

Santa Barbara News-Press

Opinion: A lawsuit to save island wildlife

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It shouldn't require an average citizen to make a federal case out of it to save the wildlife on the Channel Islands.

Yet Santa Barbara businessman Rick Feldman this week needed to go to federal court to try to stop the killing of wild turkeys on Santa Cruz Island by the National Park Service and Nature Conservancy. The nonprofit group In Defense of Animals is helping Mr. Feldman with the legal action.

Residents of the Central Coast, and all of California, should be outraged that the island's managers are destroying the state's wildlife resources in this manner. The lawsuit maintains that the Park Service and Nature Conservancy haven't followed procedures required by the National Environmental Protection Act and other regulations.

NEPA is a long-standing environmental safeguard, and one the Bush administration has been working in various ways to undermine.

It's said that gunmen on the island have already killed hundreds of birds on Santa Cruz, although the exact number is unknown because the Park Service and Nature Conservancy won't allow truly independent observers to oversee what's happening on the island. The same is true about the multi-year, multimillion-dollar campaign to kill wild pigs, a species that has lived on Santa Cruz for more than 150 years.

The lawsuit notes that there "was no mention of the wild turkeys or their eradication" in the final environmental impact statement regarding the plan to kill the pigs.

The legal filing lays out much of the killing on the islands.

It says the Park Service in the 1970s killed all of San Miguel Island's mules and donkeys, "with the last pregnant jenny being shot in 1976. In the late 1970s the NPS eradicated all the rabbits on Santa Barbara Island, with the last rabbit shot in 1979. In the 1980s the NPS eradicated over 1,200 pigs from Santa Rosa Island. Between 1981 and 1987, (the Nature Conservancy) shot over 36,000 sheep on Santa Cruz Island. In the early 1990s the NPS eradicated all of the pigs on Santa Rosa Island. In 2001, the NPS began a campaign of dropping highly toxic rat poison from a helicopter on Anacapa Island with the intent of killing the entire population of black rats."

We'd add that the toxic pellets killed migratory birds, raptors, lizards and thousands of native deer mice.

The legal filing goes on to say that the Park Service and Nature Conservancy next began a new campaign on Santa Cruz that employees within the Park Service referred to as the "mega kill, poison and burn" plan. It included killing 4,000 pigs, using helicopters to shower herbicides over the island and relying on prescribed burns.

Before the wild turkeys are gone and become just another footnote in history of killing on the Channel Islands, a judge should grant this lawsuit's request for a halt to the shooting.

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