

27-LS0717\B  
Bullard  
1/27/12

**CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 26( )**  
**IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA**  
**TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION**

**BY**

**Offered:**  
**Referred:**

**Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVES PEGGY WILSON, Thomas, Austerman**

**A RESOLUTION**

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

5 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

6 **WHEREAS**, in the late 1960s, in the absence of a long-term management plan, the  
7 Alaska Department of Fish and Game reintroduced approximately 400 sea otters to nearshore  
8 waters in six different locations around Southeast Alaska; and

9 **WHEREAS**, without proper management, the sea otter population in southern  
10 Southeast Alaska has grown at an alarming rate; and

11 **WHEREAS** more than 10,560 sea otters were observed in 2003, and a 2010-2011  
12 aerial survey by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service revealed 20,000 sea otters, for an  
13 approximate annual growth rate of 12 percent in southern Southeast Alaska and four percent  
14 in northern Southeast Alaska; and

15 **WHEREAS** the federal government, which has responsibility for managing sea otter

1 populations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, has not established an  
2 effective management plan for protecting the ecosystems affected by sea otters; and

3 **WHEREAS**, in 1994, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued the  
4 "Conservation Plan for the Sea Otter in Alaska," which stated that, while the optimum  
5 sustainable population range had not been numerically defined for sea otters in Alaska, the  
6 stock was believed to be in the optimum sustainable population range; and

7 **WHEREAS** the preface to the 1994 plan states that the plan "will be reviewed  
8 annually and revised at least every three to five years"; and

9 **WHEREAS** male sea otters in Alaska can weigh up to 100 pounds and average  
10 between 60 and 85 pounds, and large females can weigh up to 72 pounds and average  
11 between 35 and 60 pounds; and

12 **WHEREAS** unmanaged high numbers of reintroduced sea otters consume up to 23  
13 percent of their body weight each day of crab, abalone, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, clams,  
14 and other shellfish that the region's human residents rely on for subsistence and commercial  
15 uses and appear to be contributing to degradation of the ecological balance in many areas,  
16 leading to diminished human harvests of those important subsistence and commercial  
17 resources; and

18 **WHEREAS** the dramatically increasing and currently high number of reintroduced  
19 sea otters has, in some areas, depleted shellfish stocks to a degree that subsistence, personal  
20 use, sport, and commercial fishing have been halted because of unsustainable lack of  
21 abundance; and

22 **WHEREAS** many residents in the state's coastal communities directly or indirectly  
23 depend on the fishery resources of the state's coastal waters; and

24 **WHEREAS** money derived from the harvest of the state's sustainably managed  
25 aquatic resources forms a major component of the economies of the state's coastal  
26 communities, causing those communities to be particularly vulnerable to situations that  
27 negatively affect yields from local resources; and

28 **WHEREAS** Southeast Alaska's municipalities, towns, and villages face substantial  
29 challenges in developing broader economic opportunities for their residents; and

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

1       **WHEREAS**, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, Alaska Natives are  
2 denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts; and

3       **WHEREAS** sec. 101 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 provides for  
4 exemptions for Alaska Natives to harvest marine mammals, as long as the taking is for  
5 subsistence purposes and not accomplished in a wasteful manner; and

6       **WHEREAS** sec. 101 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 allows for the  
7 use of marine mammal pelts for authentic Native articles, including handicrafts and clothing;  
8 and

9       **WHEREAS**, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, sale of value-added  
10 fur products is allowed in both intrastate and interstate commerce; and

11       **WHEREAS** the state serves as a model for the management of harvestable resources  
12 for sustained yield and sustainable use; and

13       **WHEREAS** implementation of a sustainable harvest management regime for sea  
14 otters will serve the dual purposes of maintaining sea otter populations at a level suitable for  
15 continued ecological balance and expanding economic opportunity; and

16       **WHEREAS** sec. 119 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 allows the  
17 United States Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska  
18 Native organizations for the conservation of marine mammals and the development of marine  
19 mammal cooperative management structures with federal and state agencies, including the  
20 creation of local management plans for the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use;

21       **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States  
22 Secretary of the Interior and appropriate federal agencies to work with the Alaska Department  
23 of Fish and Game, Southeast Alaska's Native leaders, and other interested parties in the state  
24 to establish strategies and plans for sustainable management of the reintroduced sea otter  
25 population of Southeast Alaska; and be it

26       **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges state and federal  
27 government authorities, in developing those management plans, actively to consider means of  
28 expanding and enhancing small business and broader economic opportunities for residents of  
29 Southeast Alaska; and be it

30       **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges federal authorities  
31 to consider broadening the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence

1 purposes to include the use, transfer, and sale of intact sea otter pelts in order to restore to the  
2 state's Native people the right to make full use of sea otters harvested for subsistence while  
3 expanding and enhancing economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska.

4 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Ken Salazar, United States  
5 Secretary of the Interior; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Mark Begich,  
6 U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska  
7 delegation in Congress.