



## CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Sept. 22, 2015

Contact: Laura Mecoy  
310.546.5860  
[laura@mecoy.net](mailto:laura@mecoy.net)

### **Catalina Island Conservancy Working to Protect Bat Population *Biologists Install Protective Gates and Renew Monitoring***

AVALON – Fairy tales and myths portray bats as symbols of evil, ingredients to be stirred into witches' brews and the cause of children's nightmares. In reality, these flying mammals are essential to the ecosystem on Catalina Island and around the world because they consume insects, pollinate flowers and disperse fruit and plant seeds.

But many bat species are in decline because of the loss or fragmentation of their habitats, reduced food supplies, destruction of their roosts, the direct killing of individuals and diseases, including white nose syndrome, which has destroyed entire colonies of bats on the East Coast.

Catalina Island is home to at least eight species of bats, including two that are considered to be at risk, and the Catalina Island Conservancy is seeking to monitor and protect the Island's bat population with the support of the Donald Slavik Foundation.

The Donald Slavik Foundation provided the funding for the Conservancy to buy state-of-the-art acoustic monitoring equipment that will allow biologists to detect and identify additional bat species and assess their overall distribution and habitat. This funding also was used to install bat-friendly gates at the entrances of three abandoned mines in which Townsend's big-eared bats have been documented or are expected to occur once human disturbances are eliminated.

"Townsend's big-eared bats are extremely sensitive to human disturbance," said Calvin Duncan, Conservancy wildlife biologist. "Even a single disturbance of a maternity roost can cause abandonment of that roost."

The bat gates are specifically designed to allow bats to enter and exit the mines freely while restricting access to humans. Their heavy steel construction will withstand vandalism and ensure that the gates survive for generations to come. Because abandoned mines are prone to collapse, the gates also will protect Island residents and visitors who might expose themselves to danger by exploring the abandoned mines.

#### **Many Bats Call Catalina Home**

Among the eight species of bats documented on Catalina Island, one has been listed as a California Species of Special Concern (the Pallid bat) and another (the Townsend's big-eared bat) is a candidate for

state listing as an endangered species. Four other bat species of Special Concern occur in nearby areas and are believed to utilize Catalina. But they have not yet been documented on the Island.

The power of flight has pre-adapted bats for island colonization. But very specific roosting and foraging habitat must exist for bat species to thrive. Catalina Island's diverse landscape provides bats with abundant natural habitat, including natural caves and rock crevices, trees and water. Bats utilize human structures as well and, in many cases, these human structures can support large colonies.

"Island ecosystems often pose unique challenges for conservation because island species can be more sensitive to changes than their mainland counterparts," Duncan said. "Managed correctly, islands can also serve as refuges for species when habitat loss and other threats common on the mainland are not adequately controlled. We believe this is the case with our Island bats."

### **About the Conservancy**

Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides an airport and 50 miles of biking and nearly 150 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60 species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit [www.catalinaconservancy.org](http://www.catalinaconservancy.org).



New gate installed on Catalina to protect bats. Photo by Julie King



To protect the bat population on Catalina, Frontier Environmental Solutions installed three new gates on abandoned mines on the Island. The gates prevent humans entering the mines and allow bats to enter and leave the mines. Photo by Julie King.