Friends of the Sea Otter (FSO) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1968 and dedicated to the protection of a rare and threatened species, the sea otter, and its habitat.

Friends of the Sea Otter is a relatively small nonprofit organization with a large impact. We rely on the generous donations of our supporters to continue defending the sea otter and influencing long-term change to preserve nearshore marine ecosystems.

Please consider making a donation online at https://www.razoo.com/us/story/Friends-Of-The-Sea-Otter or by mail to Friends of the Sea Otter, P.O. Box 223260, Carmel, CA 93922. And don't forget to check out FSO's online store for fun sea otter apparel and gifts!

Thank you for your support and commitment to the amazing sea otter!
Our Mission: *Friends of the Sea Otter is committed to and advocates for the conservation of sea otters, the preservation of their habitat, through education, research, and policy decisions that will ensure the long-term survival of this species.*

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**Contact Us:**
- Friends of the Sea Otter
- P.O. Box 223260
- Carmel, CA 93922

(831) 915-3275
info@seaotters.org

Make sure to follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter for pictures and updates!

Support the CA Sea Otter Fund This Tax Season

We know filing taxes is no fun, but the California Sea Otter Fund is here to help. If you file state income taxes in California, just check the CA Sea Otter Tax Fund donation box on your California state income tax form. It’s that easy! This is a convenient way to support California’s sea otter conservation and research activities. It is imperative we meet the minimum annual donation amount in order to sustain the CA Sea Otter Fund in future years. We know we can count on you to support the CA Sea Otter Fund in 2017 and for years to come!
Meet
Kim Steinhardt
Our New
Board Member!

On any given quiet morning by the edge of Monterey Bay, you might find Kim Steinhardt at the shoreline listening for the telltale sounds of a sea otter pup squawking for its mom, and training his telephoto lens in that direction. “The first time I saw a sea otter, way back in the ancient days of film, I was hooked,” he says.

Kim is a former California state administrative law judge, but he now spends much of his time following another passion – photographing sea otters and other marine wildlife, writing about the California coast, and giving talks about sea otters and ocean stewardship.

Because of his background as a lawyer and advocate, Kim tends to view the against-all-odds story of the survival of the sea otter as a case in point for focusing on the legal and policy tools that often govern the delicate balance between humans and nature.

“Sea otters are a little like the canary in the coal mine – if we’re paying attention – not only can they tell us a lot about the health of the near shore ocean waters, but they can reveal much about our relationship with nature,” says Kim, “and how we as humans try to manage that relationship using law and economics as our tools, sometimes successfully, but sometimes with disastrous consequences.”

With two new California coast and sea otter related books set for publication, one of which will be a NatGeo Kids collection of Kim’s sea otter mom and pup pictures, he is optimistic about their plight gaining more widespread attention. But he is also cautious about what may be tough times ahead for marine creatures and the ocean. “We have huge new challenges, both environmental and political, so now more than ever is a time for everyone to become more active and involved. The stakes couldn’t be higher.”

Kim has been involved with FSO for years, including serving as a guest speaker at numerous events. He joined FSO formally as a board member in October 2016. We are thrilled to have such a dedicated environmental steward and legal expert on our team!

Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to keep up with Kim’s photos and work!
What’s New in 2017?

The new year brings reason for both optimism and concern. Between promising sea otter population growth, ongoing threats, and the uncertainty of the new Trump administration, 2017 will certainly be a busy year. We hope you will continue to stand with FSO in 2017 and fight for the protection of the sea otter!

Southern Sea Otter Population and Range
The spring of 2016 marked the first time the southern sea otter population exceeded 3,200 animals since the population was “rediscovered” in Big Sur in 1938. FSO is pleased to share these results from the United States Geological Survey’s 2016 spring survey, and we continue to have reason for cautious optimism. At an estimated 3,272, the population is now above the target recovery level of 3,090, and will be eligible for possible delisting from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) if levels are maintained for three consecutive years. However, there remain serious barriers to sustainable species recovery, such as limited range expansion, especially as the likelihood of ESA delisting and the loss of ESA protections increases.

