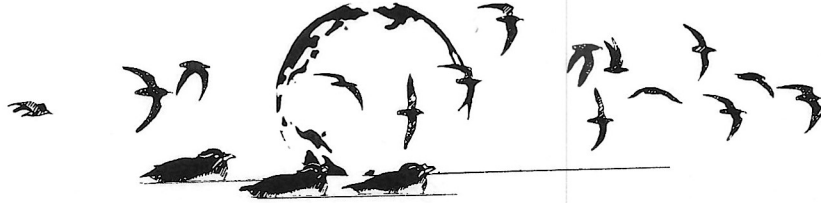

Pacific Seabird Group



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

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January 17, 1996

Michael J. Spear, Regional Director
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
East Side Federal Complex
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Michael D. Wilson, Chairman
Hawaii Board of Land and Natural Resources
1151 Punchbowl St., Room 131
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Conservation Measures for Newell's Shearwaters, Hawaii

Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we are concerned about actions that may be taken to install power lines and to mine cinder cones adjacent to the breeding colonies of Newell's shearwaters (a threatened species) in the Puna District, of the Big Island, Hawaii. As you may know, PSG is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG draws its members from the entire Pacific Basin, including Japan, China, Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, state and federal officials who manage seabird populations and refuges, and individuals with interests in marine conservation. PSG is especially active with regard to oil spill restoration plans, marine sanctuaries, seabird-fishery issues, and protection of endangered or threatened seabird species.

The U.S. Department of the Interior listed Newell's shearwaters as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975^{1/} which, under State of Hawaii regulations, automatically extends state protection under the Hawaii Endangered Species Act. The bulk of the population of Newell's shearwaters nests on Kauai, and limited breeding takes place on the Big Island, and probably Molokai, Maui and Lanai.^{2/} Recent surveys on the Big Island by Michelle Reynolds et al. and Reginald David have confirmed breeding areas for Newell's shearwaters at Pu'ulena and Heiheiahulu craters. Breeding is suspected at several other craters in this area, including Pu'u Kaliu Crater. These cones are essential for successful nesting of this species on the Big Island, and allow this species to retain an important part of its native range. We understand that power lines are planned to be installed near the breeding areas of Newell's shearwaters in the Puna district of the Big Island. In addition, Dr. David Ainley has recently learned that cinder is currently being mined at the Pu'ulena and Heiheiahulu cinder cones.

We make the following suggestions concerning the conservation of this threatened species. First, we would hope that the power lines corridor would be re-oriented to minimize the disruption of nests and to avoid the fly-ways between nest sites and the sea. There has been considerable work concerning Newell's shearwaters and power lines on Kauai during the past several years, and we strongly urge that you implement the knowledge derived from those studies into planning the power line corridor. In some cases lines can be buried and where this is not possible they can be constructed at a height that will have minimal effects on the shearwaters. We understand that marker balls on power lines may not always work, and suggest that experiments be conducted with auditory repellents (e.g., solar-powered ultrasound devices that have had some success with gulls and cormorants) or passive sound reflectors. We believe there should be additional surveys to locate Newell's shearwater colonies on the Big Island. If there is a state or federal environmental impact statement that is prepared as part of the transmission line project, PSG requests an opportunity to review it.

Second, with respect to cinder mining, we request that state and federal officials determine the extent to which these activities directly or indirectly harm Newell's shearwaters. We would hope that any harm could be mitigated through intelligent mining practices, including season and location of activities.

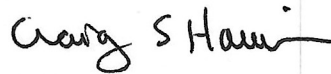
^{1/} 15 C.F.R. § 17.11 (1995).

^{2/} Harrison, C.S. 1990. Seabirds of Hawaii: Natural History and Conservation.

Known colonies should have predator control plans implemented immediately. In addition, designating critical habitat for the nesting colonies of this species seems to be warranted.

Please give any one of us a call if you have any questions concerning these issues.

Sincerely,



William T. Everett
Craig S. Harrison
S. Kim Nelson

cc: Reginald David, Hawaii Audubon Society
Scott Johnston, FWS
Brooks Harper, FWS