island, all the pigs must be killed or why non-lethal means such as

multimillion-dollar campaign to shoot all the wild pigs on the island. The park's former superintendent has exposed the flaws in the environmental review process.

These animals have lived on Santa Cruz for more than 150 years, so removing them risks throwing the island's present ecosystem and balance out of whack. Perhaps 4,000 to 5,000 animals may die over the course of the years, as new generations of piglets are born and then killed. This number is far greater than the 1,000 pigs that authorities said would be killed when these officials tried to downplay the extent of the slaughter.

And now, one of the apparently unforeseen consequences of the removal of the pigs is that it's created a supposed "need" to kill hundreds of wild turkeys on the island.

The rationale goes something like this: The pigs need to go because they attract golden eagles to the island from the mainland. The eagles then also eat island foxes, which are the object of an effort to help them rebound. Now, low and behold, the turkeys are attracting golden eagles to

birth control can't be used. Also, the managers have never refuted the specifics about the flawed review process that the former superintendent revealed.

Assuming the island managers are successful in reducing the wild turkey population, what will be the consequence of this action? What's next? What other species will be targeted for killing? What's next? What other species will be targeted for killing?

So far the public uproar has caused the Park Service and Nature Conservancy to back off from plans to kill golden eagles, a federally protected species, that live on Santa Cruz.

As veterinarian Elliot Katz, the founder of *In Defense of Animals*, says, "It's just a tragedy that there is this mindset of killing."

Also troubling is that the island managers are feeding the dead turkeys to the bald eagles that have been re-introduced to the island. In an earlier visit to the island, we also learned that the managers were catching pigs to feed to the bald eagles. One concern is that bald eagles are marine feeders, and one has to wonder what this diet is doing to the young birds.

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