Friends of the Sea Otters Weighs in on Translocation Program: 
Program Not Meeting Original Objectives

After 20 years, the Translocation Program, which was originally created as part of the recovery plan for the federally threatened southern sea otter, is now being reconsidered. Public law 99-629, which was passed by Congress in 1986, authorized the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to relocate sea otters to San Nicolas Island. The law also created a “no-otter” or management zone to minimize possible conflicts between sea otters and shellfish fisheries. Starting south of Point Conception and including the remaining coastal waters of southern California, the zone was to be maintained by FWS and any sea otters found in this area were to be captured by non-lethal means and returned to either San Nicolas Island or the central California coast.

While Friends of the Sea Otter (FSO) originally supported the translocation program as a means to protect sea otters and increase their numbers, data collected over the years indicate that the population at San Nicolas Island has not grown as expected and that the sea otter population continues to expand into the no-otter zone. For these reasons,

All Water Runs to the Ocean

The concept is simple, but rarely top of mind. Rain water that percolates through neighborhoods lawns and distant agricultural fields, that forms murky torrents that sluice through our city storm drains, all flow into the sea with the water we use to brush our teeth, wash our dishes and flush our toilets. The fresh water that rinses dirt, concrete, asphalt and porcelain eventually enters the marine ecosystem, and all indications are that this heady brew packs a wallop to marine life.

Otters in particular are an indicator species. “We swim in the same water as the otters, and we eat the same food,” said D’Anne Albers, FSO’s executive director, in a recent interview. And if they are getting sick, this is cause for concern for us, as well.
Welcome to another edition of the Otter Raft! I am delighted to let you know that we are working hard on a variety of issues to protect the southern sea otter. Water quality, disease and translocation continue to cause trouble for our favorite animal, but we are relentless in our efforts to rectify these problems. Catch up with what’s been going on by reading the articles within.

On a happy note, we are excited about our Annual Meeting on September 30th. We made a few changes to make the weekend more family-friendly, fun-packed and economical. More activities, less expensive venues, and a Monterey wine tasting will all contribute to this year’s revised event. Please check out the invitation on page seven and return your reservation envelope soon. We look forward to seeing you soon and sharing the latest news about sea otters.

D'Anne Albers

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Translocation from page one

FSO is actively advocating for one of the alternatives currently under consideration which would officially declare the translocation program a failure without disturbing the population currently located at San Nicolas Island. FSO is also encouraging the elimination of the no-otter zone.

The Current Situation: Two factors seem to indicate that the translocation has not been successful: 1) the otter population at SNI is far below original projections which estimated that by 1998 the island would be supporting a thriving population of 500+ otters. In fact, recent data from SNI number the population at about 30. 2) Sea otters continue to enter the no-otter zone which presents a management issue for FSW. This pattern of movement may be necessary for their survival.

Due to lack of progress and inability to meet the goals of the southern sea otter translocation program the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is in the final stages of reevaluating the program. Last year, FWS released its Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, which presents and analyzes six management alternatives that will be considered.

Our Position: The current law mandates that if the translocation experiment is officially deemed a failure, FWS must remove all sea otters from San Nicolas Island. FSO believes that the otters should be allowed to remain at SNI, and continue to be fully protected by the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Also, translocation efforts have shown that sea otters have a strong affinity for their home range, and will try to return there if moved elsewhere. Moving the sea otters from San Nicolas Island would inflict unnecessary stress from the capture, handling and time out of the water.

*continued on next page*
Translocation from page two

under current management practices. Shellfish are a necessary and major component of sea otter's diet. To blame the decline of abalone and sea urchin fisheries entirely on sea otters is unrealistic. FSO believes that overfishing, poaching, and habitat degradation (pollution and disease) can have far greater impacts on shellfish stocks than sea otters.

Contrary to the claims of commercial shellfishermen, sea otter feeding does not fully eliminate shellfish. Studies show that sea otters returning to their historic habitat initially have a significant impact on shellfish stocks. However, over time, a natural balance between otters and shellfish is achieved.

