



### 2011 Summer Newsletter

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

# Please meet our board members and staff:

## **Jud Vandevere**

For many years Jud studied the natural history of the southern sea otter. In *The Sea Otter (Enhydra Lutris): Behavior, Ecology and Natural History* (Fish and Wildlife Service, Biological Report 90 (14)) by Dr. Riedman and Dr. Estes are references to nine articles authored and two co-authored by Vandevere.

## **Chris Miller**

Chris has been involved with Friends of the Sea Otter for many years. He is also an active volunteer at the Monterey Bay Aquarium

## **Ryan Bigelow**

Ryan is an environmental professional interested in maintaining and protecting wildlife habitat. He has been a board member with FSO since 2008.

## **Pam Ferris-Olson**

In the '70s Pam helped Margaret Owings and Betty Davis write several position papers for FSO. She wrote a masters thesis on the conservation of the southern sea otter. Since she left California, Pam has raised two sons; the youngest, a master's student in North Carolina, is working toward becoming a marine biologist. Pam currently lives in the Dayton, Ohio area and works as a freelance writer. Pam is glad to once again be part of a team that works hard to protect the sea otter and its marine habitat.

## **Jennifer Covert**

Jennifer fills two roles for FSO as Senior Program Manager and a member on the Board of Directors. She has been with FSO since 2008, and continues to work directly with the board, liaising between them, like-minded organizations, legal and scientific consultants, and educators to advocate for the sea otter locally, regionally and nationally. She currently resides in New York City and works for a sustainable development organization.

## **Jason Lutterman**

Jason is currently a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in International Environmental Policy at the Monterey Institute of International Studies while serving as Program Manager. He works with FSO's volunteers, accounting systems, and communicates with members from the Carmel office.

Interested in becoming a Board member with FSO and live within the Monterey Bay Area? Please send a copy of your resume and a cover letter explaining why you would like to be on the Board to [info@seaotters.org](mailto:info@seaotters.org). The time commitment is about 5 hours per month.

## **FSO is going Green!**

You may notice a few changes with our donation envelope this time around. In particular, take notice of the new option to receive correspondence from FSO via e-mail instead of regular post. FSO is currently attempting to "Go Green." Please choose if you would rather receive future newsletters and other correspondence by e-mail rather than snail mail (and remember to give us your most current e-mail address!). This way FSO can reserve most of your donations for programs to help sea otters while also doing our part to reduce our environmental footprint.

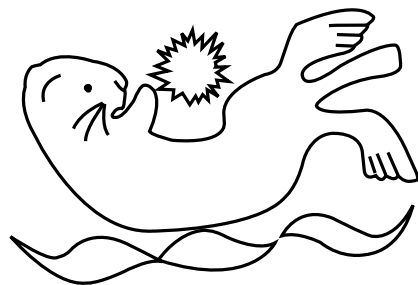
# Hello Dear Sea Otter Fans & Members:

Dear Friends,  
FSO is beginning to see the results of our labors of winter work! In this edition of The Raft, we invite you to read about our efforts and more. Please read a short summary of what's included:

- Along with our programs and projects in California, we've been working at the national level as well. FSO worked with other otter-enthusiasts and submitted comments on the Alaskan Sea Otter Recovery Plan (p.6), and the termination of the no-otter zone. We expect the Fish and Wildlife Services to begin updating the Environmental Impact Statement this summer (p.9);
- FSO has undertaken a new and exciting project that will provide members, the public and researchers with a chance to observe sea otter activity on Yampah Island. (p.8).
- Read an inspiring story about members who promoted sea otter conservation while running a half marathon (p.9).

None of this work would be possible without the messages of support and contributions from our members. We would like to recognize all of you and appreciate your kindnesses and dedication to the conservation of the sea otter. We work diligently every day to fulfill your expectations on behalf of the sea otter and its marine environment!

With respect and appreciation,  
**The Staff and Board of  
Friends of the Sea Otter**



**FRIENDS OF  
THE SEA  
OTTER**

PHOTO CONTEST WINNER



“Smiling Otter”

Congratulations to the winner of the  
FSO photo contest: Marge Brigadier!

