Status of the Translocated Sea Otter Population in Washington

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Washington Ocean Caucus

Forks WA

1 June 2009

Marine Mammal Protection Act 1972

Jurisdiction for Marine Mammals is Divided

U.S Dept. of Commerce

National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

U.S. Dept. of Interior

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Section 101 Take Moratorium

"There shall be a moratorium on the taking* and importation of marine mammals and marine mammal products…except by …"

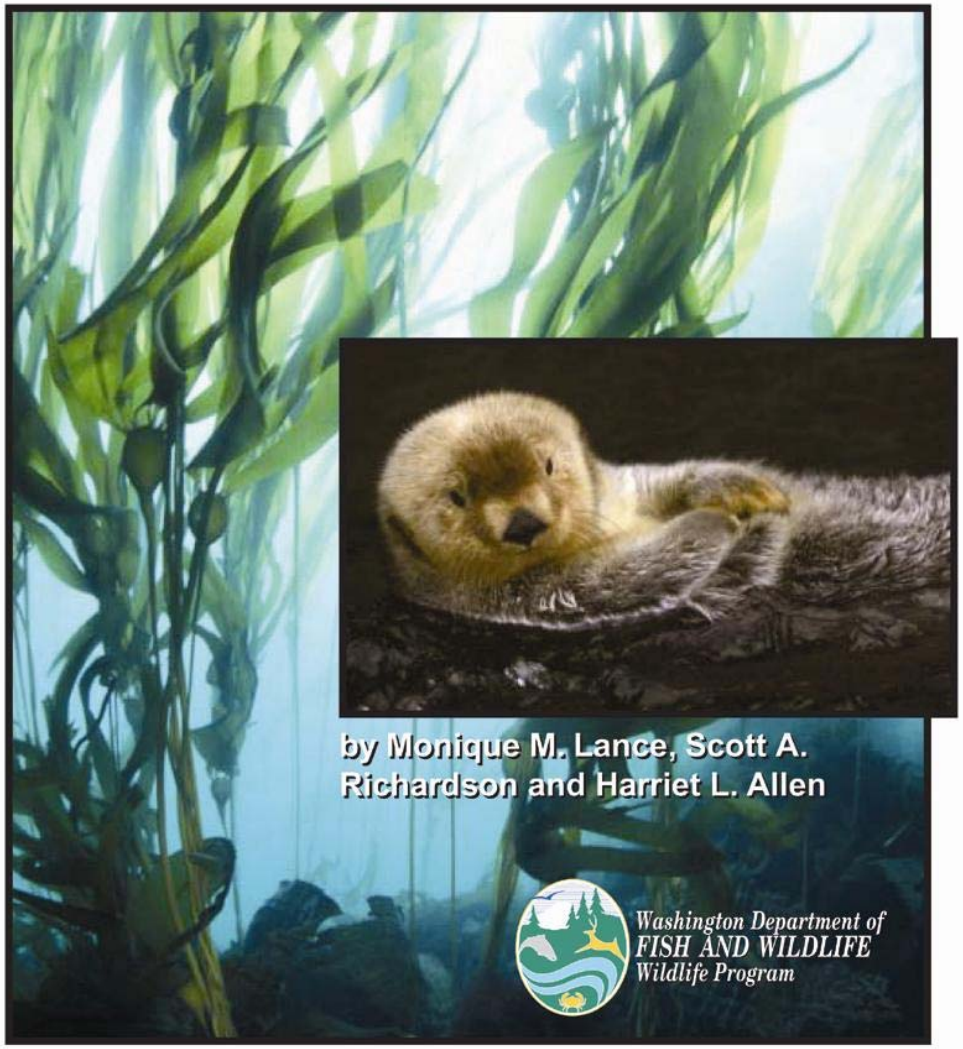
* Take is defined as "hunt, harass, capture or kill or attempt to hunt, harass, capture or kill".