The natural movement of sea otters beyond Pt. Conception may be related to the poor health of the sea otter population and its habitat. Initially scientists believed that if sea otters were restricted to areas north of Pt. Conception the population would remain healthy, eventually growing in numbers to the point where the species could be "delisted" as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Now it appears the population may require more habitat in order to continue its struggle for recovery. FSO believes this southward movement may indicate that all is not well within the sea otters' current range and a search for quality habitat may be necessary for survival.

Capture and removal is harmful to the sea otter. Based on previous translocation experience, it is known that sea otters, especially males, are very likely to die in such an effort. For this reason, capture and relocation would violate the requirement of the Translocation Law for non-lethal containment. Also, FSO believes it would be cost prohibitive, in terms of dollars and resources, to move the sea otters. Funds for this purpose would be better spent on other sea otter conservation priorities including research on pollutant levels in sea otters and their prey; monitoring of live fish fisheries to document whether sea otters are getting caught in these traps; and water quality monitoring.

What You Can Do: At this point, it seems likely that FWS will officially declare the translocation a failure. It is however, still undecided what additional recommendations the agency will regarding the status of the sea otters that are currently living at San Nicolas Island and the containment program. These decisions will have political and economic ramifications far beyond the simpler issues of what is required to maximize sea otter recovery. Hopefully, all interested parties can assist the FWS in striking the best possible balance. FWS should finish reviewing all comments by the end of this year (2006). The final decision will be made by the Department. of the Interior. Make your opinion heard during this review period by writing to your Congressman.

We would like to know how you feel about this issue. Check the FSO website for updated information on the topic.

Additional Resources:
Read the full Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Study at http://www.fws.gov/ventura/es/SSOrecplan/seaoetter_index.html
Sea Otter bill gains momentum in California Assembly

Two assembly members have introduced a bill that, if passed, could help the threatened sea otter. Co-authored by assemblymen John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) and Dave Jones (D-Sacramento), Assembly Bill 2485 addresses some of the current threats to sea otter recovery.

As an icon of coastal California, the charismatic sea otter plays several important ecological roles. These marine mammals control the destruction of kelp forests by grazing urchins. Sea otters also serve as sentinels and early indicators of environmental change. Although sea otters have been on the endangered species list since 1977, their recent unexplained decline has raised concern among advocates.

The bill proposes adding a check box to the state tax form allowing taxpayers to contribute to a special sea otter protection fund. Donations would finance important research to further reduce sea otter mortality and would also pay for a warden to provide much-needed monitoring of sea otters. Currently, taxpayers can select from 14 special funds that support a range of issues from breast cancer research to military family relief. Some causes generated more than $250,000 from the check box.

Increased fines and penalties for killing sea otters are also part of AB 2485. The bill raises the fine up to $25,000 for each sea otter, the same level as federal fines and penalties.

Under AB 2485, kitty litter sold in California would include a statement discouraging flushing it down the toilet as a means of disposal. This provision will help reduce otter deaths from the parasite, toxoplasma gondii, which passes in cat feces and seems to be making its way to the ocean when cat feces are flushed. Recent research indicates that t-gondii is one of the primary killers of sea otters so keeping it out of their habitat is crucial.

Currently, Fish and Game Code §650 prohibits depositing, passing or allowing passage into state waters any substance or material harmful to fish, plant life, or bird life. AB 2485 would add mammals to the code as well.

The bill passed through Assembly committees and a floor vote with bi-partisan support in late May and currently is pending review by the Senate’s Committee on Appropriations.

In addition to Friends of the Sea Otter, AB 2485 is supported by an impressive list of environmental groups including Natural Resources Defense Fund, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Defenders of Wildlife, and The Ocean Conservancy.

All Water from page one

Research shows that since 1998, disease accounts for an astounding 40% of otter mortality, and a significant portion (17%) of these mortalities are the handiwork of Toxoplasma gondii (Tg), a terrestrial pathogen that can infect a broad spectrum of warm blooded animals and birds, usually with few or no symptoms in animals with a healthy immune system. For humans and other animals with compromised immune systems, however, the infection can be fatal. Tg appears to hit otters with unusual intensity, and those animals that do not die outright from the illness become far more vulnerable to predators.

