

# Pacific Seabird Group



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

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Carol Gorbics  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
2730 Loker Avenue West  
Carlsbad, California 92008

## **Re: Comments on Draft Restoration Plan: American Trader Oil Spill**

Dear Sir:

These are the Pacific Seabird Group's (PSG) comments on the draft restoration plan and EA for Seabirds injured by the American Trader oil spill off Huntington Beach, California ("Draft Plan"). 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 rim of the entire Pacific Basin, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan, China, 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. Over the years we have advised and worked cooperatively with government agencies to further these interests. PSG has been especially active with regard to oil spill restoration.

The Draft Plan proposes spending about \$2.9 million for bird-related natural resource projects, specifically the following:

1. Creation, enhancement, protection of brown pelican communal roost sites;
2. Seabird nesting habitat restoration at Anacapa Island;
3. Public education and awareness; and
4. International efforts for brown pelicans (educational and protection activities; eradication of exotics on Baja islands; monitoring of populations).

In general, PSG supports the projects that the Trustee agencies have proposed. We offer the following observations and comments with respect to the details of some of the proposals.

First, we applaud the Trustee agencies' decision to allow funds to be spent in Mexico to restore brown pelicans. We believe that restoration in Mexico will have very high value for the damaged pelican population, and are gratified that the agencies are applying sound ecological principles in their consideration of projects. PSG has been frustrated in commenting on other restoration plans where the trustee agencies have stated that restoration funds can only be used at the location where the injuries took place. We congratulate you for making this determination, and hope that other trustee agencies for other restoration plans elsewhere will allow restoration projects to be implemented far from the spill site where this makes ecological sense.

Second, we strongly believe that all projects should be subject to competitive bidding and, like projects funded by the *Exxon Valdez* trust fund, should use a standard request for proposal and a peer review process. Our experience has taught us that sole source contracts often cost much more for less return (and thus less benefit to seabirds) than competitively bid contracts. Moreover, there is a public perception that sole sourcing service contracts to those individuals or entities who represented the government as experts in the settlement negotiations is improper. When this occurs, it appears that the trustee agencies are improperly "paying off" individuals for providing the testimony that the government wished to elicit. The restoration process will be cleansed of such taints if all projects are awarded after competitive bidding.

Third, our members support public education programs that work in schools with bi-lingual educators teaching about marine food webs, the role seabirds play and the effects of pollution on the ocean environment. This could take the form of a rotating set of programs for school assemblies or visits to science departments on a regular basis over a number of years in the affected areas.

Finally, we understand that the trustee agencies have already let a large contract to remove black rats from Anacapa Island using funds from the American Trader settlement. PSG supports removal of predators on Anacapa Island and on other colonies where seabirds breed because they can do terrible damage. Nevertheless, we do not condone expending trustee funds before the public comment period has run.

PSG thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Plan.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison  
Vice Chair for Conservation