Sec.109 Cooperation With States

- States may not make or enforce state regulations on take of marine mammals without return of management
- States may request return of management authority for conservation and management
- Federal, state and local officials may take marine mammals in the course of official duties.
  - Protection of the animal
  - Protection of the public health & welfare
  - Non-lethal removal of nuisance animals

STATE OF WASHINGTON December 2004

Sea Otter Recovery Plan



by Monique M. Lance, Scott A. Richardson and Harriet L. Allen

Washington Department of
FISH AND WILDLIFE
Wildlife Program

Russia
AK
Canada
Bering Sea
Kamchatka Peninsula
Pribilof Is.
Aleutian Islands
Prince William Sound
Kuril Islands
WA
OR
Pacific Ocean
Japan
USA
CA
San Nicolas Is.
Mexico
Historical Range
Current Range
Ranges are not to scale - sea otters generally live within five miles of shore
The Pribiilofs and San Nicolas have fewer than 50 otters each

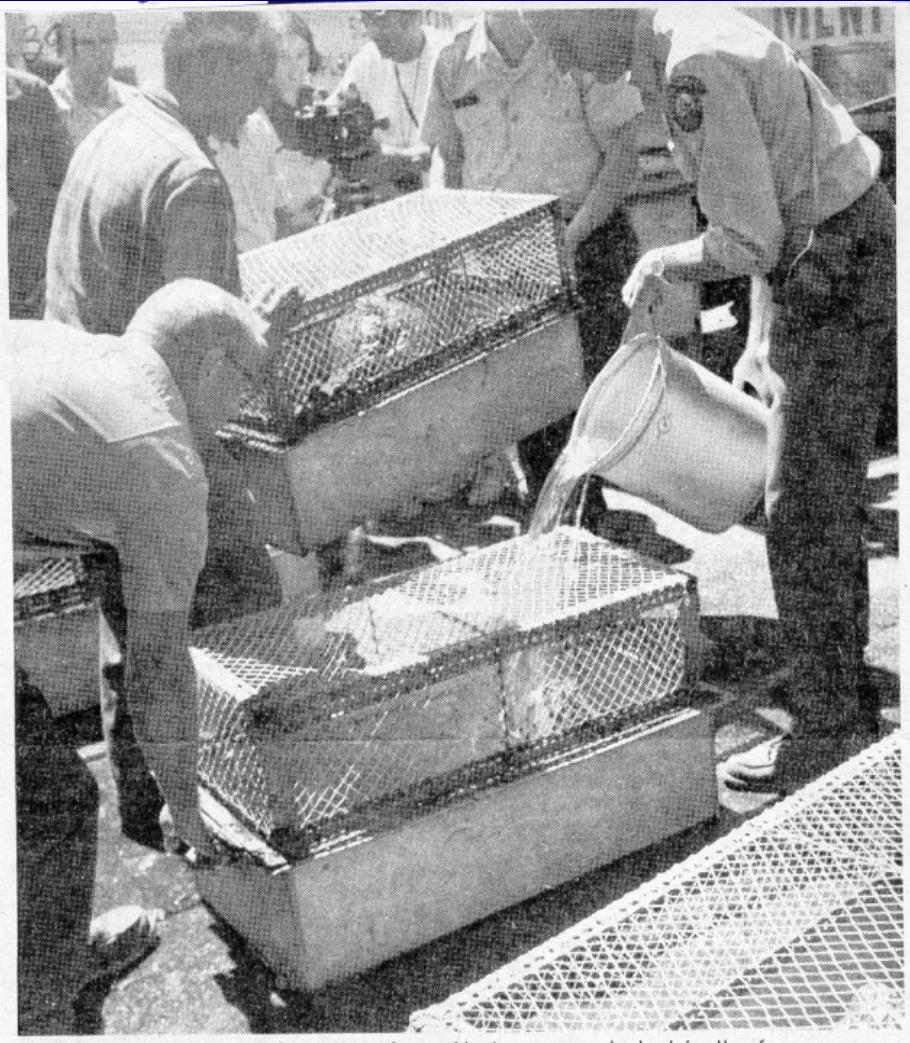
Historic Range in Washington

Prior to their extirpation from Washington by maritime fur trade hunting in the early 20th century, sea otters ranged from CR to Neah Bay including Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay

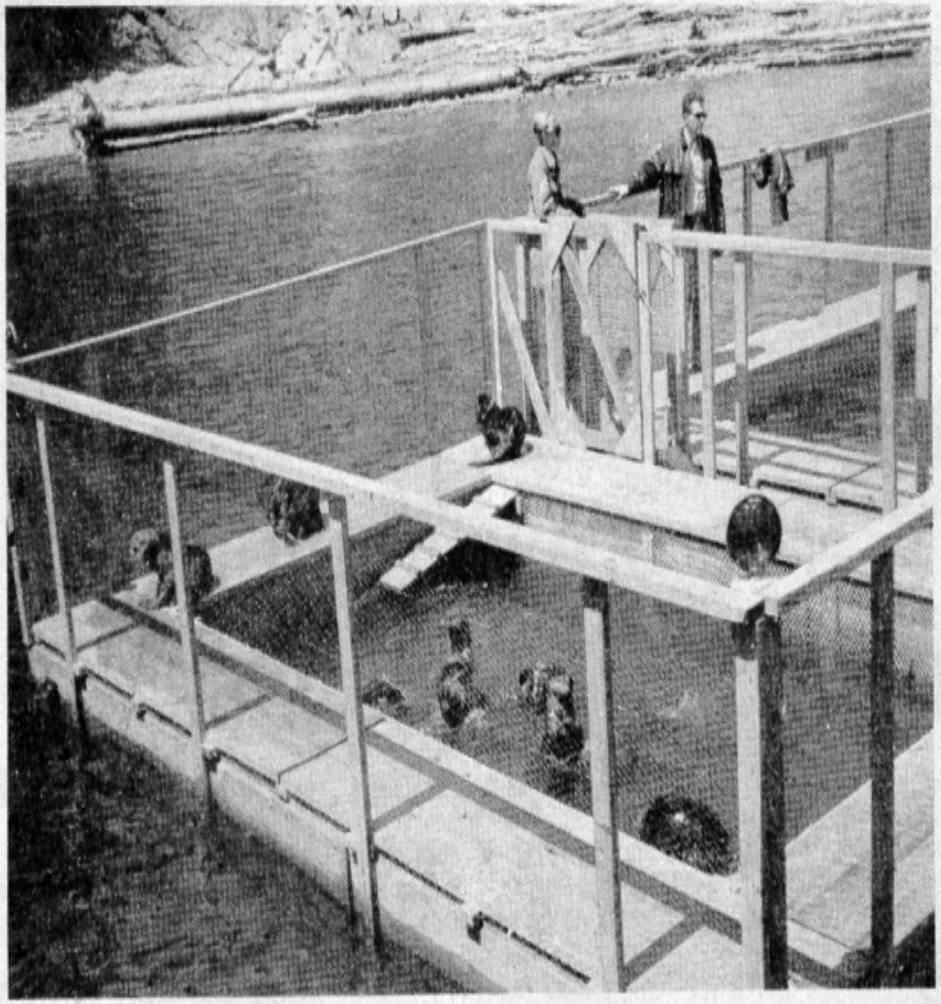
Sea Otters in Washington

- Extirpated by 1911
- Translocations in 1969-70
- 59 moved from Amchitka, AK

LaPush-1970



WET WELCOME — Sea otters from Alaska were splashed in the face upon arrival to the United States Saturday at Quillayute air base. State Wildlife Agent Don Bakker from Port Angeles manned the bucket — Evening News photos by Bill Tubbs.



HOLDING PEN —The otters were transported to the mouth of the Quillayute River. The transplanted animals will be watched in the holding pens for about 10 days. It is hoped they will adjust to the new environment before being let loose.

