

ALASKA LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE FILES, 2003-2004 8672

11325 SENATE RESOURCES

1 and Scenic Rivers System, and other areas that are  
2 subject to the potential threat of avalanches.

3 (2) RESOURCES.—In carrying out this section,  
4 the Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture—

5 (A) shall, to the maximum extent prac-  
6 ticable, use the resources of the National Ava-  
7 lanche Center of the Forest Service; and

8 (B) may use such other resources as the  
9 Secretary has available in the development and  
10 implementation of the program.

11 (c) ADVISORY COMMITTEE.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary and the Sec-  
13 retary of Agriculture shall jointly establish an advi-  
14 sory committee to assist in the development and im-  
15 plementation of the program.

16 (2) MEMBERSHIP.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Advisory Com-  
18 mittee shall consist of 11 members, appointed  
19 by the Secretaries, who represent authorized  
20 users of artillery, other military weapons, or  
21 weapons alternatives used for avalanche control.

22 (B) REPRESENTATIVES.—The membership  
23 of the Advisory Committee shall include rep-  
24 resentatives of—

1 (i) Federal land management agencies  
2 and concessionaires or permittees that are  
3 exposed to the threat of avalanches;

4 (ii) State departments of transpor-  
5 tation that have experience in dealing with  
6 the effects of avalanches; and

7 (iii) Federal- or State-owned railroads  
8 that have experience in dealing with the ef-  
9 fects of avalanches.

10 (d) CENTRAL DEPOSITORY.—The Secretary, the Sec-  
11 retary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of the Army shall  
12 establish a central depository for weapons, ammunition,  
13 and parts for avalanche control purposes, including an in-  
14 ventory that can be made available to Federal and non-  
15 Federal entities for avalanche control purposes under the  
16 program.

17 (e) GRANTS.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary and the Sec-  
19 retary of Agriculture may make grants to carry out  
20 projects and activities under the program—

21 (A) to assist in the prevention, forecasting,  
22 detection, and mitigation of avalanches for the  
23 safety and protection of persons, property, and  
24 at-risk communities;

1 (B) to maintain essential transportation  
2 and communications affected or potentially af-  
3 fected by avalanches;

4 (C) to assist avalanche artillery users to  
5 ensure the availability of adequate supplies of  
6 artillery and other unique explosives required  
7 for avalanche control in or affecting—

8 (i) units of the National Park System;

9 and

10 (ii) other Federal land used for recre-  
11 ation purposes; and

12 (iii) adjacent communities, and essen-  
13 tial transportation corridors, that are at  
14 risk of avalanches; and

15 (D) to assist public or private persons and  
16 entities in conducting research and development  
17 activities for cost-effective and reliable alter-  
18 natives to minimize reliance on military weap-  
19 ons for avalanche control.

20 (2) APPORTIONMENT OF FUNDS.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-  
22 graph (B), for each fiscal year for which funds  
23 are made available under section 4, the Sec-  
24 retary shall apportion the amount of funds  
25 made available for the fiscal year among States

1 with avalanche zones based on the ratio that  
2 the total area of avalanche zones located in  
3 each State bears to the total area of all ava-  
4 lanche zones in all States.

5 (B) PRIORITY.—In providing grants under  
6 this subsection, the Secretary shall give priority  
7 to projects and activities carried out in ava-  
8 lanche zones—

9 (i) with a high frequency or severity  
10 of avalanches; or

11 (ii) in which deaths or serious injuries  
12 to individuals, or loss or damage to public  
13 facilities and communities, have occurred  
14 or are likely to occur.

15 (f) SURPLUS ORDINANCE.—Section 549(e)(3) of title  
16 40, United States Code, is amended—

17 (1) in subparagraph (A), by striking “or” after  
18 the semicolon at the end;

19 (2) in subparagraph (B), by striking the period  
20 at the end and inserting “; or”; and

21 (3) by adding at the end the following:

22 “(C) in the case of surplus artillery ordi-  
23 nance that is suitable for avalanche control pur-  
24 poses, to a user of such ordinance.”.