The Cat Connection

Infectious through direct ingestion at infected meat; Tg has a tighter evolutionary relationship with members of the cat family, as the pathogen (a distant protozoan relative of the malaria parasite) undergoes a sexually-reproducing stage only in the intestinal organs of cats, and produces oocysts (eggs) which the animals shed in their feces. Researches believe these thick-walled, hardy eggs can withstand waste water treatment processes, which may actually enhance the transmission of the illness through the waste aeration process, which breaks up solids and disperses the oocysts.

No Smoking Gun—Yet

Once in the water, Tg is virtually invisible; lacking a direct testing method, researchers examine filter feeders like clams and mussels (otter diet mainstays) for oocyst concentrations. Tg has yet to appear in bivalves that are sampled near run-off areas after heavy rains, thus proving the cat-otter connection, but this is hardly surprising. According to Melissa Miller, a researcher at the University of California, Davis, the oocysts of Tg persist in filter feeders for 14 days, a very narrow window of time for finding a smoking gun.

Pathogen pollution is a fairly new field, and scientists must develop new epidemiological models for the ocean, as they seek to understand the origin and dispersal of the often perplexing maladies turning up in marine mammals. How, for example, does a disease carried by possums find its way into otters? Looking at the distribution of otter Tg infection rates offers a clue. Otters living near run-off areas have triple the Tg infection rate of otters living outside estuaries and other outflow sites.

Getting the Word Out

FSO is actively addressing the issue of fresh water run-off, working with cities to help them clean up fresh water outflows. At state level, FSO works with legislators who’ve drafted a bill that would require flushable kitty litter packaging warn consumers NOT to flush any cat waste. The bill would also add a check-box for sea otter research to the tax form donation options.

continued on next page
YOU ARE INVITED!
Friends of the Sea Otter 38th Annual Meeting
This year’s events will be held in conjunction with Defenders of Wildlife’s Sea Otter Awareness Week

Saturday, September 30th
10-4 Open House at FSO’s office and Retail Center
11-3 Otter Spotting at Berwick Park in Pacific Grove
6:30 Wine Tasting and Sea Otter Update at Taste of Monterey

Sunday, October 1st
Join us for one or both of these up-close and personal sea otter adventures:
9:30 Guided Kayak Tour - Monterey Bay Kayaks - $40
3:30 Elkhorn Slough Safari - $30

RSVP using the envelope enclosed with this newsletter

Food generously provided by Whole Foods

All Water from page four

What you can do
- Keep cats indoors—this keeps uninfected cats out of the back yard where they can contract Tg from infected rats or birds, and infected cats from introducing their oocyst-filled feces into the top soil.
- Don’t flush cat litter down the toilet. Bad for the plumbing, bad for otters.
- If you feel you must feed feral cats, don’t do so near a water source.
- Stay informed! There are several good on-line reference sources about this issue, including helpful information sheets available on-line at Cornell University, Ohio State University and the Center for Disease Control.

And remember, all water runs into the ocean.

Helpful resources for learning more about Tg:
www.vet.cornell.edu/frc/resources/brochure/toxo.html
www.cvm.umn.edu/img/assets/8961/toxo6-1-06R.pdf
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/toxoplasmosis/factsht_toxoplasmosis.htm
The Legend lives on!
Poster on Margaret Owings wins 1st Place in County Competition.

Authored by three 5th graders from the International School of Monterey, Deepti Gopinath, Jacque Leahy, and Caterina Fournier, the theme of the competition was on “people who took a stand.” They were wise in choosing Margaret Owings, who took many stands, fought many battles, and did it all with such an elegance that it could only be described as breathtaking. Not to mention that the girls probably had the best resource in the competition, The Margaret Owings Library. They were in our Center every weekend for about 6 weeks working studiously through the many files, documents, writings, news clippings, books, artwork and much, much more. We have enough material to fill a walk-in closet. They brought with them energy and excitement, fun, and a serious dedication to the subject. It was obvious from the start that they didn’t want second place. It was also a fun opportunity for our staff to dig through the material when they had specific questions to help support their poster. Overall, it was such an honor to help, and watch them all learn about the many great and wonderful things that Margaret Owings did in her lifetime. Oftentimes while they were at the Center, all hard working on the poster, I would think that this is what it’s all about, young children growing up, learning how to take a stand, how to become the next generation of stewards for the land and sea. Another tribute to the late great Margaret Owings, feel free to come by our Education Center where we have the poster displayed.

