

Monterey County Now- Online news.

<http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/archives/2009/2009-Jul-02/the-monterey-bay-mascot-isnt-doing-so-well/1/@@index>

Otter Slide

## **The Monterey Bay mascot isn't doing so well.**

By [Kera Abraham](#)

Sea otter numbers are down by almost 4 percent this year compared to last, according to the U.S. Geological Survey's [spring census](#), released June 30.

Fewer than 2,700 of the threatened sea mammals were spotted in their 375-mile range along the Central California coast, concentrated from the Monterey Peninsula to Morro Bay.

Statistics show the drop is more than an annual quirk. The three-year average still shows a slight decline in the southern sea otter population, which wildlife managers have been working to restore from near-extinction in the early 1900s.

Experts [suspect ocean pollution](#) is primarily to blame. Otters suffer from [diseases](#) carried by pathogens that enter the water through sewage, agricultural runoff and urban stormwater runoff. Contamination can also reduce the otters' preferred food supply, which in turn suppresses their immune systems.

Employees of the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Monterey Bay Aquarium—along with volunteers from the public—assisted USGS in the survey.

Conservationists are using the numbers to lobby for a federal bill now before Congress, the Southern Sea Otter Recovery and Research Act (HR 556).

Carol Singleton of the California Department of Fish and Game notes that the California Sea Otter Fund tax check-off option needs to receive about \$263,000 in 2009 to stay on the 2010 tax form. "If we don't get enough money in that fund, it disappears," she says.

The fund has until September to meet the minimum, she says. Californians who have filed for tax extensions still have a chance to donate to the fund.