

Southeast Sea Otter Stakeholder Working Group Quarterly Meeting

February 28, 2022 9:00 am – 12:00 pm AK

Virtual Meeting

Summary/Notes

This meeting was recorded if anyone would like to see it (note: it is a rather large file)

Participants: Kathy Hansen, Joseph Eisaguirre, Katharine Nalven, Lynn Lee, Jenell Larsen Tempel, Bo L Meredith, Mike Miller, Ben Weitzman, Phil Doherty, Paul Schuette, Mike Jackson, Mandy Migura, Tim Tinker, Ralf Wolfe

Introduction of participants on the meeting platform. Mandy Migura from the Alaska Wildlife Alliance (AWA) gave a presentation on the NGO she represents and asked questions from the group.

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provided an update on the Southeast sea otter population survey. The survey is planned for May/June 2022 and anticipated to have a report to the stakeholders in 2023. FWS asked if there are specific areas that people would like to have the plane fly over to count sea otters. If so, please contact Joe Eisaguirre (joseph_eisaguirre@fws.gov). Additionally, FWS biologist will be in several communities throughout Southeast Alaska and are happy to meet with people or give presentations. If there is an interest, please contact Paul Schuette (paul_schuette@fws.gov).

Key Action Items from the Meeting:

- Homework – POCs are to develop a plan on how to achieve their assigned goals
- Add Group representation – Jen to reach out to tour groups

Topic – Group Workplan Development

Reminder of why this group was initially formed:

Below are some perspectives on why the 2019 Sea Otter Workshop was originally held and why this was group formed as a result. Below are a few perspectives that people shared.

- The 2019 Southeast sea otter workshop was put on as a way to discuss legal management options for the sea otter population to help alleviate the pressure on commercial fishing groups.
- Sea otter recovery is controversial and there was a misunderstanding of how the MMPA was being interpreted. The initial point of the 2019 workshop was to focus on what could be done to promote management of otters within a legal framework.
 - Sitka has shown that increasing the sea otter harvest could be an effective way to manage otters without changing the rules and without wiping out the harvest. They want to promote the concept that you could increase harvest to other areas and see if it has the same impact as what was seen in Sitka Sound.
- Sea otter recovery in the Southeast Alaska has a number of benefits but is also disruptive to an ecosystem where sea otters were absent for nearly 200(?) years. This meant that people had strong opinions on the otter recovery. The 2019 meeting was a way to bring in more voices to help get past the disagreements and get some proactive and productive dialogue. With this group, we need to identify some achievable objectives and goals.
 - One idea is the Sitka example - thoughtful, directed, and legal harvest of sea otters has led to changes in otter abundance and distribution and thus key subsistence resources

- in inner Sitka Sound. We can learn a lot from this example in regard to sea otter management. Could this be replicated in other areas in Southeast Alaska, maybe Kake?
- There is no literature specific to Sitka's approach, however it is described in the September 2021 meeting notes, the 2019 Workshop Final Report, and a couple of research papers; Raymond et al. 2019 and Gora et al. 2022 (attached to email)
 - Dive fisheries are impacted by sea otter recovery. There are three species that the Dive Fisheries harvest and sea otters prey heavily on all three. The 2019 Workshop was a way to shed light on the economic impact being felt by the Dive Fisheries.
 - ADF&G conducts extensive surveys on these dive fishery species. There is some coordination with industry and the State to locate new harvest areas, but no coordinated surveys with FWS or other sea otter researchers to include otters during the survey.
 - Although not a reason for the workshop, one note is that the workshop itself may have been less productive than it could have been because there was a lot of new information for attendees to digest. It is important to keep up with all of the new information to have a more productive meeting.

Planning session:

This part of the meeting was centered on identifying what people would like to get out of these working group meetings and how to achieve that. We discussed group goals and objectives. We also assigned a person to those goals to help develop them further and keep the focus and momentum moving forward. The following is a list of each goal along with who will be responsible for developing the plan. The product from this exercise is a work plan to keep this group focused on achievable tasks that benefit the Southeast Stakeholder Working Group.

Homework – An outline of the goals and key points are included below (in the notes form taken during the meeting). These will likely be the base of the groups workplan, but they are not complete. So, I am asking for the group's help in defining each goal further. If you were identified as the point of contact (POC) for a goal, please work with your group (and others as necessary) to develop a strategy on how to accomplish the goal along with what elements are long- or short-term objectives. You will likely need to meet with your identified groups outside of the stakeholder meeting to develop these. We will use the next quarterly meeting to go over the strategies you developed for each goal, so be prepared to present.

POCs are:

Goal 1: Mandy Migura, Ben Weitzman, Jen Cate

Goal 2: Jen Cate, Jenell Larsen-Tempel

Goal 3: Mike Miller, Mike Jackson, Lynn Lee, Paul Schuette

Goal 4: POC TBD - learning from Case study

Goal 5: Joe Eisaguirre and sea otter working group

*If you want to be added/removed to a group let me know. Groups will change/grow as future tasks are identified.

As an example of what is being asked, I have developed a mock strategic plan for Goal 5. Note, I have not coordinated this with anyone, so it is subject to change. One way to look at it is what steps need to be taken, and in what order or combination, for the goal to be met? You will also want to define how you know when you have met the objective (a success).