Sea Otter Ecology

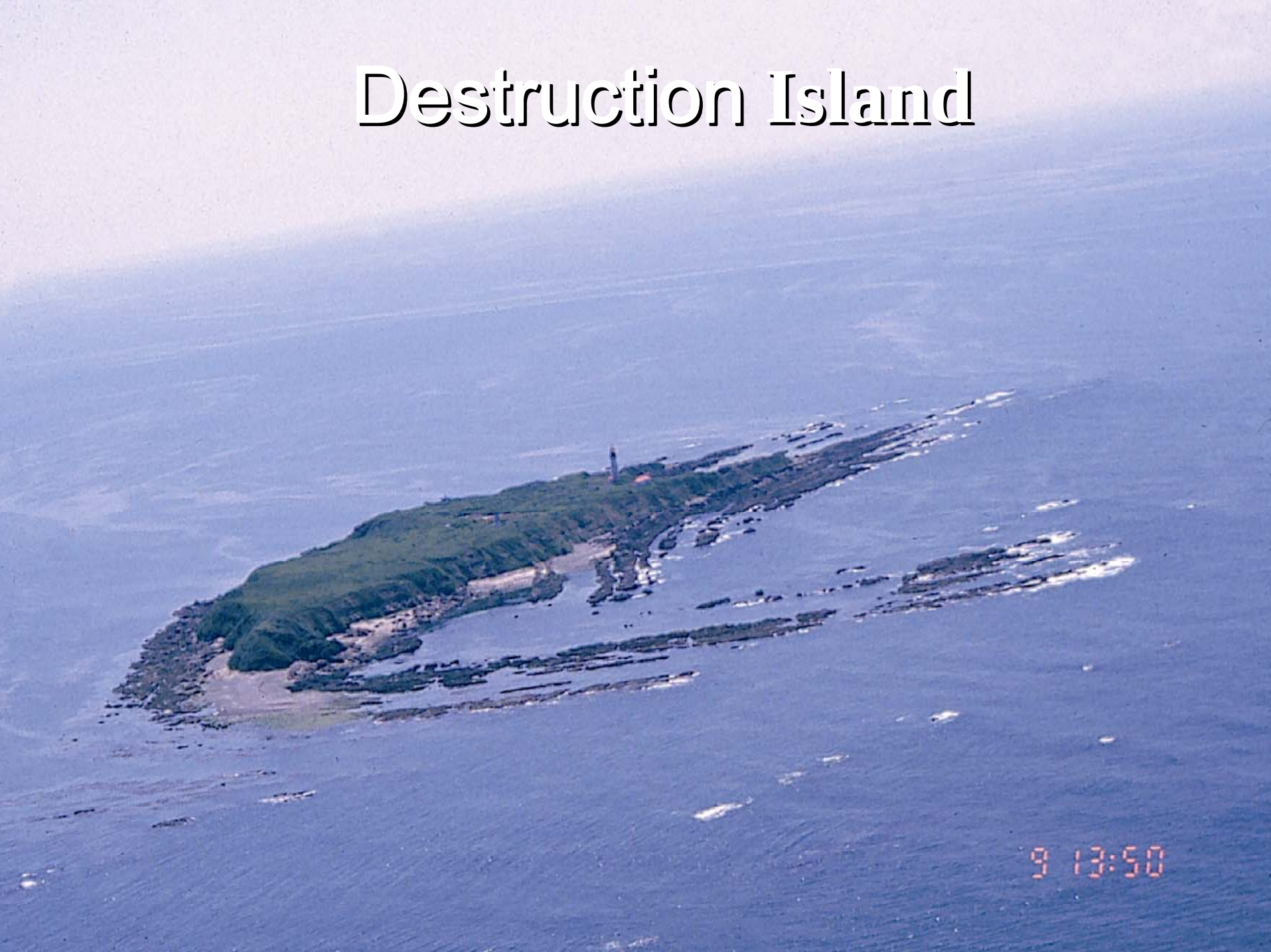
- Top predators
- Live close to shore but can forage to 20 fathoms
- High metabolism 30-40% of body wt per day
- Small home ranges but travel from DI to Neah Bay
- Conflicts with shellfish resources
- Vulnerable to oil spills

