

SPONSOR STATEMENT

House Joint Resolution 44

3/22/04

“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.

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.