



The  
Alaska  
Sea Otter and  
Steller Sea Lion  
Commission

*1988-2006: Eighteen years preserving the balance for Alaska Native peoples & marine mammals.*

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**2006 PLANNING SESSION**

**FEBRUARY 2, 2006**

LUPINE ROOM, HILTON  
ANCHORAGE, AK

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**THE ALASKA SEA OTTER AND STELLER SEA LION COMMISSION**

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## **THE ALASKA SEA OTTER AND STELLER SEA LION COMMISSION PLANNING BACKGROUND**

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The Alaska Sea Otter Commission, a tribal consortium, was established in 1988 to promote Alaska Native involvement in policy decisions pertaining to sea otters. In 1998, at the request of member tribes, The Alaska Sea Otter Commission added Steller sea lions to its mission and goals, formally expanding to The Alaska Sea Otter and Steller Sea Lion Commission (TASSC).

Throughout the past eighteen years, TASSC has worked with coastal Alaska Native peoples, Alaska tribal governments and communities to protect Alaska Native rights, further involve local people in marine mammal research and management, and to fulfill conservation and management measures in the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act and the Fur Seal Act.

In November 2004, TASSC Commissioners and staff undertook a strategic planning process, resulting in a FY2005 Strategic Plan, which was subsequently updated in March, 2005. In a continuing effort to effectively plan for the future and to incorporate Alaska Native tribal concerns and issues into its on-going planning effort, TASSC Board of Commissioners and staff met with tribal representatives in February 2006 to identify key areas of concern, priorities for the future and ideas for future actions.

At the outset of the February 2006 planning session, participants met in regional groups to discuss the most critical sea otter/sea lion related issues and priorities facing tribes, communities, residents and TASSC; followed by a presentation of highlights by each group. While there were a wide range of ideas, issues and concerns discussed, four main themes emerged – marketing, resource/habitat management, research, and education/training. Participants then were provided a general overview of the TASSC Strategic Plan and TASSC project history. Finally, two rounds of general topic area discussions were held to elicit further ideas and thoughts on the four main themes from the regional discussions – marketing, resource/habitat management, research, and education/training.

## **REGIONAL ISSUES AND PRIORITIES**

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The planning participants met in groups, by regional areas, to discuss the most critical sea otter/sea lion related issues and priorities facing tribes, communities, residents and TASSC.

Following are the critical sea otter/Steller sea lion related issues and priorities facing tribes, communities, residents and TASSC that were identified by the individual regional working groups:

### **COOK INLET/CHUGACH**

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#### ***Top Issues/Priorities:***

- Marketing of sea otter products
- Fisheries – confusing and difficult regulations, conflicts between sport, commercial, and traditional fishing, tensions between fishers and mammals
- Tanning- expense involved

#### ***Other Issues/Priorities:***

- Hunting and harvesting techniques

### **SOUTHEAST**

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#### ***Top Issues/Priorities:***

- High cost of tanning, hunting and maintenance and development of marketing website
- Marketing handicraft
- Sewing skills – difficult to find people to sew, work with product

#### ***Other Issues/Priorities:***

- Education – what crafts can be made, regulations
- Conflicts with commercial divers shooting sea otters and over-harvesting

## **BRISTOL BAY**

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### ***Top Issues/Priorities:***

- In the Manokotak area there is misinformation regarding subsistence “takes” of Steller sea lions and other marine mammals ( Example: Residents have been told or sent information indicating that they can’t shoot/hunt Steller sea lions for subsistence purposes).
- Would like more information on sea otter and Steller sea lion management plans – procedures and process. (Chigniks)
- In the late 80’s and early 90’s in Bristol Bay, when travelers were fishing in Kulukak herring fishery, Steller sea lions declined - but now they are coming back in abundance .

### ***Other Issues/Priorities:***

- Want to understand about “non-fish” and “non-animals” terms.
- In the Manokotak area, they have been told they can’t collect eggs.
- In the Manokotak area, harbor seals (nayaq’s) are seen year round.
- In the Chigniks, they have sea otters and they are not disturbed by the local residents.

## **KODIAK**

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### ***Top Issues/Priorities:***

- Need to develop a local area management plan and critical habitat
- Support of TASSC as a statewide organization
- Marine mammal impact on other species

### ***Other Issues/Priorities:***

- Blood quantum/descendency
- Communication amongst hunters and artisans
- Need accurate numbers of sea otter
- RFP for all villages
- Rural/urban subsistence designation- Kodiak City possibly being designated as urban
- Support for artisans
- Increased understanding of MMPA

## ALEUTIANS/PRIBILOF ISLANDS

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### *Top Issues/Priorities:*

- Marketability of sea mammal products
- Research is disconnected from local communities
- Confusion with regulations

### *Other Issues/Priorities:*

- Possible sea otter counts in Atka, Sandpoint, King Cove, False Pass  
Unalaska population of sea otter stable  
Do they: Move with food source?  
Is there predation and has it been documented?
- For the Aleutians, would like to see follow-up research due to oil spill impacts for both species and the long term effects of oiling, effects of soy beans

## OTHER ISSUES

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- TASSC as a conduit for two-way information (laws and regulations) between USFWS and tribes/rural residents
- TASSC partnering with USFWS to develop informational material
- International sales and marketing issues
  - Regulations
  - Visitors
  - Cultural Regalia/Materials

Generally, the regional groups identified four critical issue areas:

### ❖ Marketing

Marketing of sea otter/Steller sea lion products is a continuing challenge for Native artisans. Participants identified the need for (1) a stronger support network for marketing products, (2) education and training for artisans as well as the education of consumers, and (3) assistance with a variety of international regulatory barriers facing artisans/cultural performers.

