

Department of the Interior
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News Release



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Sea Otters in Washington - Draft Stock Assessment Available for Comment

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today released a draft revised marine mammal stock assessment report for the Washington State northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*). This report was developed in accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

Although sea otters were native to Washington's marine waters the original population was extirpated by market hunters in the early twentieth century. The current population stems from animals translocated from Alaska in 1969 and 1970 and is not protected under the Endangered Species Act. However, they are protected under the MMPA.

The stock assessment report indicates that although Washington's sea otter population continues to expand, it is vulnerable to disease or catastrophic events such as oil spills because of its relatively low numbers and limited range. Current surveys indicate only approximately 800 sea otters live along Washington's coast from the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Grays Harbor. In the northern end of their range, the otters are thought to be expanding at a rate of around eight percent annually, while those south of La Push are expanding at more than twice that rate.

One of the goals of the MMPA is to ensure that stocks of marine mammals occurring in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States do not experience a level of human-caused mortality and serious injury that is likely to cause the stock to be reduced below its optimum sustainable population level. To help accomplish this goal, section 117 of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361-1407) requires the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to prepare stock assessment reports for each marine mammal stock that occurs in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States. The stock assessments are to be based on the best scientific information available.

The draft stock assessment report is available for public review and comment at: <http://www.fws.gov/westwafwo> for 90 days. Comments may be submitted by e-mail to waseaottersar@fws.gov, they may be faxed to (360) 753-9405 or they may be mailed or hand-delivered to: Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102, Lacey, WA 98503. Comments must be received by midnight, July 16, 2008.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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