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DISTINGUISHED VISITOR: A bald eagle spotted in Huntington Beach bears a red tag on its wing, meaning it was probably released on Catalina Island.

Merrilee Madrigal, for the Register

Saturday, June 25, 2005

Catalina denied funds for bald eagle project

Agencies say money for restoration effort will shift to other Channel Islands less affected by DDT pollution.

The Associated Press

AVALON – Federal and state officials will stop funding a program to reintroduce bald eagles on Santa Catalina Island, but they could restart the project after 2007.

Officials representing six environmental agencies made the decision as they determined how to spend \$25 million in settlement money over the next five years.

A Montrose Chemical Corp. factory near Torrance from 1947 to 1971 flushed the pesticide DDT into Los Angeles County sewers that empty into the ocean off the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The bald eagle population on Catalina Island was destroyed in the 1960s by the DDT deposits.

Montrose and other companies paid California and the federal government \$140 million after 10 years of litigation that started in 1990. It was the second-largest settlement in U.S. history paid to the public for damage to natural resources.

About \$38 million, plus interest, must be used to restore the population of local fish, eagles, peregrine falcons and seabirds.

Wildlife experts for the past 25 years have spent several million dollars trying to revive the bald eagle population on Catalina Island. The eagles reintroduced on the island still carry so much DDT that their eggs cannot hatch without the aid of scientists.

The eagles have not been able to produce chicks on their own because DDT from the ocean floor still contaminates their prey.

In April, the trustee council that decides how the settlement money is spent proposed ending all Catalina funding to instead spend \$6.2 million to restore the eagle population on Santa Cruz Island and other Channel Islands to the north where there may be less contamination.

The plan called for ending funding for eagle restoration in 2007 if the birds were unable to produce chicks on their own.

After 2007, \$1 million to \$2 million of eagle funds could be spent either on the other Channel Islands or on Catalina, depending on which area has the greater chance of success.

Ann Muscat, president of the Catalina Island Conservancy, said Wednesday that the decision was "extremely disappointing."

"The so-called concession is really meaningless," she said. "Even though public comment was overwhelmingly in favor of continuing the project on Catalina, they chose essentially to stick with their proposed plan."