1 SEC. 4. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

2       There are authorized to be appropriated such sums  
3 as are necessary to carry out this Act.

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# Southeast Alaska Avalanche Center

PO Box 20578, Juneau, Alaska 99802 (907) 586-5699 ph & fax e-mail: sea.avalanche@gci.net

An educational nonprofit corporation <http://www.avalanche.org>; click on Southeast Alaska link

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March 25, 2004

Rep. Beth Kerttula  
Alaska House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 430  
Juneau, Ak 99801-1182

## Letter of Support for HJR 41

Alaska loses more people to avalanches than any other state, regardless of population, yet we are the one state with no federally funded statewide program to reduce that death toll.

Senator Stevens' S.931 sets up the programs and funding that will make a concrete difference, and Representative Kerttula's HJR 41 helps support and move that bill toward passage.

S.931 directs the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to coordinate with the US Forest Service National Avalanche Center to develop a program of grants to governments, communities, transportation systems, and private businesses affected by avalanches to set up the safeguards they need to maintain public safety and the flow of commerce, and apportions funding by each state's area of avalanche zones, which ensures that Alaska will get the large share of the funding that it needs and deserves to address our problem.

As a nonprofit dedicated to avalanche education, we strongly support both bills.

thank you

Bill Glude  
SAAC Director & lead avalanche specialist



## **B.A.A.R.T.**

BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE AWARENESS & RESPONSE TEAM

3-26-04

Subject: HJR 41

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Backcountry Avalanche Awareness and Response Team (B.A.A.R.T.) is a partnership of backcountry travelers and their families that provides Education, support, training and response throughout Alaska.

BAART is a non-profit organization.

BAART helps backcountry travelers and their families by offering information, training, support, and field response equipment services.

BAART works with the Alaska State Troopers, Alaska State Parks, and Alaska Mountain Safety Center as well as individuals to promote safe backcountry travel and to provide trained response team members to the site of an incident.

BAART believes that education and training is the best response to the increasing number of Alaskans dying as a result of avalanches.

As an organization dedicated to reducing Alaska's highest number of annual avalanche deaths among all the states, we support HJR 41."

Regards,

Bob Schmidt  
President

PMB 403 1830 E. PARKS HWY. A-113  
WASILLA, AK 99654  
(907) 352-3777



Subject: support for HJR41  
Date: Wed, 31 Mar 2004 14:32:13 -0900  
From: W Joe Westfall CSP / CSSI <Joe@Westfalia-Werke.US>  
To: Juli\_Lucky@legis.state.ak.us  
CC: 'Bill Glude' <snownerd@mac.com>, Rep\_Beth\_Kerttula@legis.state.ak.us

Hello Juli.

I was contacted by Bill Glude to ask for support on the bill introduced by Rep Kerttula. I understand this is a support effort that will additionally help federal Senate bill S.931 for funding.

As the co-founder of the Alaska Snowmachine Search Rescue & Recovery Team, I am very much in favor of legislation that would potentially reduce the number of avalanche fatalities in Alaska (as well as any other state).

Personally, I am sick and tired of going out on missions to recover the 'death by avalanche' victims. I would much rather our team be able to focus on rescuing live people that are happy to see us.

I teach numerous avalanche awareness, avoidance, and rescue classes throughout the winter seasons. I have concentrated on the snowmachine community, as they are the highest fatality rate and the least educated about the risks they bring upon themselves.

Only in the last few years has the cost of this instruction and expenses been somewhat offset by a grant from the Alaska State Troopers. Prior to that it has all been out of mine and my co-founders' pockets. It is way past time to consider both federal and state funding for avalanche issues in the state.

As an educator and rider dedicated to reducing Alaska's highest number of annual avalanche deaths among all the states, I support HJR 41.

Best Regards...

W Joe Westfall CSP(ICCP) CSSI(IASA)  
907.333.0739(voice) 413.473.5503(fax)  
Bluffs on Susitna & Anchorage Alaska  
Joe @Westfalia-Werke.US

From: smith.blaine@att.net  
Date: March 27, 2004 7:48:43 AM AST  
To: Juli\_Lucky@legis.state.ak.us  
Cc: snownerd@mac.com

