

Petersburg Borough Assembly

February 9, 2018

This letter is in response to a request by the Borough of Sea Otter hunters asking for our positions of the sea otter population.

Recently I've asked the position of the Assembly regarding sea otter harvests. I was told more than once the Borough had no position. However, KFSK reported from the Board of Fish that "Petersburg officials are still hoping to see changes to that law and plan to lobby in the nation's capital this winter with the hopes of making it easier for Natives harvest and sell unmodified pelts." Is this now the position of the Assembly?

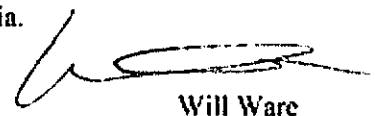
I am opposed to the sale of unmodified pelts to non-natives. What can a non-native make with a sea otter hide that I cannot? The problem is not enough hunters to take sea otters. I can assure you my four boys and myself are efficient hunters.

But for conversation sake, let's say the effort to open sales of unmodified hides is successful. Furriers like David Green Master Furriers will almost immediately put out of business the dozens of cottage industry sea otter artisans that are starting to take off in Southeast alone. Once they get their few hundred hides a year, then what? Even less harvests than we have now.

The issue is marketing and getting local support of this industry. Less than 5% of my sales are local, yet I hear constantly to go out and harvest more, primarily from crabbers and divers. Why? I have two freezers dedicated to holding hides for online sales and the 3-4 shows I do a year. But not everyone can afford to go to shows. Besides the cost of a boat, guns, gas, ammunition, and shipping and tanning costs, there are costs associated to participate in sales shows itself such as airfare, hotel, car rental, food and table fees. Most cases, you need to make a couple thousand dollars to break even for each show.

I understand the costs of sea otter products are expensive. As illustrated above, so are the hunter/sewer costs. However, let me ask the question then...how would opening this market up to non-natives make it cheaper? You may see a very short-term increase to hunting. But I can assure you it would be very short term and eliminate the growing cottage industry starting in our region now. It will make ongoing efforts by Sealaska Heritage, who has held dozens of sea otter sewing classes across Southeast, all for not.

You want to make a difference? Ask USFW to quite harassing hunters unnecessarily. Don't leave to enforcement to make judgement calls based on interpretation of vague language in the law. When and if you can, support the locals making a dent in the population around our hometown. Educate your friends and family to the beauty and uniqueness of sea otter fur. And part of that uniqueness, is that it is harvested and sewn only by coastal Alaska Natives who have done so for millenia.



Will Ware