Population growth continues to occur primarily in the center of the range around Monterey and around San Nicolas Island, rather than throughout range. Prior to the fur trade of the 18th and 19th centuries, the southern sea otters range spanned from Japan to Baja California. Despite recovery efforts, sea otters today have reclaimed only 13% of their historic range (San Mateo County to Santa Barbara County to San Nicolas Island), with increased shark bite mortality being a leading factor in range limitation. As a keystone species, sea otter range expansion is critical both to the sea otter’s recovery and to the health of nearshore ecosystems all along the California and Oregon coastlines. FSO is committed to working with policymakers and other organizations to develop solutions that promote sustainable range expansion.

In 2016, the USFWS announced its intention to revise the marine mammal stock assessment report (SAR) for the southern sea otter stock in California due to changes in population dynamics in the central portion of the mainland range and new information on fisherman-related sea otter mortality. FSO will submit official comments on the SAR in early 2017, including our concern regarding the status of sea otter range expansion. Much will be riding on the revisions of the stock assessment.

What About the Northern Sea Otter?
Northern sea otters, found in the Aleutian Islands, Southern Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington, face a unique set of threats:

- **Washington:** Significant population growth of the northern sea otter in Washington is leading to conflicts with the local fishing industry. FSO will monitor population growth and advocate fishing practices that keep sea otters safe from net entanglement and harassment from sea otters.

- **Alaska:** Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Alaska Native communities are permitted to hunt sea otters for subsistence and handicraft purposes. FSO will continue to monitor production of handicrafts to ensure hunting and production are in compliance with current guidelines.

What About the Northern Sea Otter?
**Update: The No-Otter Zone**
The shellfishing industry continues its legal fight for the reinstatement of the no-otter zonal management program that would restrict the expansion of the sea otters into their historic range in southern California. As of January 2017, various plaintiffs representing the shellfishing industry are engaged in two separate suits against USFWS in federal court. Along with numerous other environmental organizations, FSO continues to serve as an intervener defendant on behalf of USFWS, trying to assure that sea otters are protected and can continue their expansion southward. FSO will remain an active intervener defendant throughout the litigation process. Final briefs for the first case are due February 10, 2017, and oral arguments for the second case are expected in April 2017. FSO will update members as these law suits proceed.

**Other Issues in 2017**
FSO remains concerned about increased rates of human harassment and disturbance of sea otters. The interaction between human residents, tourists, and sea otters in communities such as Moss Landing, Point Lobos, and Downtown Monterey continues to put sea otters at risk of disturbance, injury, and motor vehicle-related fatalities, such as the tragic death of a widely-recognized sea otter known as Mr. Enchilada in July 2016. The proximity of sea otters to human residents further puts sea otters at risk of habitat degradation from human run-off and pollution. FSO will continue to partner with local communities and Sea Otter Savvy to educate tourists and residents alike on how to safely view sea otters without disturbance.

Finally, the USFWS recently published the Polar Bear Draft Conservation Management Plan, marking the first time a species recovery plan has addressed habitat loss as a result of climate change and the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms to address climate change. FSO will work with partner organizations and USFWS to determine if the sea otter recovery plan should be revised to reflect climate change as well.

**What’s New in Washington, D.C.**
Perhaps the biggest change in 2017 is the incoming Trump administration. While early pronouncements of intentions to weaken environmental regulation give us pause over what actions the new administration and congress might take, FSO remains steadfastly committed to securing full protections for sea otters at the federal, state, and local level. FSO will honor the legacy of our co-founder, Margaret Owings, and participate in defending the ESA and MMPA so full protections entitled to sea otters and other marine mammals remain.

**How Can You Help?**

FSO will continue to call on our supporters to sign petitions, call your local representatives, participate in providing input to policymakers, spread awareness, and donate throughout 2017 in order to protect the sea otter.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for regular updates on our work and how you can get involved!
The Endangered Species Act

GOP Promises Big Changes

Since its implementation in 1973, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been nearly 100 percent successful in saving threatened species from extinction. In fact, according to the Annual Review of Ecological Systematics, approximately 170 species may have become extinct between 1973 and 1998 had it not been for the ESA protections, including our beloved sea otters.