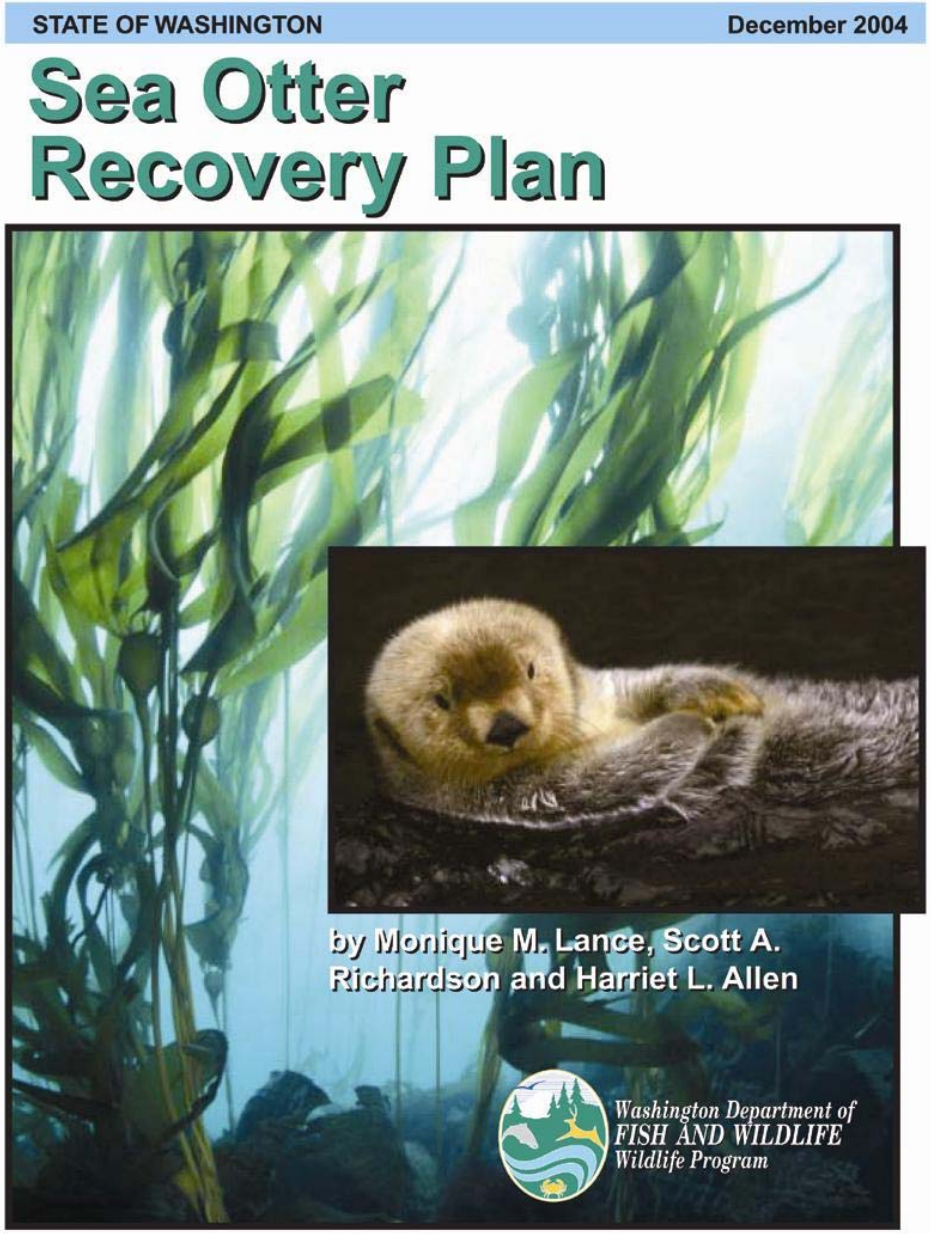
Rocky outer coast with kelp canopy
= ideal sea otter habitat

Cape Alava

Cape Johnson to LaPush

Destruction Island





Part One ~ Background

Part Two ~ Recovery

Recovery strategies and tasks include:

1. Monitor the population
2. Protect the population
3. Protect the habitat
4. Information mngmt.
5. Public info and education
6. Research**
7. Coordinate all interested
8. Prepare for direct mngmt.

6. Undertake research that will facilitate and enhance recovery efforts

- Determine long-term growth and expansion of the population in Washington
- Determine abundance, distribution and diet of sea otters in Washington

Washington Sea Otter Surveys

-2nd week in July
-aerial with ground observers
-Cessna 185 @ 700-900 feet
-3 days with 2 passes each day
-photos of groups
-adult:pup ratios from ground

Figure 1 . Growth of Washington sea otter population, showing 3-yr running average of counts, 1989-2008

