

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

SESSION

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SJR 13

“Urging the United States Congress to amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act and urging certain federal agencies to permit Alaska Native organizations and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to co-manage, take, and study sea otters.”

Along Alaska’s coast, the growing sea otter population is devastating the shellfish biomass. If the population continues to go unchecked, predation from sea otters inevitably threatens the future of dive and crab fisheries; jeopardizing hundreds of jobs and tens of millions of dollars in economic activity. The dramatically increasing and currently high number of sea otters has depleted shellfish stocks to a degree that subsistence, personal use, sport and commercial fishing have been halted. In recent years, ADFG has closed 18 dive fishery harvest areas due to the shrinking biomass.

The sea otter diet consists mainly of marine invertebrates including: crabs, clams, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, shrimp and abalone. Sea otters can consume up to 25 percent of their body weight per day. One male otter can consume up to 7,300 pounds of food per year. As of 2012, the US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates a population of 25,000 sea otters in Southeast Alaska with an estimated growth rate of 13% growth per year.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 removed marine mammals from the State of Alaska’s management denying most Alaskans the opportunity to harvest sea otters. However, Section 101 of the MMPA provides an exemption for Alaska Natives to harvest sea otters for subsistence and artisanal purposes. Senate Joint Resolution 13 urges Congress and appropriate federal agencies to work with the State of Alaska, Alaska Native organizations and non-Native leaders to create a sustainable and equitable management plan for sea otters that properly balances human needs with sea otter populations.

Furthermore, to ensure that adequate numbers of sea otters are being harvested each year, the resolution urges Congress to amend the MMPA to provide for more hunting opportunities and uses of sea otters in Alaska. Lastly, SJR 13 urges Congress to allow the State or Alaska Native organizations to manage sea otter populations in Alaska.

District R

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