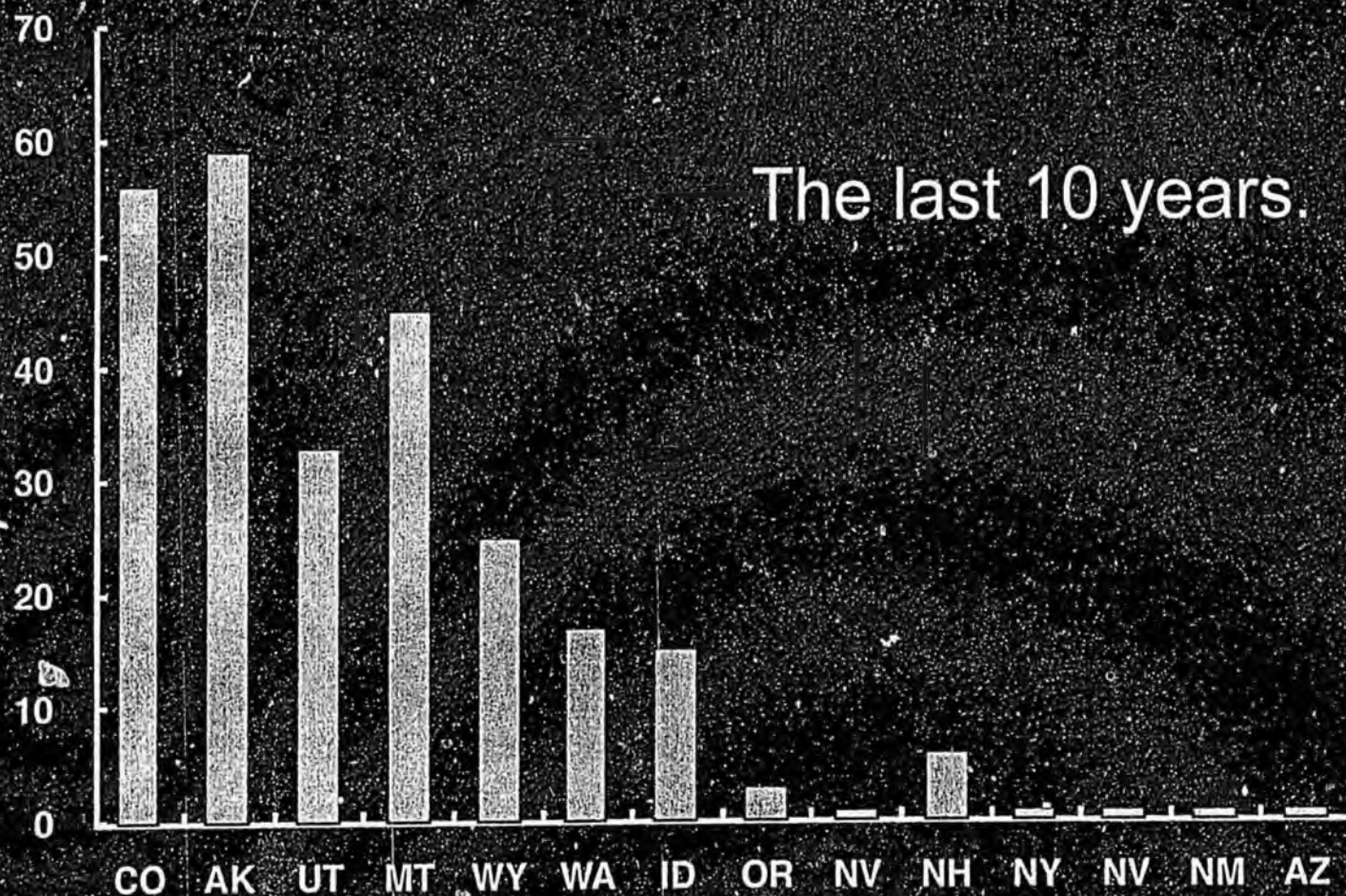
Representative Kerttula,

As a long time educator of avalanche hazard recognition, avoidance, and rescue, I see the need, and support your efforts to provide increased avalanche services to the State of Alaska through HJR41.

Thank you.