❖ **Resource/Habitat Management Issues**

Strong consensus was formed that sea otter/Steller sea lion resource and habitat management issues continue to be critical. Participants identified the need to continue development of management plans and to plan for, research and manage critical habitat. Additionally, participants expressed concern about the “nuisance factor” created by large numbers of sea otters/Steller sea lions and the tensions created between subsistence and commercial interests.

❖ **Research**

Research is also an area of great importance to TASSC and to Alaska Native tribes. Participants identified the need for better communication of science and research to tribes, communities and local residents. Currently, there seems to be a “disconnect” between those participating/conducting research studies and the local tribes, communities and residents as to the research findings, outcomes and impacts. Additionally, there seems to be a great deal of misinformation about issues concerning sea otter/sea lions among tribes, communities and residents.

❖ **Education/Training**

There is a great need for education and training, which covers a broad spectrum of subject matters and issues. Participants identified the need for education and training on laws and regulations, hunting standards and traditions, traditional uses and contemporary skills, and product marketing.

## **PRIORITIES, ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS BY TOPIC**

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After regional discussions, two rounds of general topic area discussions were held to elicit further ideas and thoughts on the four main themes that emerged from the regional discussions – marketing, resource/habitat management, research, and education/training. Following are the priorities and suggestions for future action that each group identified.

### **MARKETING**

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#### ***Marketing of Products***

- Cooperatives – seek grants to fund cooperatives to be run by artists themselves
- Develop website to include information on Silver Hand (what it means to be a Silver Hand artist), artist biographies and contact information, links to websites where consumers can purchase handicraft items
- TASSC endorsement of authentic Native handicraft – similar to Silver Hand
- Advertising – Native American and artist venues, i.e. POWWOW Magazine, American Indian Art, Sierra Club
- E-commerce – websites
- Participation in Native gatherings

#### ***Education and training***

- Educational video- process of making sea otter handicraft from start to finish
- Educate buyers- Silver Hand, sea otter fur “finest in the world”
- Coordinate village corporation meetings for artists
- “Learn how to drive/draw customers to your marketplace - whether it be a shop or a website”

#### ***International marketing and customers***

- International brochures
- One-stop shopping for rules and regulations for artisans

## RESOURCE/HABITAT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

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### *Management Plans*

- Management plans should be based on best available information (science and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)).
- Management objectives need to be balanced between multiple uses and be consistent with existing laws/regulations.
- Management plans need to be developed in the Alaska Peninsula area. Local input needs to be included, particularly traditional knowledge in managing the Steller sea lion and sea otters.
- In developing management plans, need to address the Steller sea lion nuisance issue in the region and other marine mammal concerns at the local level - because Steller sea lions impact every fishery differently depending on the region/area.
- Steller sea lion/sea otter management plans need to address different types of fisheries – regional fishery district (i.e., Bristol Bay/Alaska Peninsula/Unalaska). Ex: Bristol Bay commercial fishery uses gillnets; Chignik and Alaska Peninsula commercial fisheries use trawl/seine/gillnets – deep water fishing.
- After developing a management plan at the local level, invite government/state agency representatives to consult with tribes in the review of the draft management plan.
- Each region has different subsistence needs (Ex: Akutan harvests sea lions and Unalaska harvests sea otters) and the impact is different.
- Include predation of Steller sea lions in the management plan (i.e., killer whales).

### *Critical Habitat*

- Need a better understanding of critical habitat.
- Needs to be defined region by region. Critical habitat needs are different in each region. Also, impacts to commercial fishing are different.
- Research scientists need to respect the local tribal/traditional and subsistence knowledge/laws and they need to consult with the local village councils or marine mammal councils/commissions before conducting research projects (i.e. not during subsistence activities).
- Need to develop inter-management plans (i.e., how we cope with subsistence of the sea lions/sea otters (each region has different needs)

## RESEARCH

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- Researchers come to the community....then leave.
- Integrate outreach into research design.
- Central/comprehensive contact list (TASSC?) so no one is left out of the loop
- Intern/Career opportunities for tribal members
- Dissemination of fact sheets: How can we improve?
- Convey: How does research impact you?
- Build TEK into study design.
- Research should build local capacity – train local bio-technicians.
- Tribes and agencies, together, should develop research priorities, and build local capacity by training community technicians, utilizing local expertise and encouraging local long-range programs.
- When researchers are communicating study results to the community they must speak in laymen's terms.
- Agencies need to communicate with Natives that it is okay to harvest marine mammals that are collared or branded, and the agencies would appreciate tag or collar returned to agency.
- Research doesn't interfere with subsistence practices.
- Disparities exist between science/research and TEK.

## **EDUCATION/TRAINING**

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### ***Laws and Regulations***

- Create a handbook of laws and regulations.
- Translations of laws/regulations into Native languages (also include management plans).

### ***Traditional Uses/Contemporary Skills***

- Cultural heritage day/week
- Elders educate youth
- Mentoring
- Participate at Science/Culture camps
- Develop a list of culture-bearers
- Develop How-to Booklets/Videos (by region)
  - Skinning/Cleaning
  - Food preparation
  - Recipe book
- Educate non-natives on traditional/customary uses and skills
- Revive skinning competitions

### ***Other***

- Develop partnerships/dialogue with charter boats/divers/commercial fishers – share resource plans – complementary and mutually supportive.
  - Communication with Law Enforcement
  - Encourage and foster communication/understanding rather than antagonism – good public relations
- Compile TEK and historical usage information collected for sea otter lawsuits.

## **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

*TASSC gratefully acknowledges the following participants for contributing their time to assist TASSC with identifying future priorities and actions.*

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