# Oil & Otters Don't Mix!



The Deepwater Horizon's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico last year taught us many things, the most important being that the threat of an oil spill is ever-present. If one were to occur along the central Californian coast it could have disastrous consequences for the fragile Southern Sea Otter population.

The threat of an oil spill has grown even larger in recent months with the election of many pro-drilling advocates in the US House of Representatives. The House is now considering H.R. 1231, a bill mandating that half of the unleased area in each of the three regions mentioned in the bill (including the sea otter habitats of California and Bristol Bay, Alaska) be available for lease in every five-year plan.

In light of these developments, we thought it instructive to revisit observations made more than 30 years ago by Scientific Advisor for FSO, Betty S. Davis. Betty wrote the article "Oil and Otters Don't Mix" for issue 18 of *The Raft*. The article was written as a commentary on the oil spill in the waters off Paramushir Island in the northern portion of Kuril Islands chain in the northwest Pacific Ocean. As a result of the spill in 1964 100 sea otters were killed. The information presented in the article is still relevant today as our sea otter populations continue to face the threat of an oil spill, a situation that could jeopardize their existence.

**R**ecent research on oiling of otters in Alaska and California (1977-1978), and the Russian report of otters killed in an oil spill (1968), have shown that:

- Sea otters *do not* avoid oil on water but enter it repeatedly, dying rapidly if left on their own.
- Once oiled, otters spend up to 75% of their time *underwater*, frantically grooming and licking toxic hydrocarbons from their fur.
- When washed, detergents that remove surface crude oils also remove natural hair oils; this may lead to wetting, chilling, hypothermia, pneumonia and death on their return to water. Metabolic rates become greatly elevated, and continue to be slightly elevated for at least 15 days.

- If cleaned, dried, and sheltered for 15+ hours, fur oils may become restored sufficiently to *avoid wetting*; however, long-term survival of one animal so treated and released at sea is uncertain (radio-contact failed after 2 days).
- Otters oiled with minimal amounts of oil may survive on their own; one released with 25cc of oil on its back was monitored 10 days before contact was lost – only the first few days were abnormally active.
- Otters are *slow* to capture with hand-held or tangle nets under optimum conditions. When *frightened* or *invisible* under an oil slick (or in a dense fog or storm) capture would be even *more* difficult.
- Otters do not eat properly and lose weight rapidly under primitive captive conditions (20% loss in 4-5 days; 25% is fatal); out of water, otters are easily heat stressed.
- *Rapid* capture and transport methods, *proper* anesthetics and food supply, *experienced* technicians, *available* shelter, and of appropriate hair restoration techniques are essential prerequisites for rescuing and rehabilitating surface oiled otters; even so, long-term survival is conjectural. Two California otters survived about 12 to 14 days after treatment before becoming ill from pneumonia (under optimum conditions); one responded to antibiotics, the other died 17 days after oiling.

Besides direct oiling impacts, habitat destruction, loss of food supply, pollution of drinking water, and *sublethal cumulative effects of eating* contaminated food objects could have equally adverse effects on the small otter population.

To read the entire article, visit The Raft database on our website at [www.seaotters.org/raft.html](http://www.seaotters.org/raft.html).



## FSO Submits Comments for Alaskan Sea Otter Recovery Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) released the *Southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the Northern Sea Otter Recovery Plan* on October 12, 2010. It not only identified the current threats to the sea otter population, but included population recovery plans as well. Some of the threats to sea otters named in the report are an increase in killer whale predation, infectious diseases, and oil spills. Friends of the Sea Otter considers the report to be relatively thorough in identifying the threats facing sea otters in Southwest Alaska. However, in comments FSO submitted to FWS on February 9 we indicated that the recovery plan is not as comprehensive in its evaluation and ranking of the current threats it identifies.

