

CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL, ALASKA

RESOLUTION No. 01-18-1387

A RESOLUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF
WRANGELL, ALASKA, SUPPORTING SEA OTTER MANAGEMENT IN
SOUTHEAST ALASKA

WHEREAS, the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska is a small island fishing community located in Southeast Alaska with a population of approximately 2,000 citizens; and

WHEREAS, residents of the Wrangell community are dependent on abundant, sustainable resources from the coastal waters of Southeast Alaska; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1960's, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game reintroduced approximately 400 sea otters in six different locations to near shore waters of Southeast Alaska in the absence of a long-term management plan; and

WHEREAS, the federal government, which has jurisdiction under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), has established no effective management plan for protecting the ecosystems affected by sea otters and maintaining an ecological balance of shellfish resources; and

WHEREAS, the unmanaged proliferation of reintroduced sea otters, which consume non-quantified yet substantial volumes of the crab, abalone, urchins, sea cucumbers, clams and other shellfish upon which the region's residents also heavily rely, appears to be contributing to a degradation in the ecological balance in many areas leading to diminished harvests of these important resources for subsistence and commercial purposes; and

WHEREAS, without proper management, the sea otter population in southern Southeast Alaska has grown at an alarming rate (over 5,800 observed in 2003 and a 2010 aerial survey by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service revealed an estimate of over 11,000 otters a growth rate of 13% per year, which extrapolates to a population of nearly 70,000 by 2025); and

WHEREAS, the drastic increase and high density of reintroduced sea otter has, in some areas, so depleted shellfish stocks that subsistence, personal use, and sport fishing is almost non-existent, and commercial fishing is closed due to unsustainably low abundance; and

WHEREAS, monies derived from the harvest of Alaska's sustainably managed aquatic resources form a major component of the economies of Alaska's coastal communities and thereby make them particularly sensitive to situations negatively impacting yields from those resources; and

WHEREAS, a degradation in the ecological balance of a diversity of species has taken place in many areas; and

WHEREAS, residents of Wrangell and many other communities throughout Southeast Alaska rely on shellfish not only for their livelihood, but for survival in a subsistence way of life; and

WHEREAS, Southeast Alaska's indigenous inhabitants have hunted sea otters since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, Alaska Natives under the Marine Mammal Protection act are denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts; and

WHEREAS, Section 101 of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act further allows for the use of marine mammal pelts in the creation of authentic native articles of handicraft and clothing; and

WHEREAS, under the Act, such value added fur products, so created, are already allowable for sale in both intra and interstate commerce; and

WHEREAS, Alaska is a model for the management of harvestable resources for sustained yield and is the only state in the United States which sites this model of management in the Alaska Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the mandate within the Alaska Constitution to manage for sustained yield is in conflict with the current interpretation and enforcement of the Marine Mammal Protection Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and

WHEREAS, implementation of a sustainable harvest management regime would serve the dual purposes of maintaining sea otter populations at a level suitable for continued ecological balance and expanded economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Section 119 of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act allows the Secretary of the Department of Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organizations for the conservation of marine mammals, the development of marine mammal co-management structures with Federal and State agencies and the creation of local management plans for the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use and providing protection to important subsistence shellfish resources creating an ecological balance; and

WHEREAS, the loss of commercial harvests have resulted in negative economic impacts to fishermen, processors and seafood dependent communities which have experienced a loss in employment wages and associated economic activities; and

WHEREAS, the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell adopted a similar Resolution in 2011.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL, ALASKA urges the appropriate Federal agencies work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Native and non-Native leaders in the Southeast region, to establish strategies and plans for an ecological balance of shellfish resources and the reintroduced sea otter population of Southeast Alaska, including shellfish enhancement programs; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska urges State and Federal government managing authorities, in developing those management plans, to actively consider means of expanding and enhancing small business and broader economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, as a means of expanding and enhancing economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska, urges Federal authorities to consider expanding the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence purposes; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska supports the efforts of the Shellfish Preservation Alliance (SPA) to further these actions; and

LET IT BE RESOLVED FURTHER, the State and Federal government managing authorities are requested to find ways to revive the lost economies from the Southeast Alaska region due to the relocation and re-colonization of sea otters in southern Southeast Alaska.

ADOPTED: January 9, 2018.

ATTEST:


Aleisha Mollen, Deputy Borough Clerk


David L. Jack, Mayor

