



April 2004

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for your interest in Defenders of Wildlife's Sea Otter Unit. The lessons include both individual and group learning activities and are designed to integrate reading, writing, social studies, and technology into your science curriculum.

Sea otters once ranged from northern Japan to the Alaskan peninsula and along the west coast of North America to Baja California in Mexico. Until the 1700s, sea otters were abundant throughout the waters of the north Pacific. During this time, the worldwide sea otter population numbered between 150,000 to 300,000. By the 1900s, the sea otter was nearly extinct with only 1,000 to 2,000 otters left. Only 13 remnant sea otter colonies existed from Russia to Mexico when the International Fur Seal Treaty, which banned the hunting of sea otters and fur seals, was established in 1911. Since 1977, thanks to protections through the federal Endangered Species Act, some strides in recovery have been achieved for California sea otters. Over the last three decades the recovery has been slow, with the current situation showing declines in the population in 6 out of the last 8 years. The current population of California sea otters is estimated at 2,500 animals. However, sea otters continue to face threats today. Sea otters can become entangled in fishing nets; impacted by oil spills; injured or killed by collisions with boats; and affected by disease.

Defenders of Wildlife works with other conservation groups and state and federal agencies to ensure the survival of this species. Education is a critical component of our efforts to protect the sea otter. We hope that you will find this unit to be helpful in your classroom. We are interested in hearing your thoughts on sea otters and the unit. Please complete the evaluation at the back of the curriculum and return it to us. Again, thank you for your interest in the Sea Otter Unit and for your commitment to our young people.

Sincerely,

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