For example, FWS indicated that a major threat to the sea otter population is killer whale predation, but FWS did not thoroughly indicate why predation on sea otters has increased. An assessment of root causes is needed to help identify a solution not only to help the sea otter's survival but also to help restore the natural food chain

The recovery plan also recognizes that oil spills still pose a high threat because of the small range of the Southwest Alaskan Sea Otter population. However, the report did not underscore the significance of this threat in light of the government's inadequate expertise, equipment, and technology to deal with oil spills in icy waters.

Furthermore, the statements on subsistence harvesting and fisheries bycatch suffer from inaccurate reporting and poor monitoring. An assessment on the severity of the threat posed to sea otter populations and what actions are needed to reduce these threats cannot be completed if data is unreliable.

FSO applauds the plan's suggestions on population monitoring and research. However, the plan should better emphasize the need for frequent annual monitoring. The more data collected, the easier it is to observe new trends and potential negative consequences. More consistent monitoring will also enable faster reaction to negative trends. Because of the precarious position of the Southwest Alaskan Sea Otter population, any decline in their numbers is damaging to their conservation. Thus, immediate investigation into any factor that might adversely effect sea otter population is crucial.

FSO's goal is to support an effective recovery plan – one that accurately details the direct threats sea otters face and realistic strategies to confront these threats. The draft recovery plan makes progress towards developing a comprehensive final plan but FSO will continue to work with FWS to ensure the final plan will be an effective tool in conserving the Southwest Alaska Sea Otter.

**Read the complete plan and our official comments at [www.seaotters.org](http://www.seaotters.org).**

# FSO Supports the No New Drilling Act of 2011

Sea otters are particularly susceptible to oil spills. Unlike other marine mammals, sea otters do not have blubber to insulate themselves from cold-water temperatures. Instead, sea otters rely upon their thick fur for warmth and insulation. Because of this, oil spills are some of the sea otter's worst enemies. Just a small amount of oil can completely rob the otter's fur from its ability to trap heat. Additionally, the Southern Sea Otter range along the West Coast is so small that a single oil spill could decimate the population and their habitat, resulting in a drastic decrease in population size or, in a worst case scenario, their extinction.