New selections from the Otter Trove
Be sure to check out our entire inventory of fabulous otter items! Drop by our retail store in Pacific Grove, visit us on-line at www.seaotters.org, or call us at 831-373-2747 to order items.

20-piece wooden sea otter jigsaw puzzle measures 8”x8”. $6.95

Mother and Pup Aqua-stone Casting
Measures about 7”x5”. Cast in the U.S. by Utah artisan Lee Clark.

Hand Carved Wood Sea Otter on Base
Made in Indonesia. Each piece is hand carved and picked from recycled parasite wood. For more elaborate bases choose the larger carvings. $10.00

50 Ways to Save the Ocean
by David Helvarg
The user-friendly guide to preserving, protecting, and enjoying our magnificent seas...
Soft Bound. 186 pages. Measures 9” x 6”. $12.95

Long Sleeve Raggle Tee
Super soft, this long sleeve jersey features a unique wrap-around diving otters motif on colorful parsley crystal wash. 100% Cotton. Made in the U.S.A. $21.95

Become a Researcher for a Day!
Our Researcher for a Day program has been such a success we have plans for expanding it. Currently, Friends of the Sea Otter members are invited to make reservations to join our researcher in the Elkhorn Slough to become a part of our Sea Otter Ecology Project. This program has proven a successful tool for outreach and getting the public involved in sea otter conservation. Our current goal is to implement the Researcher for a Day Program with our Sea Otter Distribution and Ecology Research Project. Our plan is to provide members and school groups with the opportunity to join our research team along the coastal trail around the Monterey Peninsula, and experience our field research first-hand.

To make reservations or for more information please contact William Brooke: centerdirector@seaotters.org or call 831-373-2747.
New Members in 2006

Julian Abel, Kent, England
Gail Ansell, Kent, England
Alisabeth V. Asher, Cerés CA
Alman Atkins, Granite Bay CA
Judith Austin, Sacramento CA
Autumn Barker, San Marcos TX
Paula L. Barrett, Marina CA
Mrs. Bauer's Class, Kissimmee FL
Logan Bello, Sebastapol CA
Dr. Raffaele Biermann, Pacific Grove CA
Nigel Borsari, Richmond VA
Jim & Mary Borrowman, Nanaimo BC
Lorraine Brown, Roseville CA
Deborah Brownstein, Clarksville IN
Philip A. Burkhardt, Lovexa KS
Kerris Burn, Rosemont, MN
Alex Caldwell, Baltimore, MD
Debbie Chau, Pomona CA
Nicole Cheng, Dublin CA
Karen Clark, Corona del Mar CA
Cathleen & Martin Cohen, Pebble Beach CA
Mrs. Connolly's Class, San Jose CA
Patrick Cosgrove, Chicago IL
Jody Cosson, New Braunfels TX
Scott Cross, Long Beach CA
Gretchen Dooling, Villa Park CA
Elana Extrum-Fernandes, Walnut Creek CA
Liam Finlayson, Uxbridge ON
EP Fisher, White Plains NY
Agustina Garcia, Salinas CA
Gillian College OHCSC Program, Melbourne, Australia
Chalisa Gomez, Overland CA
Berkeley Harris, Tempe AZ
Kathryn Harris, Williston VT
Shannon Harvey, Foothill Ranch CA
Jean Hicks, Wheaton IL
Elliot Hiraishi, Los Angeles CA
Laura Holland, San Francisco CA
Leah Kolin, Tempe AZ
Irene Katz, Fremont CA
Michael King, El Cerrito CA
Duane Komaki, Whittier CA
Gina Kuhn, Linden CA
Beverly Kurz, Santa Clara CA
Lowell Langers, Greensboro MD
Stephanie Larson & Caleb Tector, Mammoth Lakes CA
Barb LaRue, Ignacio CO
Kathy Le, San Francisco CA
Sue Lebeek, Thousand Oaks CA
Caitlin Leydon, Concord CA
Sharon Magnoli, Millford MA
Nicolas Marcatiugio, Rockville Centre NY
Margie & Carolyn Marks, Pittsburgh PA
Brittany Marshall, Decorah IA
Bouvard Martine, Petaluma CA
Rick & Carla Mathers, Fresno CA
Victoria Mazzeiogia, Casterville CA
Ms. McBride, Albuquerque NM
Megan McCormick, Carlston NY
Antoinette McDaniel, Carmel Valley CA
Pamela McHahan, Reading MA
Judith & Steve Milburn, Roswell CA
Laura Minini, Martinez CA
Gary Morris, Lenexa KS
Steve Nielsen, Bainbridge Island WA
Pamela Osgood, San Francisco CA
Sandra Ostrand, Paradise CA
Daisy Ortman, Atlanta GA
Jennifer Phillips, Baltimore MD
Charles Phizikmayer, Cincinnati OH
Carrie Pierce, Liverpool NY
Donald & Kristin Potter, Sturrock CA
Diana Price, Watonville CA
Prospect Sierra School Library, El Cerrito CA
Gretchen Pruett, Round Rock TX
Mica Prutahale, Torino, Italy
Beth Robbins, Atlanta GA
A. Jack Rubton, Orangevale CA
James Reeva, Savannah GA
Becky Reeves, Bryan TX
Lorraine Ring, Carmel Valley CA
Mary Romero, Turlock CA
Juliana & Gabriel Sand, Petaluma CA
Fritz Sattelmayer, Redwood City CA
Janice Soul, Pacific Grove CA
Kimberly Schroder, Union NJ
Blaise Schulze, Amity OR
Erin Seiden, Taunton MA
Shayna Selby, Pacific Grove CA
Dawn Shoppell, Fort Wayne IN
Erin Sicotte, Walnut Creek CA
Edward Sims-Johnson, Scotts Valley CA
Terry Smith, Salinas CA
Marcia Soles, Fulton CA
Victoria Sokolovitch, Northridge CA
Ruby Sonnandare,orrance CA
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Connie Tsao's 3rd Grade Class, Pacifica CA
Douglas Way, Pescataway NJ
Grace Woods, Davis CA