Blaine Smith  
32789 Cumulus Road  
Eagle River Alaska 99577  
(907) 696-3480

# US Avalanche Fatalities By State



Colorado Avalanche Information Center

1993/94 to 2002/03

HJR

44



## SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT

DATE: 04/8/04

FURTHER: Finance

DATE TURNED  
IN TO OFFICE: 4-14-04

Resources Committee considered **CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 44(RES)** am  
HJR 44 SEA OTTER RESEARCH/ENDANGERED SPECIES

Relating to research into the decline of the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter in the western Gulf of Alaska.

and recommends:

- be replaced with \_\_\_\_\_ CS \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_)
- adopt previous \_\_\_\_\_ CS \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_)
- attached amendment(s)
- adopt Letter of Intent by \_\_\_\_\_ Committee
- further referral to \_\_\_\_\_ Committee

<b>Senate Bill:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Same Title
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Title
<b>House Bill:</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Same Title
<input type="checkbox"/>	Technical Title Change
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Title w/ SCR # _____

**NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):**

Department	Date	Fiscal	Indet.	Zero	FN#

**PREVIOUS FISCAL NOTE(S):**

Department	Date	Fiscal	Indet.	Zero	FN#
HRES	3/31/04			✓	1

APPROPRIATION - no fiscal note

SIGNATURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:	DO PASS	DO NOT PASS	NO REC	AMEND
<i>Ralph Keating</i>	✓			
<i>Thomas J. Wagner</i>	✓			
<i>Paul Rupp</i>	✓			
<i>[Signature]</i>				
<b>CHAIR:</b> <i>[Signature]</i>	✓			

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: 1  
 Bill Version: CSHJR 44(RES)  
 (H) Publish Date: 4/1/04

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. Affected: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title Sea Otter Research/Endangered BRU \_\_\_\_\_  
 Species \_\_\_\_\_ Component \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sponsor Rep. Ogg \_\_\_\_\_  
 Requester \_\_\_\_\_ Component No. \_\_\_\_\_

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual						
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>						
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>						
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF						
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type--Do not abbreviate)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY2004) cost: 0.0  
 Mark this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2005 budget proposal:

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

**ANALYSIS:** *(Attach a separate page if necessary)*

Prepared by: Rachel Essen Phone 465-3783  
 Division: House Resources Date/Time 3/31/04 3:00 PM  
 Approved by: Representative Nancy Dahlstrom, Co-Chairman Date 3/31/2004  
 Agency: House Resources Committee



**Committee Assignments:**

**Member:**

House Special Committee on Fisheries  
House Special Committee on Education  
House Transportation Committee  
House Judiciary Committee

**Dan Ogg**  
Representative

Session:  
Room 409  
Capitol Building  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Phone: 907-465-2487  
Toll Free: 800-865-2487  
Fax: 907-465-4956  
Email: rep.dan.ogg@legis.state.ak.us

Interim:  
112 Mill Bay Road  
Kodiak, Alaska 99615  
Phone: 907-486-8872  
Fax: 907-486-5264

## **SPONSOR STATEMENT**

House Joint Resolution 44

4/1/04

### **"Relating to research into the decline of the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter in the western Gulf of Alaska."**

The Southwest Alaska population of Northern Sea Otters has declined as much as 65 percent since the mid-1970s. In response to this precipitous decline, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service recently proposed listing the sea otters in the Southwest region as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has said they do not currently anticipate commercial fishing closures due to the decline in sea otters. However, as we have witnessed with Steller sea lions, commercial fishing activity in Southwest Alaska could be curtailed if sea otters gain protected status. Our coastal communities, as well as the state as a whole, depend heavily on revenue generated by commercial fishing.

In an attempt to be proactive, this resolution asks the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Congress to provide \$5 million per year for five years for research into the abundance of Northern Sea Otters and the reasons behind their decline. Since Kodiak is uniquely situated in the Gulf of Alaska and is also a large commercial fishing port, the resolution asks that research into the sea otters' population decline be centered in Kodiak, with field stations in other western Alaska coastal communities.

Previous surveys of sea otter population levels have been sporadic and have not produced long-term reliable data. It is imperative that scientists immediately begin to consistently monitor and investigate the sea otters' decline to mitigate the potential negative effects on Alaska's commercial fishing industry.



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

Region 7 - Alaska

1011 East Tudor Road

Anchorage, Alaska 99503

(907)786-3309 (TDD Available)

**News**

04-03

For Immediate Release

Contact: Bruce Woods (907) 786-3695

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES LISTING SOUTHWEST ALASKA SEA OTTERS AS "THREATENED" UNDER ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to list the southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (E.S.A.). A Proposed Rule regarding the listing was published today in the Federal Register. The Service will accept comments on the proposed rule for the next 120 days.