Despite these documented successes, many conservatives have dismissed the law as being ineffective in its mission to protect threatened species and a significant barrier to economic development. As House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop put it, “It has never been used for the rehabilitation of species. It’s been used for control of the land...We’ve missed the entire purpose of the Endangered Species Act.” We at FSO wholeheartedly disagree with the Chairman’s assessment, as do most other environmental organizations and non-partisan outlets. The law has been overwhelmingly successful in its mission, and has been imperative to the recovery of the sea otter and California’s nearshore ecosystems.

Moreover, the law strengthens local economies by bolstering sustainable, nature-related tourism markets, as well as producing billions of dollars per year in ecosystem service benefits at the national level. Finally, it is important to remember we share this world with millions of other species, all of which have an equal right to a flourishing natural habitat, clean planet, and existence without exploitation.

“Where is our moral contract with the future which recognizes that plants, animals, and man are all dependent upon one another?”- Margaret Wentworth Owings, Co-Founder of FSO

Republicans in Congress now seem intent on “reforming” the ESA, and currently have increased numbers in Congress to move that agenda forward unless checked by conservation advocacy efforts. As reported by the Christian Science Monitor, “reforms” may include a limitation on the number of lawsuits to maintain protections on ESA species, and a cap on the number of species that can be protected overall. In fact, just one week into 2017 Congresswoman Liz Cheney of Wyoming introduced a bill to remove the gray wolf from the list of threatened and endangered species and prohibit judicial review of the delisting determination. This dangerous measure could set the precedent for endless proposals to delist endangered species and limit judicial review.

FSO is dedicated to the preservation of the ESA for full recovery of the sea otter and all other threatened and endangered species. We encourage you to check out Defenders of Wildlife, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Endangered Species Coalition, and other environmental organizations to learn more about the ESA and how you can help protect it!
Becoming Sea Otter Savvy

By Gena Bentall,
Program Coordinator and Wildlife Biologist
Sea Otter Savvy Program

In spring of 2014, at the Southern Sea Otter Research Update Meeting in Santa Cruz, some of the most influential sea otter agency and organization representatives convened a special working group to address the issue of disturbance to sea otters by human marine recreation activities. It was here that the idea of a program dedicated to creating awareness of the unique vulnerability of sea otters to disturbance and fostering an ethic of good stewardship, was conceived. Together we agreed that most disturbance is the result of lack of awareness rather than intent to cause harassment. For example, most people paddling up to a raft of wild sea otters have little understanding of sea otter behavior, and no recognition that their actions may be disruptive and harmful.

Through the collaborative efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Monterey Bay Aquarium, and Friends of the Sea Otter, the concept of this new, outreach-based program, Sea Otter Savvy, was developed. Since launching in fall of 2015, we have been developing outreach materials, establishing relationships with stakeholders, giving public presentations, recruiting a citizen science team, and conducting research in three central coast regions. We are currently distributing a waterproof kayak decal with our “Be Sea Otter Savvy” message to kayak rental shops. Customers renting from participating shops have a reminder of our guidelines with them as they paddle!

Sea Otter Savvy has created a central location at www.seaottersavvy.org, where people can find information about sea otters, why they are vulnerable to human-caused disturbance, tips for understanding and recognizing disturbance and harassment, guidelines for responsible viewing, and much more. For those active on social media, you can find @SeaOtterSavvy tips and news on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and spread the word with #seaottersavvy and #respectthenap.

You can help us by promoting the respectful sharing of space with our wild neighbors: know, follow, and share guidelines for safe viewing of sea otters and all kinds of wildlife, model responsible behavior when you are on the water, and foster an ethic of respect and empathy towards all in our coastal community, human and non-human.
Make a Contribution to FSO Today!

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