

# Pacific Seabird Group



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DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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Steve Hampton  
California Department of Fish and Game—OSPR  
1700 K Street, Suite 250  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Comments on Draft Restoration Plan/Environmental  
Assessment for S.S. *Jacob Luckenbach* and Associated Mystery Oil Spills**

Dear Mr. Hampton:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we offer the following comments on the Draft Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment for the *S.S. Jacob Luckenbach* and Associated Mystery Oil Spills (“Restoration Plan”) that was issued in February 2006. The Restoration Plan will spend oil-spill restoration funds for damages to seabirds and other natural resources related to multiple oil spills that occurred off the coast of San Francisco from 1990 to 2003. PSG is an international, non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote the knowledge, study, and conservation of Pacific seabirds. It has a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Russia, Japan, South Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird refuges and populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation. PSG has been involved with issues relating to the restoration of seabirds after human-caused disasters such as oil spills for decades.

In general, PSG is very supportive of the draft Restoration Plan. As discussed below, we support all of the seabird restoration projects in the Restoration Plan, including projects devoted to loons, grebes, shorebirds and sea-ducks. We express no opinion regarding the proposed expenditure of funds on sea otters because otters are beyond PSG's mandate. However, our silence should not be interpreted as opposition to that project.

Specifically, PSG endorses the following projects in the Restoration Plan:

- Protection of nesting habitat of nesting Pacific loons, red-throated loons, and red phalaropes at Kokechik Flats, Alaska, from human disturbance;
- Protection of western/Clark's grebe nesting colonies at northern California lakes;
- Mouse eradication at the Farallon Islands that is anticipated to benefit nesting ashy storm-petrels;
- Seabird restoration and protection on Baja Islands, Mexico, that should benefit Cassin's auklets, California brown pelicans, and cormorants;
- A seabird colony protection program that will extend a current program by 20 years to protect common murres off the central California coast from human disturbance;
- A corvid management at Point Reyes National Seashore that will improve nesting success of common murres at the Point Reyes headlands;
- Reading Rock murre colony restoration in Humboldt County;
- Corvid management program in the Santa Cruz Mountains that is designed to improve marbled murrelet nesting success;
- Old-growth forest acquisition and protection that would acquire and manage old-growth forest parcels to benefit marbled murrelets;
- Dune habitat restoration at Point Reyes National Seashore that should create more nesting habitat for snowy plovers;
- Norway rat eradication in the Queen Charlotte Islands [Ellen Island and Bischof Islands] , Canada, that would benefit ancient murrelets; and
- Nesting habitat restoration on Año Nuevo Island that would benefit rhinoceros auklets.

We applaud the Trustees' decision to fund projects in Mexico and Canada that were affected by the oil spills off San Francisco. There is ample precedent to spend restoration funds outside of the United States when circumstances warrant. Several years ago, PSG supported the proposal and ultimate decision of the *American Trader* Oil Spill Trustee Council to restore a brown pelican colony in Baja, Mexico, that was affected by an oil spill in Southern California. In 2003, PSG supported the proposal and ultimate decision of the *Command* Oil Spill Trustee Council to restore a sooty shearwater colony in New Zealand that was affected by an oil spill near Monterey, California. Last year, PSG supported the proposed Montrose settlements that provided funds for numerous projects that benefit seabirds in Baja California.

Finally, PSG notes that the seabird restoration and protection project in Baja California also will benefit Xantus's murrelets, in addition to target species. The Xantus's murrelet has been designated threatened by the State of California and is a candidate species for federal listing. Much of the Xantus's murrelet population spends the non-breeding season in late summer and fall off central California where the Luckenbach oilings occurred. The project proposes restoration activities at three important Xantus's murrelet breeding colonies — San Martín, San Jeronimo, and the San Benito Islands — that would notably benefit Xantus's murrelets. In particular, shielding of lights at colonies and at sea, prevention of reintroduction of cats or rats which have likely caused great reductions in Xantus's murrelet population size, and education/outreach to reduce human disturbance should be effective in reducing injury to murrelets and in increasing their breeding success at these colonies. Therefore, we express our support of this project for the additional reason that it has a high potential to provide conservation benefits for Xantus's murrelets.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Restoration Plan. We will gladly provide additional comments or expertise at your request.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Craig S. Harrison*

Craig S. Harrison  
Vice-Chair for Conservation