"We are proposing to list the sea otter population in southwest Alaska based on survey data indicating that it has declined dramatically over the last 10 to 15 years," said Rowan Gould, Regional Director of the Service's Alaska Region. "This population, which once contained more than half of the world's sea otters, has declined at least 56 to 68 percent since the mid-1980s and we have no indications that the decline has ceased."

Under the ESA, "species" is defined broadly to include species, subspecies, and also to include Distinct Population Segments, or DPS, of vertebrate species. A DPS is a portion of a vertebrate species or subspecies that is discrete from the remainder of its taxon and also is significant to that taxon. The ESA defines a "threatened" species as one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. An "endangered" species is defined as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The proposed rule describes the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter as occurring in nearshore waters from the Aleutian Islands to Cook Inlet, including waters adjacent to the Aleutians, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Kodiak archipelago. This corresponds to the range of the southwest stock of sea otters recognized in 2002 by the Service in accordance with provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Two other stocks of sea otters in Alaska that also were recognized in 2002, the southcentral and southeast stocks, are believed to be stable or increasing and are not included in the proposed rule published today.

Between the mid 1700s and the early 1900s, commercial hunting of sea otters brought the entire species to the brink of extinction. When they became protected from commercial harvest in 1911 under the International Fur Seal Treaty, only 13 small remnant populations were known to still exist, including six in southwest Alaska. Following this protection, otters from 11 of these populations gradually recovered and re-colonized their former range in southwest Alaska and some other portions of their historic range.

A substantial decline in the southwest Alaska otter population appears to have begun in the mid- to late 1980s. In the Aleutians, there were approximately 55,000 to 74,000 sea otters in the mid-1980s, representing almost half of the world's estimated population of sea otters at that time. Aerial surveys since that time, however, indicate a progressive decline in the number of otters in the Aleutians, where the current population is estimated to be less than 9,000 animals. Survey results also show substantial declines have occurred in the Alaska Peninsula, where the counts of otters have declined by more than 65 percent since the mid 1980s. In the Kodiak Archipelago, surveys indicate the number of otters has declined more than 55 percent since the



late 1980s. Overall, the DPS has declined an estimated 56 to 68 percent over the past 10 to 15 years, and recent surveys indicate the decline is continuing.

The cause of the population decline is not clear. Production of young does not appear to be reduced, nor is there evidence that starvation, disease, or contaminants are involved. There also is no evidence that entanglement in commercial fishing gear or competition with fishermen for prey species is playing a significant role in the decline, and annual subsistence harvest by Alaska Natives is believed to be too low to contribute significantly to the decline. Some evidence points to predation by killer whales as a possible cause of the decline in the Aleutian Island chain. However, additional research will be needed before we can confidently identify the cause of the decline.

The proposed rule to list the southwest DPS of the otter as threatened does not include a proposal for designating critical habitat. As explained in the proposed rule, critical habitat is not determinable at this time. As part of the request for public comments on the proposal to list the DPS, the Service is seeking information regarding features and specific areas that the Service should consider for a critical habitat proposal, in the event that the listing becomes final. If the Service does propose critical habitat for the DPS in the future, the public would have an opportunity to comment on such a proposal.

If the southwest Alaska DPS of the sea otter is listed as threatened under the ESA, a recovery plan would be developed for it. This plan would bring together efforts by Federal, State, Alaska Native groups, local agencies, and private entities for the conservation of the DPS.

The Service invites the public to submit data, information, and comments on the proposed rule. The Service will accept comments on the proposed rule for the next 120 days, and during that time the Service also will hold one or more public hearings where the public can obtain information and offer comments. Requests for public hearings need to be received by the Service within the next 60 days. A copy of the proposed rule and other information about the proposal is available on the Internet at <http://alaska.fws.gov/current.htm>. Comments on the proposal can be emailed to [fw7\\_swakseaotter@fws.gov](mailto:fw7_swakseaotter@fws.gov).

