

# Review of Key Factors in ESA Listing Decision

# Background

- 1992 – USFWS aerial survey in the Aleutians documented ~50% decline in sea otter abundance in the Rat, Delarof, and Western Andreanof Islands.
- 1998 – Estes *et al.* (1998) published in *Science*. Documented ongoing sea otter declines and proposed hypothesis of killer whale predation.
- 2000 – USFWS aerial survey in the Aleutians documented an overall 70% decline since 1992.

# Candidate Species

- August 2000 – candidate species designation for sea otters in the Aleutian Islands.
- June 2002 – candidate notice of review (CNOR) expanding candidate species designation to the range of the southwest Alaska population stock.

# Population Surveys

- May 2000 – North Alaska Peninsula. ↓
- April/May 2001 – South Alaska Peninsula. ↓ ↔
- June 2001 – Kodiak Archipelago. ↓
- Summer 2002 – Kamishak Bay. ↔
- Overall, >50% decline since mid-1980s

# Stock Identification

- 1998 – single sea otter stock in Alaska.
- 2002 – based primarily on Gorbics and Bodkin (2001), USFWS revised MMPA stock assessment reports for 3 sea otter stocks in Alaska: southwest, southcentral, and southeast.

# Sea Otter Stock Boundaries



# Listing Activities

- April 2002 – began development of proposed rule to list the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter.
- February 2004 – publication of proposed rule to list as threatened. 120-day public comment period, public meetings, and hearing.

# Additional Population Monitoring

MARINE MAMMAL SCIENCE, 21(1):169-172 (January 2005)  
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## CONTINUING SEA OTTER POPULATION DECLINES IN THE ALEUTIAN ARCHIPELAGO

T. A. Ferrel

Location	Period	% Change
Western Aleutians	2000-2003	-63%
Eastern Aleutians	2000-2004	-48%
Shumagin Islands	2001-2004	-33%
Kodiak Archipelago	2001-2004	+7%

Recently published  
 Aleutian archipelago  
 to earlier reports  
 based on aerial

skiff surveys of particular islands or small island groups during various years from the early 1990s through 2000. To summarize the main findings: (1) aerial counts declined by about 70% from 1992 to 2000, (2) populations at those islands thought by Kenyon (1969) to be at or near carrying capacity in 1965 had declined 88% by 2000, (3) most of the overall decline occurred after the late 1980s or early 1990s, and (4) sea otters had reached a uniformly low population density (numbers per unit length of shoreline) throughout the Aleutian archipelago by 2000. Derooff *et al.* (2003) interpreted this latter finding to mean that the factors responsible for the decline were density-dependent, thus implying that a steady state may have been attained between killer whale predation, the purported cause of the decline (Estes *et al.* 1998), and the reduced availability of sea otters. If that conjecture is

169



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Alaska Sea Otters

*New surveys show the decline continues in southwest Alaska*

Southwest Alaska population proposed for listing as threatened under the ESA  
 On February 11, 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposed

the U.S. Geological Survey, conducted additional skiff and aerial surveys of sea otters at selected locations in southwest Alaska. This new survey population throughout most



are seen in the Aleutian islands. There are 1,600 sea otters in 1986, only 132 numbers of sea otters are seen in the Kodiak Archipelago, the Pavlof and Kodiak Archipelago.

is slightly higher, but not significantly different from our previous estimate of 5,893 in 2001. The reason for the difference between sea otter population trends in Kodiak and other areas of southwest Alaska is unknown. The Service and the U.S. Geological Survey are currently planning for additional sea otter studies in the Kodiak area.

Now signs of the decline in the Kodiak Archipelago are estimated to be higher than other areas of sea otters, which



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
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Visit the Marine Mammals home page:  
<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm>

Photo by Dr. Randall Davis,  
 Texas A&M University

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 Marine Mammals Management Office  
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 Anchorage, AK 99503

November 2004

# Population Monitoring



Location	2003	2005	% Change
Amchitka (N)	294	95	<b>-67.7</b>
Kiska/L. Kiska	265	154	<b>-41.9</b>
Attu	132	147	<b>+11.4</b>
Agattu	46	45	<b>-2.2</b>
Adak	397	271	<b>-31.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,134</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>-37.2</b>