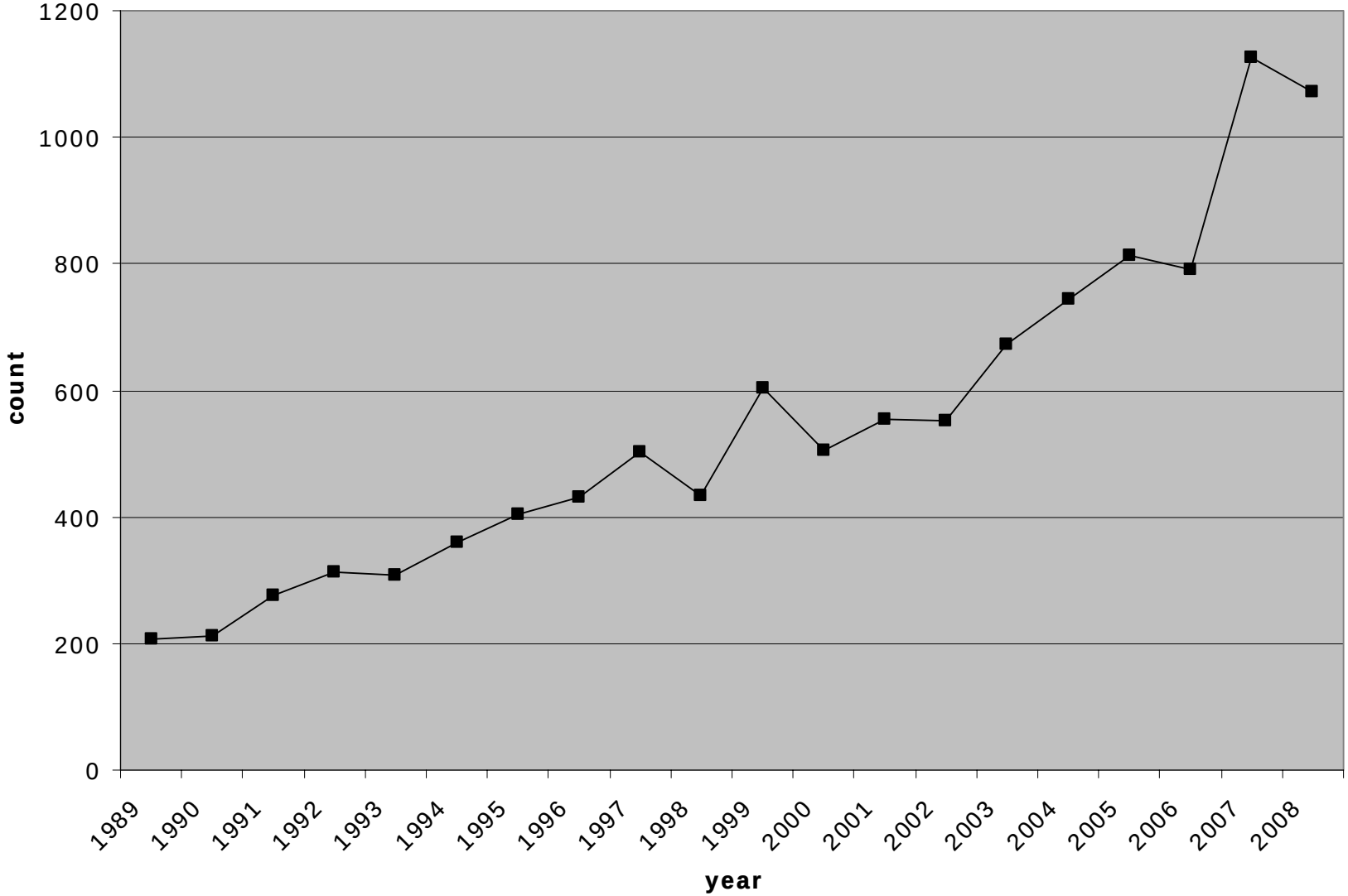
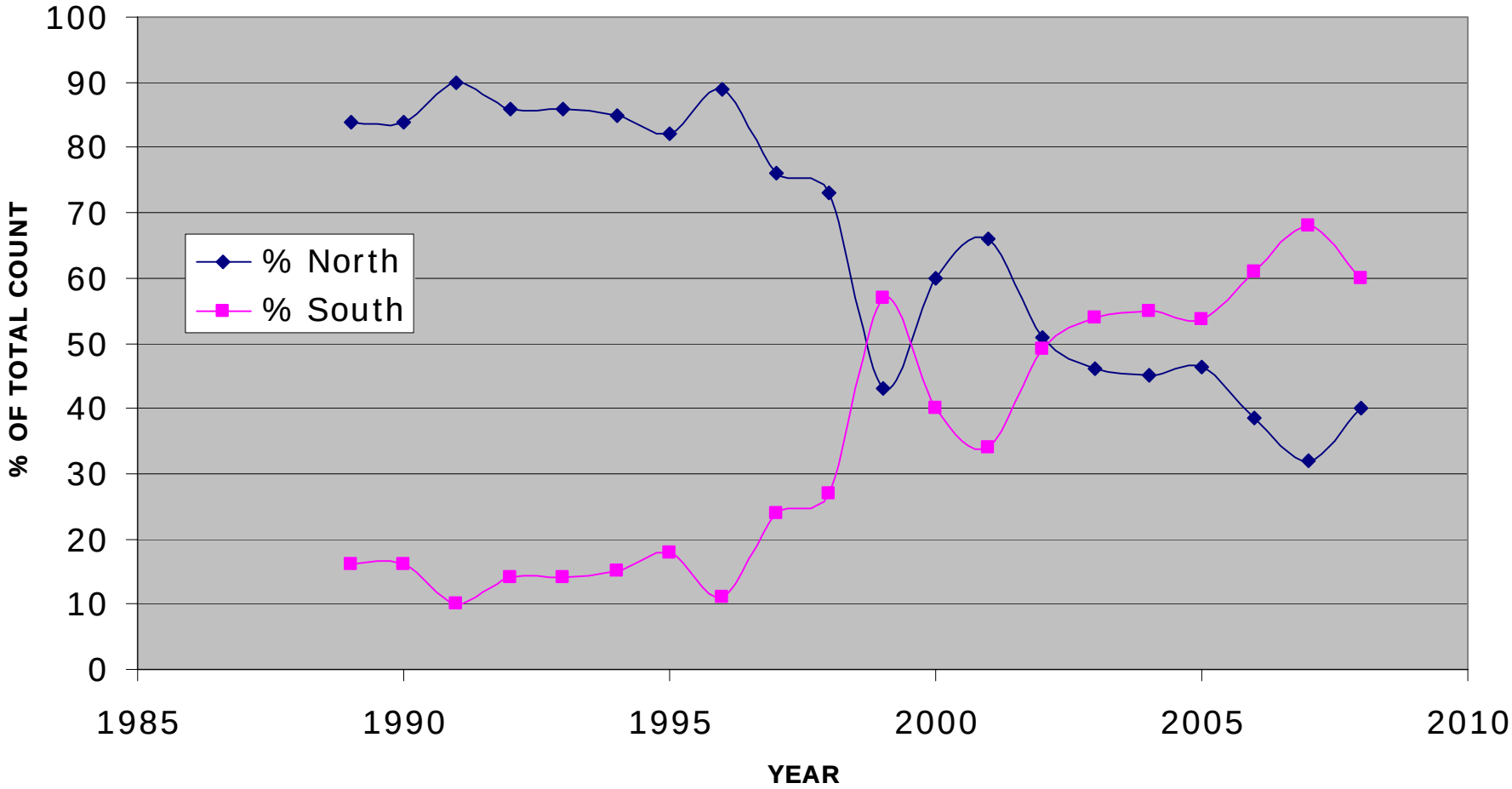