You can subscribe to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region listserver to have our press releases sent to your e-mail address automatically by sending a message to: [listserv@www.fws.gov](mailto:listserv@www.fws.gov). Please indicate that you would like to subscribe to FWS-Alaska news and give your name in the body of the message.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

- FWS

*For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,  
visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov>*

**Comments on research needs:  
Northern Sea Otter, Southwest Alaska Discrete Population Segment (DPS)**

Kate Wynne, UAF Marine Advisory Program

1 March 2004

The number of Northern sea otters occurring from the Aleutian to the Barren Islands has apparently declined 56-68% since 1976 for unknown reasons and with no indication of recovery. Although they continue to inhabit the breadth of their coastal range, sea otter numbers in different portions of southwestern Alaska have declined by 27-70 %, with the steepest declines occurring since the late 1980's. In response, the USFWS has proposed to list the Southwest Alaska Discrete Population Segment (DPS) of the Northern Sea Otter as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (FR 69 (28): 6600-6621, 11 Feb 2004)

Sea otter surveys throughout this area have been sporadic and asynchronous. Aerial surveys have covered disjointed portions of the coast in different months and different years but no range-wide counts have been made for this DPS. Although this precludes a direct assessment of the sea otter's decline throughout this range, a consistent downward trend has been noted in each area surveyed.

Population declines of this magnitude indicate a broadscale increase in mortality or decrease in reproductive potential. Human-induced mortality through subsistence harvest, incidental fishery takes, and habitat destruction (e.g. oil spills) occur within this DPS' range but are not believed to be significant contributors to the decline. Sea otters in this DPS do not appear to be food-limited nor mortally burdened by parasites, although limited recovery of carcasses from their remote AK coastline has hampered full investigation. Although predation by killer whales has been hypothesized as a mortality factor, experts disagree on the potential scale of this mortality factor. Little information is available to assess trends in reproductive success.

Steller sea lion and sea otter numbers have declined in approximately the same area and time frame in southwest Alaska. Whether similar environmental and anthropogenic factors affected these species or not, sea otter managers may benefit from insights gained from multi-million dollars of dedicated sea lion research.

- 1) There is likely no "smoking gun" or single clear cause for the decline of either species in southwestern Alaska. Long term studies are needed to track population-level changes and temporal variability. Ecosystem-level studies may be needed to identify the mechanisms and processes driving declines.

- 2) It may be impossible to determine the original cause(s) of the population's decline through retroactive analyses; identifying the current limits to the sea otter's recovery may prove a better investment of energy.
- 3) The challenge of studying either species over the breadth of their decline is prohibitive. By selecting comparative small-scale study sites within and outside the area of decline, researchers can monitor and compare the growth, health, diet, prey availability, and movements of declining and stable populations.

#### What's needed?

Researchers at the USFWS/MMM and USGS/BRD are conducting aerial and boat-based surveys to estimate sea otter abundance and monitor trends along varying segments of the Alaska coast. While helpful for monitoring trends within each area, there is a chance for animal movement between surveys so a more synoptic and synchronous count of the entire stock is needed to derive an abundance estimate for the DPS. This would require additional funds to support an increase in the number of aircraft and observers to survey the entire range during the same time period.

Sea otter (or other species) recovery may be constrained by factors that are either increasing their mortality rates or decreasing reproductive potential. One way of assessing the role of these factors in sea otter declines is by comparing the status (condition, diet, habitat use, population structure, and age-specific mortality) of sea otters spatially (area of decline vs stability) and/or temporally (current vs historic datasets). Particular areas of study and comparison may include:

- o Health/condition: prevalence of disease or parasites, contaminant levels, stress hormones, reproductive status, and physiological condition
- o Habitat use: movements and habitat use by tagged animal vs availability, identification of pupping areas and other critical habitat
- o Diet: identify prey species, determine if prey is limited in abundance or quality/contaminants, identify and assess health of sympatric benthic consumers
- o Predation: determine age- or sex-specific predation by eagles, predatory fish, killer whales

Long term intensive studies of sea otters and their habitat, as conducted by J. Estes and others in Adak and Amchitka, have proven invaluable in assessing the role sea otters play in their changing environment. But historically, budgetary constraints have limited agency efforts to count, capture, tag, and monitor sea otters elsewhere in Alaska. Past studies in the Kodiak Archipelago and Prince William Sound have elucidated sea otter movement and foraging dynamics but have lacked longevity and integration with existing ecosystem-based research projects (e.g GAP, EVOS). Researchers from the USFWS/MMM and USGS/BRD plan to capture and tag sea otters in the Kodiak area in 2004 but their efforts are self-described as 'bare-bones' due to budget constraints.

