

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 26

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES PEGGY WILSON, Thomas, Austerman, Dick

Introduced: 3/31/11

Referred: Resources

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 5,800 sea otters were observed in 2003, and a 2010 aerial
12 survey by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service revealed more than 11,000 sea otters,
13 for an approximate annual growth rate of 13 percent; and

14 **WHEREAS** the federal government, which has responsibility for managing sea otter
15 populations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, has not established an

1 effective management plan for protecting the ecosystems affected by sea otters; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31 **WHEREAS**, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, Alaska Natives are

1 denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges federal authorities
30 to consider broadening the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence
31 purposes to include the use, transfer, and sale of intact sea otter pelts in order to restore to the

1 state's Native people the right to make full use of sea otters harvested for subsistence while
2 expanding and enhancing economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska.

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