Congressman Donald Young (R-AK) has proposed legislation that would roll back existing protections for thousands of northern sea otters living in Alaskan waters. If passed, this legislation would raise incentives for increased harvesting of northern sea otters for commercial production and create a widespread market for products made of sea otter fur.

H.R. 2714 (and its identical counterpart in the Senate, S. 1453) would amend and undermine the intent of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and all the progress sea otters have made in Alaska since the 1960s in one fell swoop. Here is what the legislation would do to Alaska’s northern sea otters:

**Remove restrictions on products made from sea otters**
Under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s current interpretation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, Native Alaskan’s are allowed to hunt sea otters for subsistence purposes. This includes for both the meat products derived from sea otters and traditional handicrafts and artifacts made from its fur. Such artifacts and handicrafts must in some way be altered in a traditional manner. This prevents the sale of plain pelts for large-scale commercial products.

H.R. 2714 would eliminate the requirement to significantly alter sea otter pelts into traditional artifacts or handicrafts before selling. This means that plain pelts could be sold to non-native groups who could then turn them into hats, coats, and other garments at a mass-produced commercial level.

**Negatively impact the Alaskan nearshore ecosystem**
Sea otters play a well-known ecological role in the growth and productivity of kelp forests in the rocky nearshore environment. Sea urchins prevent the growth of kelp forests by feeding on the holdfasts that anchor kelp to the sea floor. When present, sea otters feed on sea urchins, naturally regulating their numbers and allowing kelp forests to grow.

Kelp forests are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, providing many ecosystem services such as habitat for certain fish, coastal erosion protection, and carbon sequestration.
Exacerbate the decline of sea otters in southwest Alaska
Northern sea otters are divided into three distinct groups in Alaska: the southeast, southwest, and southcentral populations. The southwest population was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2005 and continues to decline in numbers.

Though H.R. 2714 does not include the southwest population of northern sea otters in Alaska, there is no regulatory framework in place to determine whether a sea otter was harvested from the southwest population or from one of the other populations.

Sea otters within the southwestern population can still be harvested under the provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act for subsistence purposes and the production of native handicrafts. H.R. 2714 does not include any mechanism to ensure sea otters harvested from the threatened population are not used for purposes which are only allowed for the southcentral and southeastern sea otters.

Because the bill does not include new regulatory processes for the protection of the threatened population of sea otters in Alaska, H.R. 2714 could further accelerate the decline of sea otters in southwest Alaska.

Slow the recovery of southcentral and southeast Alaska sea otters
4,000 sea otters died as a result of the oil spill from the 1989 Exxon-Valdez catastrophe, from which sea otters and the environment in southcentral Alaska are still recovering. Increased harvest rates, as a result of this bill and commercialization of sea otter fur, could further impede their recovery.

The recovery of sea otters in southeast Alaska has become uneven over the past thirty years. Growth rates in the protected Glacier Bay National Park, where all hunting of sea otters is illegal, have accelerated while growth rates outside the park have declined. Increased native take of sea otters outside Glacier Bay National Park could further worsen this disparity.

What you can do
• Logon to www.seaotters.org/takeaction.html to write to your elected officials and urge them to oppose this bill when it comes to a vote in Congress.
• Contact FSO to learn how you can help in spreading awareness about H.R. 2714.
  Email: info@seaotters.org
  Phone: (831) 915-3275