THE WASHINGTON HEARING ON
MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION

By Judson Vandevere

Chairman Dingell of the House Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation invited me to testify in September concerning pending marine mammal protection legislation. I testified with gray whale authority, Dr. Ted Walker and manatee researcher, Dr. Daniel Hartman. Chairman Hollings of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and Atmosphere asked me to return to Washington in February to participate on a panel with Dr. Hartman, whale expert, Dr. Roger Payne, and marine mammalogist Dr. Kenneth Norris. On both occasions I called attention to the following dangers facing sea otters and other marine life:

In the southern portion of their range, otters are often shot.
Fatal boating accident injuries appear to be the greatest single cause of death and yet —
With Federal support, the City of Monterey plans to quadruple its accommodations for boats.
A 1971 study indicated that DDT can cause reproductive damage in newborn mammals.
Organochlorine pesticides are a danger to both marine mammals and man, whose diet includes fish and cephalopods.
One sea lion pup on San Miguel Island contained 1200 ppm DDT in its tissues.
The jack mackerel fishery in southern California was condemned for a time and some were removed from the market because of high DDT levels. 89% of swordfish and 2% of tuna were condemned last year because of high mercury levels. A negative correlation between hepatic cadmium and iron levels found in sea otters suggest that anemia could threaten the southern subspecies. The high cadmium concentrations could also cause hypertension.
Liver mercury levels in California sea lions compared with sea otters were an order of magnitude higher. Because of the toxic nature of chlorinated compounds, the maximum PCB (2.8 ppm) and DDE (7.4 ppm) levels in sea otter fat should be cause for concern. Outside the otters’ range the decline of abalones, spiny lobsters, and commercial crabs is blamed on possible changing oceanographic conditions, pollution, and overfishing.
Should the southern sea otter be allowed to extend its range into its former haunts to the south, it would improve our marine resources by reducing sea urchin populations, thereby enhancing kelp growth, which in turn supports rock fish nurseries.

The financing of ecological studies and the welfare of sea otters would be enhanced by the passage of a marine mammal protective law.

Because of the general deterioration of our marine environment, strong legislation is essential to the survival of marine mammals.

The proposed Commission should be composed of three marine mammalogists or ecologists rather than management specialists who are commercially oriented.

The Dingell-Anderson bill is now before the U.S. Senate. Further strengthening amendments are urgently needed. Jurisdiction should be in the Department of the Interior not divided between the Departments of Commerce and Interior. The bill should also contain a cutoff date. The drowning of porpoises and dolphins in tuna purse seines should be prohibited in 1973, giving fishermen time to develop a method which does not destroy the mammals they depend on for locating tuna.