

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 26(RES)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Offered: 2/15/12

Referred: Rules

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

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 and the regulations
2 adopted under the Act, Alaska Natives are limited to selling only "authentic" and "traditional"
3 Native handicrafts; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges federal authorities

1 to consider broadening the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence
2 purposes by replacing the references to "authentic" and "traditional" handicrafts in the Marine
3 Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the regulations adopted under the Act with the phrase
4 "Alaska Native articles of handicraft" and continuing the sale of sea otter pelts consistent with
5 all other provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

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