### Best case scenario

If additional funding were available for sea otter research and conservation, a multi-year and multi-disciplinary program could be developed to integrate and compare studies of sea otters, their prey, and habitat at two or three study sites. For instance, by maintaining an Aleutian Island study area (severe decline) and establishing long-term study areas in Kodiak (moderate decline), and Prince William Sound or southeast Alaska (outside DPS and stable/increasing), population parameters and habitat needs of sea otters within the declining DPS could be compared to those from a 'healthy' stock. A fixed field station could be established within each of these focal areas from which to conduct long-term and seasonal studies on sea otter movements, condition, and benthic prey. These could then be integrated into ecosystem-based studies of local environment, human activities, sympatric competitors (e.g. gray whales, sea ducks, arrowtooth flounders) and examination of oceanographic, meteorological, ecological, and physiological linkages. Specific mechanics of such an approach might involve coordinating the following:

- Seasonal abundance and distribution surveys: conduct repeated boat surveys to determine trends in sea otter sex/age structure and ♀: pup ratio. Use these to groundtruth overlapping aerial abundance surveys.
- Sea otter captures: collect blood, fat samples to monitor health parameters, reproductive status, contaminant loads, stress hormones
- Sea otter tagging studies: define critical habitat, movements, derive correction factors for aerial/boat survey counts, determine seasonal diet, and age-sex specific mortality factors (predation)
- Habitat studies: Identify, quantify abundance, and assess contaminant loads in sea otter prey. Monitor oceanographic/meteorological conditions and their impact on the condition of prey species
- Carcass recovery: access samples to compare to 1970's ADFG harvest dataset and capture data above
  - Conduct surveys for beachcast carcasses and collect biosamples from Native harvest.
  - Coordinate with Native marine mammal commissions and village sentinels

<b>S</b>	Southeast
<b>A</b>	Alaska
<b>R</b>	Regional
<b>D</b>	Dive
<b>F</b>	Fisheries
<b>A</b>	Association



*Mission Statement: To develop, expand, and enhance new and existing dive fisheries in Southeast Alaska.*

Julle Decker, Executive Director  
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 info@sardfa.org  
 www.sardfa.org

Senate Resources Committee  
 Senator Scott Ogan  
 State Capitol, Room 103  
 Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
 Ph: 907-465-3878; Fax: 907-465-3265  
 Email: [Senator\\_Scott\\_Ogan@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Scott_Ogan@legis.state.ak.us)

April 14, 2004

**RE: Support for HJR 44 – Sea Otter Resolution**

Dear Senator Ogan,

I am writing on behalf of the Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association (SARDFA). SARDFA is a non-profit, economic development corporation whose mission is to develop, expand, and enhance new and existing dive fisheries in Southeast Alaska. SARDFA's administration is supported by a portion of the assessments on the dive resources (7% on sea urchins, and 5% on both sea cucumbers and geoduck).

SARDFA has been monitoring the sea otter situation in Alaska, as it directly affects our industry. SARDFA has also been developing ideas and support for proactive approaches to sea otter management in Southeast Alaska, some of which may also be of value to Southwest Alaska. To date, we have gained support from United Fishermen of Alaska and Southeast Conference.

SARDFA would like to express support for HJR 44. SARDFA has been researching this situation and most of the issues boil down to one thing - not enough research has been done to know what is going on with the sea otter population in Southwest Alaska beyond the observation of a general decline.

The two questions that are unanswered at this time are:

- 1) How large of a decline is being observed?
- 2) What is the cause of the decline?

SARDFA believes the following information is useful to you in your consideration of this resolution. In Table 1 of the Federal Register, published on February 11, 2004, which announces the proposed listing of the Southwest Alaska otters as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, there are 21 different counts or estimates of otters listed for seven different areas of SW AK, which span a period of 37 years and use several different methodologies. This research is very sporadic and would not be valid to a statistician.

In another publication titled, "Studies of Southeastern Alaska Sea Otter Populations: Distribution, Abundance, Structure, Range Expansion and Potential Conflicts with Shellfisheries" (by Kenneth Pitcher, ADF&G, 1989), the following is reported:

"It was disappointing to see the amount of variation between replicate counts. While the distributional data obtained during the surveys were likely quite good, the value of the estimates of population size, even as population indices, was limited. When a series of such estimates over a number of years become available, they can be useful in evaluating general population trend and estimating average rate of increase; however the variability is so great that meaningful annual comparisons will be impossible, particularly if only single counts are made."