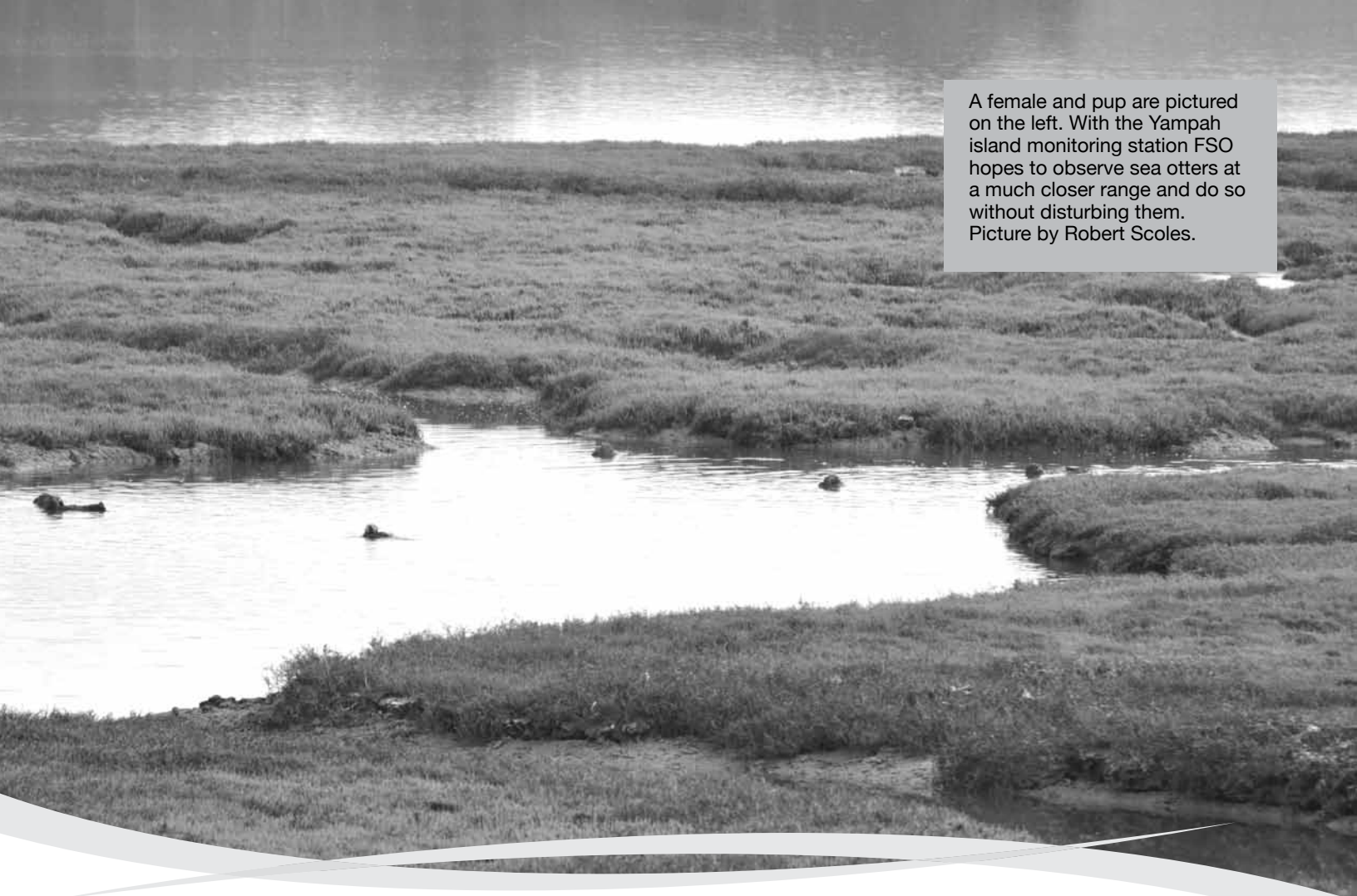
For these reasons Friends of the Sea Otter advocates for the passage of the No New Drilling Act of 2011. This bill would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to make the outer continental shelf off-limits to developers of oil, gas, or any other minerals.

Past outer continental shelf land acts are woefully incomplete, as companies can still obtain exploration or drilling leases. Such activities expose the West Coast to exploitation at the benefit of big oil and natural gas companies and to the detriment of local wildlife.

The No New Drilling Act of 2011, if passed, would be an important step toward ensuring the survival and recovery of the Southern Sea Otter while also preserving the unique coastal ecosystem in which it lives.

**To view the bill and send a letter to your representative, visit [www.seaotters.org/takeaction.html](http://www.seaotters.org/takeaction.html).**





A female and pup are pictured on the left. With the Yampah island monitoring station FSO hopes to observe sea otters at a much closer range and do so without disturbing them. Picture by Robert Scoles.

# Yampah Island Project

In the spring 2010 edition of *The Raft*, we published “Unknown Otters of Parson’s Slough.” In this article Ron Eby of the Elkhorn Slough Reserve described that among the mud flats and tidal creeks of Parson’s Slough, an area about a mile upstream in the Elkhorn Slough complex near Moss Landing, up to 20 sea otters can commonly be seen resting and foraging. Eby has also noted an unusual behavior. Some sea otters appear to be spending more time on land than is typical. FSO is most interested in this behavior, which has been thought rare for Southern Sea Otters. In October 2010 FSO entered into an agreement with the Elkhorn Slough Reserve to establish a monitoring station on Yampah Island. This region, near Parson’s Slough, will be the site of a wireless camera system that will broadcast a live feed to the Reserve’s visitor center. The live feed will also be available to sea otter researchers and FSO members.

One of our goals for this camera is to reduce the need for volunteers to observe otters on site. Video, pictures, and data captured by the monitoring station will allow sea otter researchers to better understand the behavior of our favorite critter without the potential for human disturbance. It will also provide FSO members and Elkhorn Slough visitors the chance to see exactly what the researchers are watching.

