

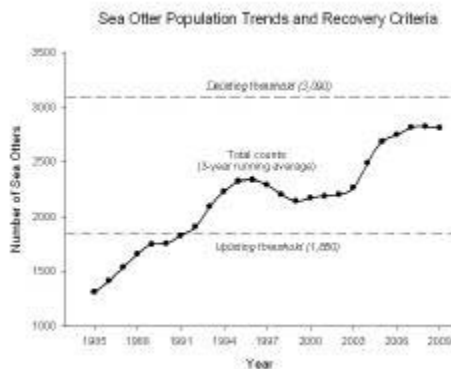
Survey: Sea Otter Recovery Stalls

3-Year Average Down .5 Percent

POSTED: 11:26 am PDT June 30, 2009
UPDATED: 9:11 am PDT July 1, 2009



MONTEREY, Calif. -- The recovery of the California sea otter appears to have stalled once again, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. A recent survey shows the latest three-year average of sea otters was 0.5 percent lower than last year, which is the first time the trend has been negative since the late 1990s.



Courtesy Of USGS

"This slight dip of the sea otter growth trends has happened before ... so, hopefully, this will be just a brief setback to the recovery of the population," said Brian Hatfield, a USGS biologist. "The fact that the pup counts have continued to increase slowly is encouraging." During the 2009 census, observers counted 2,654 California sea otters, 3.8 percent fewer than the 2008 spring count of 2,760. California sea otters are considered to be threatened and are on the endangered species list, according to the USGS.

"This is bad news," said Allison Ford, executive director of The Otter Project. "Sea otters are facing a lot of pressures, and we're not doing enough here on land."

The spring 2008 California sea otter survey was done between May 4 and June 11, covering more than 375 miles of coast line.

The latest three-year average was obtained by taking the spring census totals from 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Historically, the California otter population ranged from 12,000 to 18,000. The current otter population was nursed back from a small colony of survivors of the fur hunts that nearly caused the California sea otter to become extinct.

Disease and other factors that cause immune suppression are the most serious threats to sea otters, Ford said.