



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, California 93003

IN REPLY REFER TO:
81440-2011-TA-0072

December 14, 2010

Doug Bosco, Chair
California Coastal Conservancy
1330 Broadway, Suite 1300
Oakland, California 94618

Dear Mr. Bosco:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) encourages the California Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) to continue to fund, through completion, the ongoing research project entitled "Investigating the Consequences of Coastal Contamination and Anthropogenic Stressors for Sea Otter Recovery" (hereafter referred to as the Monterey-Big Sur study) with monies from the California Sea Otter Fund. As you know, the Service is charged with bringing the threatened southern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris nereis*) to recovery under the Endangered Species Act and to its Optimum Sustainable Population level under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. We believe that the subject project, which is the result of a cooperative effort between members of the sea otter research alliance, represents an important and appropriate use of the sea otter tax check-off funds allocated to the Conservancy. Disease figures prominently as a cause of death in the stranded sea otters that have been examined, but the extent to which, and the specific pathways by which, disease is driving the patterns of mortality that are hindering recovery are unknown. Until these pathways and their relative importance to sea otter recovery are elucidated, it will be difficult or impossible to develop and prioritize effective management strategies.

The main purpose of the comparative study, as its title suggests, is to provide credible science on the causal links between contamination and other anthropogenic stressors and sea otter mortality. Observations made during the first 2 years of work have already yielded important insights. For instance, the ocean discharge of freshwater microcystins (persistent biotoxins produced by cyanobacteria of the genus *Microcystis*) was linked to the deaths of 21 sea otters, 4 of which were radio-tagged (Miller *et al.* 2010). Information collected for the Monterey-Big Sur study on the home ranges and prey preferences of these four sea otters pointed to a common source of exposure in south Monterey Bay and a possible route of exposure via consumption of bivalve mollusks. Stranding clusters for other microcystin-poisoned sea otters indicated additional high-risk sites. These results demonstrate the importance of long-term live-animal monitoring as a complement to post-mortem investigations and the promise that the approach holds for identifying the sources of other harmful inputs to the nearshore marine environment. However, completion of the 3-year duration of field work and the full complement of related analyses on archived samples will be needed to realize the potential of the research.

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Exhibit 3: Project Letters

Doug Bosco

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The Service strongly supports this research project because it seeks to provide the very information that will be needed to identify focused and appropriate recovery and management actions. In fact, from the perspective of southern sea otter recovery, it is the most important and relevant research currently underway. We appreciate the support the Conservancy has already given the project and urge your continued funding of it.

Please do not hesitate to contact Lilian Carswell of my staff at (805) 612-2793 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

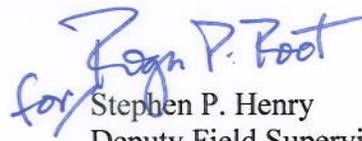

for Stephen P. Henry
Deputy Field Supervisor

Exhibit 3: Project Letters



Marine Program Office

P.O. Box 959 | Moss Landing, CA 95039 | tel 831.726.9010 | fax 831.726.9020
www.defenders.org | www.saveseaotters.org

December 14, 2010

Doug Bosco, Chair
State Coastal Conservancy
1330 Broadway, Suite 1300
Oakland, CA 94618

Dear Mr. Doug Bosco:

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) and our over 145,000 members and activists in California, we would like to urge the California Coastal Conservancy to continue to direct money raised through the California Sea Otter Fund to support the research project proposal titled, "Investigating the Consequences of Coastal Contamination and Anthropogenic Stressors for Sea Otter Recovery." Defenders greatly appreciates all of the work of the Conservancy and staff to promote the California Sea Otter Fund and to take the time to participate in meetings to discuss southern sea otter research priorities and how best to use the funding that comes in through the California Sea Otter Fund.

This research project funded through the California Sea Otter Fund, as you know, is now entering its third year and already important information has been gleaned from the project and at least one new piece of information regarding the freshwater toxic algae, microcystin, has been published in PLoS as "Evidence for a Novel Marine Harmful Algal Bloom: Cyanotoxin (Microcystin) Transfer from Land to Sea Otters" in 2010 by Miller et al.

As you've heard discussed, disease is one of the leading causes of mortality in the stranded sea otters that have been examined, but there is still a great deal about how disease is transmitted that is unknown. Until these pathways and their relative importance to sea otter recovery are elucidated, it will be difficult or impossible to develop and prioritize effective management strategies. The main purpose of the comparative study, as its title suggests, is to provide credible science on the causal links between contamination and other anthropogenic stressors and sea otter mortality.

Meanwhile, since this research group and others are trying to also better understand other impacts to the sea otter population in California and how to mitigate those impacts, Defenders of Wildlife is leading efforts to introduce a bill that would renew the California Sea Otter Fund on state income tax forms for another five years. The information this research group obtains from the present project and any future ones will, in my mind, be the key to understanding sea otter mortality in California and working towards efforts to recover this population.

Defenders has worked collaboratively on many levels with the great team of researchers from U.S.G.S, CDFG, U.C. Davis, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the University of California, Santa Cruz and other agencies and organizations. This multi-disciplinary team possesses the expertise and commitment to complete the ongoing project, and the resulting data and analyses will inform specific conservation-action recommendations—such as managing specific routes of land-sea pathogen transmission—that should encourage sea otter population growth and improve ocean health.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Best regards,

Jim Curland, Marine Program Associate

National Headquarters

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Washington, D.C. 20036-4604
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Exhibit 3: Project Letters

December 20, 2010

Douglas Bosco, Chair
State Coastal Conservancy
1330 Broadway, Suite 1300
Oakland, CA 94618

Re: Funding for sea otter research

Dear Chair Bosco:

I am writing to urge you to maintain your support for the research project *Investigating the Consequences of Coastal Contamination and Anthropogenic Stressors for Sea Otter Recovery*. As you know, the southern sea otter population is continuing to struggle and over the past few years has begun to decline. The work funded by the Coastal Conservancy is vital to determining the principal reasons for this decline and for determining how to stimulate the recovery of the species.

The sea otter research project is now in its third and final year. Much has been accomplished over the course of this study—we have determined vital information about southern sea otters and the threats they face from pollution and other sources of habitat destruction. Project investigators have met or exceeded all of their research goals to date, and they are committed to completing the full scope of work in the coming year. However, we cannot finish this project without funding for the final year, and without a complete project we will not have a comprehensive view of the threats to California's sea otters.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you provide full funding for the final year of this important project. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and others will continue to invest significant matching resources of our own in this project in 2011. Your support will be essential to the successful conclusion of this work.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Sutton", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael Sutton
Vice President
Center for the Future of the Oceans

cc: Sam Schuchat