

Sustainability of Coastal Communities and Sea Otters

Project Summary

The Southeast Alaska sea otter population is estimated at 25,000 individuals (2010-2012) and continues to grow. We are interested in documenting resource conflicts between sea otters and subsistence harvesters, specifically impacts of sea otters on local resources, sea otter traditions, and human interactions with sea otters since they were reintroduced. Our research will result in a better understanding of how rural communities are experiencing changes due to sea otters and will document local features that make communities resilient or susceptible to these changes.

Study Sites

This study will take place in Hydaburg, Klawock, and Kake.

Objectives

- Identify patterns of subsistence resource use before and after sea otters were reintroduced.
- Identify sea otter impacts on other resources (non-subsistence).
- Document sea otter distribution and abundances.
- Document traditional and historical uses of sea otters.
- Document interactions with sea otters since their reappearance (for example, harvest levels, seasonal variation, behavioral observations).
- Investigate strategies for coexisting with sea otters that promote community sustainability.



Photo by Deborah Mercy

Data Collection

We will conduct in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and site visits with elders, experts, and hunters for their insights on these issues and our study.

Importance

Sea otter impacts on rural communities are a pressing concern for the State of Alaska and its coastal communities. This study seeks to better understand the issue and develop mechanisms to help address this growing concern.

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