



United States Department of the Interior



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/R7/MMM/EST0007815

Mr. John Jensen
Chairman, Alaska Board of Fisheries
1255 West 8th Street
PO Box 115526
Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526

APR 3 -- 2018

RC 025

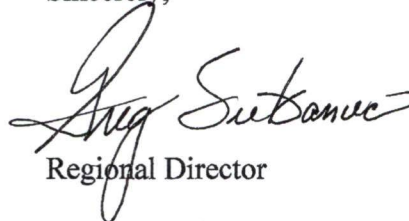
Dear Mr. Jensen:

Thank you for your recent letter to Secretary Zinke noting the success of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the benefits of the law in fostering a successful and growing population of northern sea otters in Alaska. We also appreciate the concerns you have raised regarding the impacts the growing population of northern sea otters are having on subsistence fisheries, dive fisheries, and shellfish fisheries in Southeast Alaska.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been working with stakeholders in Southeast Alaska to address these concerns, within the constraints of the MMPA, for a number of years. Some of these efforts include working with Tribal governments to develop sea otter management plans for their Tribal members as well as our work with the Southeast Area Regional Dive Fisheries Association (SARDFA) to help local fishermen target their catch efforts in areas that sea otters have yet to recolonize. The Service also undertook an effort to provide clarity to Alaska Native artisans who work to produce sea otter handicrafts in response to their concerns that harvest was being limited because of uncertainty over the legality of their handicraft products. More recently, we have been meeting with the Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals, the Marine Mammal Commission, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to discuss alternative approaches that could be taken to address this issue under the MMPA. In particular, this has included discussions about revisiting the Southeast Alaska Sustainable Arts project funded by the Sealaska Heritage Institute aimed at enhancing the cultural and economic utilization of marine mammals for Native handicrafts.

The Service continues to explore ways to address the concerns raised by organizations such as the SARDFA and subsistence users of shellfish within the constraints of the MMPA. Once again I thank you for raising these concerns to the Service. Should you have additional questions or thoughts please contact: Dr. Patrick Lemons, Chief for Marine Mammals Management, at (907) 786-3800.

Sincerely,


Regional Director