

From: Tina Brown

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Subject: 3/13/13 Testimony for Senate Resources Committee Re SB 60, Bounty on Sea Otters

To: Members of the Alaska State Senate Resources Committee

From: Alaska Wildlife Alliance - Tina M. Brown, President

Re: SB 60 - State Bounty on Sea Otters

March 13, 2013

Dear Members of the Senate Resources Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this issue, and thank you for your service to our state.

The Alaska Wildlife Alliance, a grassroots organization founded in 1978, advocates for science-based ecosystem management. All of our board members are Alaskans.

We urge you to oppose SB 60, which proposes a state bounty for sea otters.

1. Sea otters are a keystone species necessary for a healthy ecosystem. Because of their preference for sea urchins, sea otters are largely responsible for the presence of kelp forests. Sea urchins are marine herbivores whose populations, if left unchecked, can transform healthy marine systems to barren grounds. However, in the presence of sea otters, urchin numbers are controlled, so kelps flourish. Kelps are important to the productivity of the nearshore, provide habitat for diverse species of invertebrates, fishes - including salmon and herring - and marine birds and mammals.

2. Sea otters also reduce greenhouse gases. The healthy kelp forests caused by the presence of sea otters can absorb as much as 12 times the amount of CO₂ from the atmosphere than if they were subject to unchecked sea urchins. And when greenhouse gases are reduced, ocean acidification is reduced, so shellfish grow stronger shells. In fact, when greenhouse gases are reduced, all of us are healthier.

3. Because of the near extirpation of sea otters during the Russian fur trade, no one alive today has seen a healthy Southeast Alaskan nearshore ecosystem. Fortunately, our nearshore marine ecosystem will recover if sea otters are allowed to re-establish themselves.

4. Even though the reintroduction of sea otters to Southeast Alaska is a success story so far, these animals have not yet completely re-established themselves. Encouraging a large take could result in unsustainable sea otter populations.

5. Sea otters have limited home ranges; there are areas in Southeast Alaska where populations are high, and areas where they are low. If greater takes of these animals

were to occur in certain locations, the sea otter populations in these areas would be unsustainable.

6. The actual population status for SE Alaska's sea otters has not yet been determined. It is not known whether the population is at Optimum Sustainable Population, and Southeast Alaska's population may even be a candidate for "depleted" listing under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

7. As well as disregarding the health of the ecosystem and the health of a recovering species, SB 60 disregards the large and growing tourism industry in Southeast Alaska and throughout our state. Sea otter viewing is extremely popular; Allen Marine in Sitka started off as a sea otter viewing company.

8. This bill has already damaged Alaska's already tarnished image for wildlife management. It has received negative attention across the nation. Let's not exacerbate that problem by supporting this bill.

9. Even if this bill were passed, it could not be enforced; in fact, enforcement would be illegal. Sea otters are protected under federal law. According to US Fish & Wildlife spokesperson Bruce Woods, states cannot impose bounties. In an interview with CoastAlaska reporter Ed Schoenfeld, Woods points out that "the Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits any state from enforcing a law that affects the take of a marine mammal without soliciting and receiving management authority for that species from the Secretary of the Interior."

0. To be honest with you, SB 60 does more harm than good, and the bill is a waste of your time - at a time when far more pressing issues exist that you can actually do something about - unlike imposing a bounty on sea otters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and thank you for your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Tina M. Brown

President

Alaska Wildlife Alliance

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