In fact, Pitcher felt so strongly about the poor replication of sea otter counts that one of his six recommendations at the end of his report was this:

"Thought should be given to developing new techniques for either estimating total population size or obtaining reliable indices of abundance for sea otters. There was considerable variability in replicate counts conducted during this study. Studies of population dynamics would benefit from more accurate data."

In light of this information, SARDFa would like to recommend the following changes to HJR 44:

- 1) After page two, line 1, insert: "Whereas information from monitoring programs administered by NMFS indicates that interactions between sea otters and commercial fisheries result in less than one instance of mortality per year within the Southwest Alaska distinct population segment; and" (excerpt from Federal Register)
- 2) After the above, insert: "Whereas information from the MTRP estimates the subsistence harvest of sea otters from the Southwest Alaska distinct population segment (DPS) averaged less than 100 sea otters per year during the 1990s and the impact of the subsistence harvest is negligible; and" (excerpt from Federal Register)
- 3) Amend page 2, line 4, to read: "Whereas the cause of the decline in abundance of the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter is unknown, although the weight of evidence of available information suggests that predation by killer whales may be the most likely cause of the sea otter decline in the Aleutian Islands; and" (excerpt from Federal Register)
- 4) After page two, line 18, add: "and be it further resolved that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the United States Fish and Wildlife Service not list the Southwest Alaska sea otter as threatened until the amount of decline and cause of decline is better understood through intensive research."

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Decker, Executive Director

Members of: Southeast Conference United Fishermen of Alaska Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers' Assoc. Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference
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Cc: Senator Bert Stedman  
Representative Peggy Wilson  
Representative Bill Williams  
Linda Hay, Aide to Senator Ogan  
Mark Vinsel, Executive Director, United Fishermen of Alaska  
Meilani Schijvens, Executive Director, Southeast Conference  
Don Bremner, Central Council  
SARDFa Board of Directors



**CITY OF KODIAK  
RESOLUTION NUMBER 04-11**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF KODIAK SUPPORTING  
FUNDING FOR RESEARCH INTO THE DECLINE OF THE SOUTHWEST ALASKA  
POPULATION OF THE NORTHERN SEA OTTER IN THE WESTERN GULF OF  
ALASKA**

WHEREAS, the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter in the western Gulf of Alaska may have declined as much as 65 percent since the mid-1970s; and

WHEREAS, the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter is found in the near shore waters of the Aleutian Islands, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Kodiak Archipelago; and

WHEREAS, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has recently proposed listing the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter as threatened under the Endangered Species Act; and

WHEREAS, commercial fishing activity in the western Gulf of Alaska may be restricted if the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter is listed under the Endangered Species Act; and

WHEREAS, coastal communities of western Alaska, and the State of Alaska as a whole, are heavily dependent upon the revenue generated by commercial fishing in the near shore waters of the western Gulf of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, Kodiak, a major commercial fishing port in the United States, is located in the western Gulf of Alaska, the area of the sea otter population decline; and

WHEREAS, the cause of the decline in abundance of the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter is unknown; and

WHEREAS, long-term studies are needed to assess changes in the sea otter population in Southwest Alaska and to determine the extent of variability in sea otter population levels; and

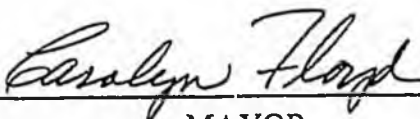
WHEREAS, previous surveys of sea otter population levels off western Alaska have been sporadic;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Kodiak, Alaska, fully supports Alaska House Joint Resolution 44 and respectfully requests support of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and funding from the United States Congress of \$5,000,000 a year for the next five years to conduct research to determine the cause of the decline of the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter in the western Gulf of Alaska;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Kodiak respectfully requests that research regarding the Southwest Alaska population of the Northern Sea Otter be centered in Kodiak, with field stations located in the coastal communities of western Alaska where the Northern Sea Otter occurs.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Gale Norton, United States Secretary of the Interior; the Honorable Steve Williams, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior; the Honorable J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Ted Stevens, President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senator; and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative.

CITY OF KODIAK



MAYOR

ATTEST:



CITY CLERK

Adopted: April 8, 2004