# Final Rule (August 9, 2005)

- Southwest Alaska DPS listed as “threatened”
- Listing took effect September 8, 2005
- Critical habitat not determinable



## Federal Register

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Tuesday,  
August 9, 2005

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### Part VI

### Department of the Interior

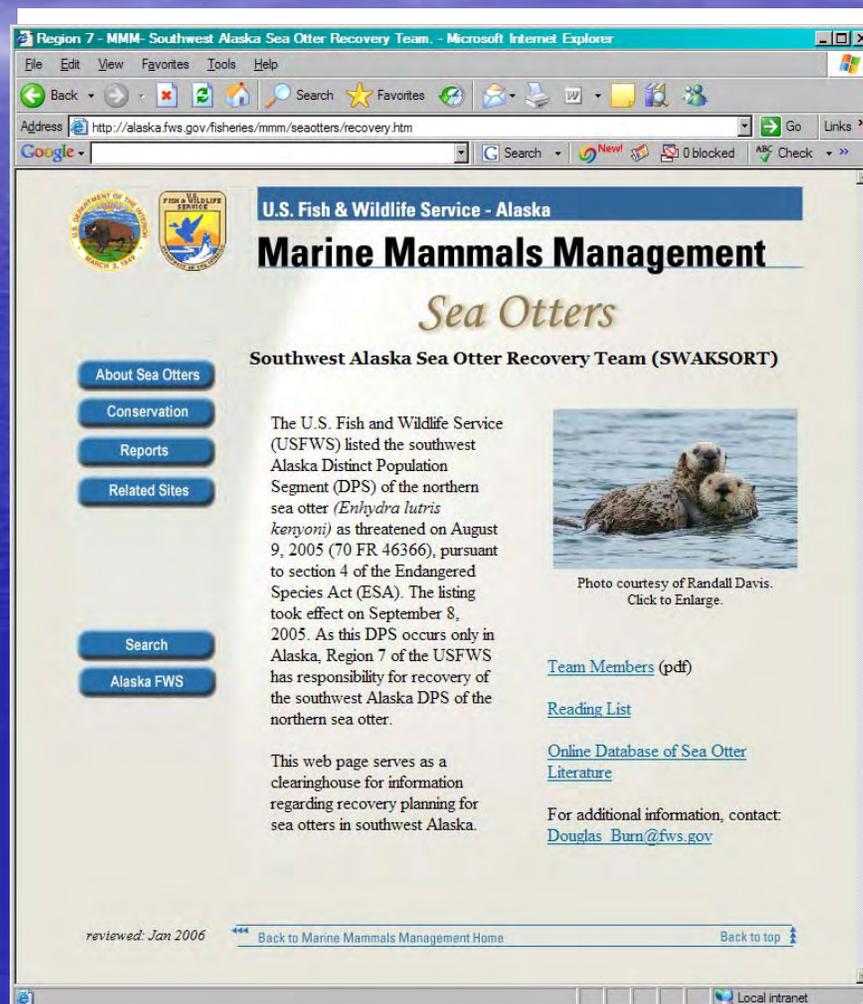
Fish and Wildlife Service

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50 CFR Part 17  
Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and  
Plants; Determination of Threatened  
Status and Special Rule for the Southwest  
Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the  
Northern Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris  
kenyoni*); Final Rule and Proposed Rule

# Recovery Planning

- Recovery Outline
- Recovery Team
  - Writing
  - Stakeholder
  - Scientific Advisory
- Recovery Plan
  - Conservation
  - Monitoring
  - Research



Region 7 - MMM - Southwest Alaska Sea Otter Recovery Team - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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Address <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/recovery.htm> Go Links >>

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### Sea Otters

Southwest Alaska Sea Otter Recovery Team (SWAKSORT)

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) as threatened on August 9, 2005 (70 FR 46366), pursuant to section 4 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The listing took effect on September 8, 2005. As this DPS occurs only in Alaska, Region 7 of the USFWS has responsibility for recovery of the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter.

This web page serves as a clearinghouse for information regarding recovery planning for sea otters in southwest Alaska.



Photo courtesy of Randall Davis.  
Click to Enlarge.

[Team Members](#) (pdf)

[Reading List](#)

[Online Database of Sea Otter Literature](#)

For additional information, contact [Douglas Burn@fws.gov](mailto:Douglas.Burn@fws.gov)

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