Last month, in the Yampah Island area, a Elkhorn Slough Reserve volunteer witnessed the birth of a sea otter pup.

Ron Eby, FSO’s liaison for the Yampah Island Project, reported: “This event has very seldom been observed in the wild. The mother was hauled out on the pickleweed, then entered the water to give birth. After giving birth she rested on her back on the mud bank while grooming her pup for the next hour or so.”

“Pictures were taken from over 100 meters away, but if the camera had been installed we might have been able to get some quality pictures and video from close range,” Eby said.

Ron Eby will install the FSO camera sometime in late spring.

*To learn more about the Yampah Island project, or to become an official steward of the Yampah Island Monitoring Station, contact [info@seaotters.org](mailto:info@seaotters.org) or visit our website at [www.seaotters.org/yampah.html](http://www.seaotters.org/yampah.html).*



## Sea Otters Spotted on Santa Cruz Streets!

Long-time FSO members Sue Stutton and Deborah Paolini did their part to spread the word about sea otters on April 10th while running a half marathon in Santa Cruz, CA. The two friends decided to “act the part” by dressing up as sea otters. They also passed out useful information on how to keep the ocean clean, how to donate to the Sea Otter Fund on California tax forms, and information on H.R. 261, the No New Drilling Act of 2011. Their costumes were decorated with dangling kelp, and the ladies even wore rocks in case an abalone or other treat was offered to them for a snack!

**“It was great fun,”**

said Deborah Paolini (right) with friend Sue Stutton (left)

“People were extremely receptive to ‘otter power,’” said Deborah. The two friends successfully built awareness for our favorite animal while having fun at the same time. Deborah and Sue plan to return to the streets for other events around the area and abroad. Keep your eyes open for them and if you see them let them know you appreciate their efforts!

Interested in spreading the word about sea otters in your area? We’d like to help! Contact Friends of the Sea Otter at [info@seaotters.org](mailto:info@seaotters.org) about fliers and information packets to make your efforts more worthwhile.

## One Step Closer to Expanding Sea Otter Range

In the campaign to end the no-otter zone off the coast of California, FSO and other otter enthusiasts continue to urge the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to swiftly amend their current rule limiting the sea otter range and allow sea otters to naturally expand their range.

In a letter to Friends of the Sea Otter on September 9, 2010, FWS outlined a two-year plan in which the Service would release a revised environmental impact assessment of the no-otter zone rule, conduct internal and external consultation, and finally write and publish a new rule. This plan, however, would not be completed until late 2012. It would place this crucial decision for the Southern Sea Otter into a highly political arena of a presidential election season.

FSO and our partners contended in a response to FWS on January 11 that all required preparations and a final rule could, and should, be ready within a year. Last year’s census of the Southern Sea Otter indicated the population had dropped

by 3.6%, including a dangerous 11% drop in pups, over the previous three years. The threats facing sea otters remain varied and include disease, pollution, and shark predation. The downward trend demonstrates how vulnerable the sea otter population remains and will remain so as long as population growth and range expansion remain limited by the no-otter zone. FSO believes a quick decision terminating the no-otter zone is possible in light of FWS’s own 2000 biological opinion and 2003 revised recovery plan for the Southern Sea Otter, which outlined the need for natural range expansion. FSO will continue to advocate for the termination of the no-otter zone, an action that will allow sea otters to naturally expand their range.

To read the FSO’s letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service, visit [www.seaotters.org](http://www.seaotters.org).

# Sea Otters Need Your Help Now More Than Ever!

The latest census offers a grim future for southern sea otters, whose numbers have declined for the second straight year. Unfortunately the economic recession has had a negative impact on the sea otters' protectors like Friends of the Sea Otter as well! We need your help now more than ever as we ramp up our efforts to expand sea otter range and secure much needed federal funding for otter researchers and conservationists. Please consider sending a donation today!

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