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Howard E. Skidmore, Carmel CA
Barbara S. Smith, Chappaqua NY
Charles & Dawn Smith, Timne Park IL
Barbara L. Spalding, Saddle River NJ
Connie To's 3rd Grade Class, Pacifica CA
Barbara Walker, Los Altos CA
Robert D. Welch, Grosse Point Farms MI
Susan J. Willey, Carmel-by-the-Sea CA
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Jeppy & Leonard Yarensky, Bethany CT

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Doug Thaxter

In Memory Of:

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Irma R. Weisskopf
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Church of God, On behalf of the Helen Sprinkle Charitable Fund Trust, Bloomingtom IL
Welcome to the Friends of the Sea Otter newsletter!

Look inside for:

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Margaret’s Corner

Inspiration from Margaret Owing, beloved co-founder of Friends of the Sea Otter
1913 - 1999


My life was completely changed, at a time when illness and deep concerns sent me to my bed. A dear friend brought Rachel Carson’s The Sea Around Us, and read those stirring words aloud to me for several days. “This particular instant of time, that is mine” write Rachel Carson, and I was struck by the depth of that simple thought. Later, I stood on my porch savouring the immensity of its great view before me as the sight, sound and diversity stretched out in all its splendor—and I became part of it.

I had the privilege of meeting Rachel Carson at a National Audubon Award dinner where Rachel received a medal for her book, Silent Spring. After a magnificent brief speech, she left the room and seated herself apart from the others. I joined her, dropping down beside her chair. I wanted to tell her about the imprint she had made on my life. She listened and thanked me for telling her. Then we moved on to Silent Spring, her eloquent alarm at the poisoning of the environment. She said, with a wistful note in her voice, and a far-away look in her eyes, “You know, I did not want to involved myself so deeply about conflict and poisons, I wanted to write about the mysteries along our shores.”

As she spoke, I remembered that Einstein had once said, “the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious source of all true art and science.” And then I remembered Carson’s own opinion, “In order to achieve, one must dream greatly, one must not be afraid to think large thoughts.”

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Friends of the Sea Otter
125 Ocean View Blvd., Suite 204
PACIFIC GROVE, CA 93950

“Friends of the Sea Otter has proven itself a leader in coastal protection and deserves our support—especially now during this crucial time.”—DR. JANE GOODALL, DBE
FOUNDER, THE JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE

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