

3. Farallon Islands Component of the Project. *Comment:* Several respondents asked for expansion or clarification of the scope of the Farallon Islands component of the project and pointed out that an understanding of the status and phenology of the large colony at Southeast Farallon Island is critical to restoration efforts at the smaller, nearshore colonies. Also, some respondents suggested that experiments with decoys be conducted at the Farallon Islands in order to refine and validate social attraction methodologies and protocols.

*Response:* The Service agrees that Farallon Islands are an important component to the conservation and understanding of the central California common murre population. Monitoring of common murres at the Farallon Islands, especially individually banded murres, will be important for evaluating the success of the recolonization efforts at the nearshore colonies and has been included in the Final Plan. The Service believes that the efforts described in the Final Plan are appropriate for the Farallon Islands, given National Wildlife Refuge management objectives and protocols. The Service does not believe that the colonies on the Farallon Islands merit greater emphasis in restoration than the nearshore colonies. The murre colonies on the Farallon Islands were impacted by the spill, but may still contain sufficient birds to accomplish any necessary social facilitation of breeding without human intervention.

Research on decoy placement and on effectiveness of combinations of auditory and visual attractants has been underway in Maine for several years (Schubel 1993). This research provides empirical data on numbers and densities of decoys sufficient to attract murres when combined with auditory stimuli. The Service believes that the information from Maine is sufficient to guide initiation of the Final Plan. Therefore, the Service believes it is not essential, at this time, to conduct methods-oriented research and experimental validation of common murre recolonization techniques at the Farallon Islands for the recolonization project to be successful. However, the Trustees will reevaluate the restoration projects and consider additional projects at least annually.

4. Additional Sites for Murre Recolonization. *Comment:* One respondent suggested that the Service could do more to expand the range of common murres in central California by using social attraction techniques to start a new colony at Bodega Rock in Sonoma County.

*Response:* The Service did not consider this site for murre recolonization because, as far as the Service is aware, it has no prior history of use for nesting by murres. Lack of prior use suggests that this may not be a suitable location for a murre colony.

5. Prey Resources for Common Murres. *Comment:* Some respondents questioned whether ecological resources, such as prey, might be insufficient to support growing murre populations and thereby could limit the success of the project.

*Response:* The Service is aware of this theory and would welcome any additional information for consideration on this subject at any time. Currently, the Service believes that insufficient information exists to conclude that prey resource limitations would preclude the success of this project. In addition, Pacific Sardines (*Sardinops sagax*) are beginning to recover in central California (Wolf 1992). Sardines had disappeared north of Point Conception by 1951, probably due to a combination of overfishing and an extended period of cold water (described in Ainley and Lewis 1974). Their recovery may strengthen food resources in the vicinity of the recolonization sites; for example, the once abundant sardines were believed to be an important food to larger seabirds, including cormorants and puffins (Ainley and Lewis 1974). In addition, more detail was added to the plan to clarify that common murre diet and feeding information would be collected at recolonization and reference sites where feasible, in order to gain more information on prey resources.

6. Public Outreach and Education. *Comment:* Several respondents emphasized the importance of making public outreach and education an integral part of the project.

*Response:* The Service agrees that public outreach and education should be an integral part of this project, and has allocated up to \$10,000 annually for this purpose. Relevant public outreach and education opportunities will be sought throughout the project, and will be funded to the extent possible without compromising project goals.

7. Budget. *Comment:* Several respondents requested a more detailed budget.

*Response:* A more detailed budget has been included in the Final Plan. This budget contains anticipated ranges of annual costs for major budgetary categories for the duration of the project. Actual costs for cooperators and contractors will be known when negotiations are completed, and/or when contracts have been advertised and bids received.

8. Coordination With Other Trustee Councils. *Comment:* One respondent recommended that the Apex Houston Trustee Council coordinate its activities with the Trustee Councils that are guiding restoration projects for seabirds injured in other oil spills along the Pacific Coast.

*Response:* The Apex Houston Trustee Council will coordinate and communicate with other Trustee Councils.

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