

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE PEGGY WILSON HOUSE DISTRICT 2

SPONSOR STATEMENT House Joint Resolution 26

"Urging federal agencies to work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Southeast Alaska Native leaders, and other interested parties to establish strategies and plans for the sustainable management of the reintroduced sea otter population of Southeast Alaska."

In 1965-69 sea otters were reintroduced in SE with no management plan for an eventual overabundance.

Since 1972 the federal government who has the sole responsibility for managing the sea otter population has focused on a general harvesting moratorium, with few exceptions. Regulations allow a single group of people to sell sea otter pelts for purposes of authentic native articles of handicrafts and clothing. Even though they have the right to hunt the sea otter, the Alaska Natives have been denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts.

The 1994 Conservation Plan for the Sea Otter in Alaska states that although the optimum sustainable population range has not been numerically defined for sea otters in Alaska, the stock is believed to be within that range. That was sixteen years ago. The preface states, this plan will be reviewed annually and revised at least every three to five years.

The Southeast sea otters have flourished, with a growth rate of 13% a year. There is a known population of some 11,000 sea otters in Southeast. These sea otters could eat up to 253,000 lbs of food in a single day. This demonstrates how sea otters have been implicated in the demise of the recreational and commercial crab, geoduck and abalone fisheries. Their preferred foods are also some of our preferred foods, crab, clams, abalone, mollusks and other shellfish.

Good management calls for a new management plan now, not waiting for years more of study, while the sea otter overpopulation continues and the shell fisheries suffer loss. More assessing will not restore to Southeast Alaska tribes the right to make full use of sea otters for subsistence, nor to fishermen the commercial and sport fisheries that are being lost. A plan revision is needed now. There is an urgent need to diminish the sea otter depletion of shell fish and to facilitate the means by which all Southeast Alaska people can share in a more robust sport, subsistence, and economic base.