

Peer Review Plan for the Southwest DPS of the Northern Sea Otter – Species Status Assessment Report:

About the Document

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report, Southwest DPS for the Northern Sea Otter, September 2020

Estimated Peer Timeline of the Peer Review: September 2020 – October 2020

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270) and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intend to subject the *Species Status Assessment Report (SSA) for the Yellow-cedar* to independent peer review. We will contract with a third party who will select three to five well-qualified independent peer reviewers. Peer reviewers will be requested to review the SSA that will be used to support our listing determination or not warranted finding. Peer reviewers will not be asked to provide recommendations on the listing determination or designation of critical habitat. Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document. Specifically, reviewers will be asked whether the following aspects of yellow-cedar status have been accurately described, and whether available scientific information has been fully considered, or if there is additional scientific information that should be incorporated:

- Taxonomy and species description;
- Distribution;
- Habitat and life history; and
- Status and trend.

Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should be an expert on sea otters, climate change in the Arctic and Alaska, or Gulf of Alaska and Aleutian ecosystems.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service and State fish and game agencies if government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Advocacy:** Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

About Public Participation

This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. The SSA along with the listing decision document will be made available to the public through news releases, direct mailings, and posting on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment if we prepare a proposed rule to list the species as threatened or endangered). If appropriate, the Service will implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final listing and designation of critical habitat following consideration of all comments received from the public and peer reviewers.

Contact

For more information, contact Patrick Lemons, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammals Management Office, telephone 907-786-3668. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

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