

PETERSBURG BOROUGH
Resolution #2025-17

**A RESOLUTION URGING IMMEDIATE ACTION FOR EFFECTIVE SEA
OTTER MANAGEMENT TO RESTORE SOUTHEAST ALASKA'S
SHELLFISH COMMERCIAL FISHERIES AND SUBSISTENCE HARVESTS**

WHEREAS, the Petersburg Borough is an island fishing community located in Southeast Alaska with approximately 3,000 residents, whose economy and subsistence lifestyle heavily depend on sustainable marine resources; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1960s, approximately 400 sea otters were reintroduced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to six locations in Southeast Alaska without a comprehensive, long-term ecological management strategy; and

WHEREAS, the sea otter population, left unmanaged, has expanded exponentially from an estimated 5,800 in 2003 to over 11,000 by 2010, with ongoing growth rates of 12-14% per year, the sea otter population is estimated to have grown far in excess of 70,000 otters; and

WHEREAS, sea otters consume approximately 25–30% of their body weight in shellfish daily, resulting in annual predation of millions of pounds of shellfish resources including crab, abalone, urchins, sea cucumbers, and clams, significantly depleting these stocks for human use; and

WHEREAS, the Southeast Alaska Dungeness crab populations have been severely decimated by sea otters, causing over two-thirds of the original harvest area to become barren, compelling the crab fishing fleet to compete within a significantly smaller footprint and placing further unsustainable pressure on the remaining crab populations; and

WHEREAS, the unchecked proliferation of sea otters has severely impacted local ecological balance, drastically reducing shellfish availability for subsistence, personal use, sport, and commercial harvests, leading to the closure of numerous fisheries and severe impacts on community food security; and

WHEREAS, Alaska's sustainably managed marine resources form a fundamental component of coastal economies, and the depletion of shellfish resources due to sea otter predation has resulted in substantial economic losses exceeding tens of millions of dollars and adversely impacted employment opportunities in fishing, processing, and associated industries; and

WHEREAS, indigenous communities in Southeast Alaska have sustainably managed marine ecosystems, including traditional sea otter hunting, for thousands of years, maintaining ecological balance and abundant shellfish resources; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), while essential for sea otter recovery, now imposes severe restrictions that prevent effective management of the sea otter population, creating conflicts with Alaska's constitutional mandate for sustained-yield resource management; and

WHEREAS, under current MMPA regulations, Alaska Native communities face significant economic constraints due to restrictions on selling intact sea otter pelts, limiting traditional economic activities; and

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WHEREAS, Section 119 of the MMPA allows for cooperative management agreements involving Alaska Native organizations and federal and state agencies, providing a framework for responsible local management and ecological balance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE PETERSBURG BOROUGH OF Petersburg, ALASKA, strongly urges immediate action by federal and state authorities, in collaboration with Alaska Native and non-Native stakeholders, to establish and expedite a comprehensive and adaptive sea otter management strategy to restore ecological balance and protect critical shellfish populations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that federal and state managing agencies must prioritize equitable disaster assistance and financial relief for Southeast Alaska's crab and dive fisheries, commensurate with support historically provided to salmon fisheries, recognizing the severe economic impacts of unmanaged sea otter populations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, federal authorities are urged to amend MMPA regulations to expand allowable uses of sea otters harvested by Alaska Native subsistence hunters, enhancing economic opportunities through the sale of intact pelts and value-added products, thereby supporting traditional livelihoods; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Assembly supports initiatives to enhance shellfish populations, including community-driven ecological recovery and shellfish enhancement projects, as essential components of sustainable marine resource management; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Assembly affirms strong support for the efforts of the Shellfish Preservation Alliance (SPA) and similar organizations advocating for ecological balance, sustainable resource use, and economic revitalization; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, the Assembly urgently calls on state and federal agencies to implement these management actions without delay, ensuring the restoration of balanced ecosystems and sustainable economies vital to the communities of Southeast Alaska.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Petersburg Borough Assembly this 4th day of August, 2025.

Donna Marsh, Vice Mayor

ATTEST:

Rebecca Regula, Borough Clerk