- **EXAMPLE - Goal 5: Regular and routine Southeast sea otter population surveys**

POC – Joe Eisaguirre and Sea Otter Working Group

- Obj 1. – Finalize Southeast sea otter survey and submit report to stakeholder group (*short-term goal*)
 - Conduct survey in 2022
 - Analyze results and submit report to stakeholder group in 2023
 - *Success: Survey is completely, analyzed and reported to Stakeholders in 2023*
- Obj 2. – With these data, identify a routine Southeast sea otter population survey schedule (*long-term goal*)
 - *Success: population survey schedule is developed and can be maintained*
- Obj 3. - Develop localized survey design to be informative (*short-term goal*)
 - Develop surveys so that local communities can help inform sea otter population estimates on a regional scale
 - Message this to local Southeast Communities
 - as an example: Utilize the Guardian Program
 - *Success: Localized surveys are being conducted by the local communities and the data are useful to inform Southeast sea otter data needs.*
- Obj 3. Advocate for continued funding to support sea otter surveys on a routine basis (*long-term goal*)
 - Utilize stakeholder group to request and secure funding for routine surveys
 - Amplify any messages to help with this goal
 - *Success: Congress develops a line-item of funding to support these surveys on a routine basis.*

Draft Workplan – Notes taken during the meeting – Use this template to build off

- **Goal 1: Improve information sharing:**

(POC: Mandy Migura, Ben Weitzman, Jen Cate)

- Synthesis of background information to help inform new people – Southeast sea otter stakeholder 2019 final report may be a form of this
- Can we publish the Sitka case study to show how this management strategy could work? (would like to cite it to inform FWS management strategy). Currently the case study is akin to quilt being sewn together.
- Develop or identify a repository for information – publications, grey literature,
 - Site for data dumping and sharing
 - Perhaps emerging research could be shared regularly with the group and we could offer to host discussions about what that research means for sea otter management

- **Goal 2: Collaboration with other Southeast groups:**

(POC: Jen Cate, Jenell Larsen-Tempel)

- ID missing Stakeholders from this group – tourism group (Allen marine tours)
- Increased collaboration with other Southeast groups or report back on what other groups are focusing on – i.e, The Southeast AK Abalone working group is very interested in Southeast sea otters. Some in that group don't realize that impact. They want to know what they can do for abalone in that area (not a dive species). Phil known this group.

- There are also mariculture groups (EVOS) that have a focus on Sea otter activities. FWS can report back, but not add anyone to this group.
 - Linda Shaw may have other ideas
 - Formalized coordinated sharing of lessons learned and strategies between Lynn's Canadian program and the work within this working group
 - Do we want a representative from the Haida Nation in the group?
- **Goal 3: Management case studies** – Sitka and Kake case studies – (POC: Mike Miller, Mike Jackson, Lynn Lee, Paul Schuette)

Background - Developed on a local group level to manage the impacts they were experiencing. Increased Sitka harvest was a result of increased opportunity to economics. The goal wasn't resource protections, but that was one of the outcomes. They increased harvest and didn't take hour ALL of the otters (which was against the advice at the time). 2 weeks ago they had a meeting at Sealaska Heritage Center – sat with grant writers and presented that they could work with Kake to do a focused harvest again to help with the community. This was not marketed as a predator control initiative.

- It is important to document what happened in Sitka – maybe a TEK report – Taylor White (NPRB project) research project she is proposing to go back and look at the tagging data in conjunction with the ecosystem. There is also a lot Bodkin and Estes. A group at UCSC is continuing to do those benthic transects – published in Gora et. al. 2019 to monitor the benthic communities.
 - Can we collaborate with sci dive class to support Sitka case study (Jacob Romandi – Kristi Kroecler and Pete Raimondi)
- Need to set up the wholistic research so it is important for the group.
 - Help get funding, drive the work, focus grad students, etc
- If the Sitka case study is replicated elsewhere – designed to maintain biodiversity in the ecosystem to have defined research questions in mind
- Establish a monitoring program for this and work towards developing a local harvest management plan, if communities agree
- If they do the same thing, they will want to work with others and see if they can document the impacts in the ecosystem.
- Identify what needs to be looked at and what standards will show an appreciable impact
- Need to establish those subtidal plots before implement the Kake experiment.
- Can't have this initiative region-wide, it won't work and will collapse the population. Are there local scale initiatives that can have a positive impact?
- Try to replicate the Sitka Case Study in a new area.

- (Kake) Want to continue to keep track of the sea otters (moving north of Kake). Sea otters have eaten all of the sea urchins and are getting into clams and geoduck. Impact of clams and cockles have been big in this community. Stories from ancestors talk about how the sea otters impacted them. Need to find an equitable solution to keep sea otters out of mariculture farms (cockle farming). Need to find a good balance. Mike Jackson is keeping track of sea otters around Kake and they know the behavior of sea otters in the area.

- Study how much their impact is having on the subsistence foods.
 - And to help them out – study the impact it is having on their clams.
 - Assess the long-term impacts and finding a balance between sea otters and subsistence harvest.
- **Goal 4: Prioritize research projects within this working group so it is directly beneficial to this working group.**
(POC TBD - learning from Case study) – Longer term goal -
 - Facilitate research between different research groups
 - Focus granting agencies to Southeast sea otter priority data needs
 - Identify if worth looking into the extent of clam gardens as a strategy to manage subsistence resources. British Columbia is doing this
- **Goal 5: Regular and routine Southeast population surveys –**
(POC: Joe Eisaguirre and sea otters working group).
 - Advocacy for funding for this survey to continue to happen
 - Amplify any messages to help with this goal (Mandy)
 - Develop localized survey design to be informative
 - Utilize the Guardian Program as an example
- **Next Meeting**
 - Update from POCs on their goals for the draft workplan document
 - Reports from any task forces