Figure 2. Distribution of sea otters in Washington as a percentage of total population count within north and south segments, 1989-2008.



Research: sea otter captures

- Wilson traps
- Tangle nets

More captures…

- Surgically implant radiotags

Research: focal observations

- Questar from land
- Data recorded included: date, time, location, dive time, post dive surface time, dive success, prey species, prey size, number of prey

Results

Dive and surfacing behavior

- Avg. dive time 55 s did not differ b/w M and F
- Avg. surface time 45 s did not differ b/w M and F
- Ad longer surface times than SAd
- Surface time did not differ b/w successful vs unsuccessful dives

Results

Prey capture success

- No significant difference b/w M and F when all ages pooled
- Success rate higher for Ad

Prey selection

•Dive time highest for other prey and sea stars and lowest for urchins (change over time, availability)

Results

- Sea otters in Washington are generalists, but will preferentially prey upon sea urchins where available
- Sea otters will impact the nearshore environment and fishery resources as they like red urchins, Dungeness crab and razor clams

Fisheries Interactions

- Set and Drift Gillnets-SJF
- Lots of crab pots-18,000
- Razor clams in sandy habitat near DI and to the south

Summary

- +1,000 and growing
- Open question where, when and if they will expand range
- Anticipate potential conflicts with urchin, crab and razor clams in the future
- Protect population:
  oil spills

Questions ??