

DFG News Release

Oiled Sea Otter Gets Second Chance at DFG Facility in Santa Cruz

Feb.26, 2009

Contact:

Carol Singleton, DFG Communications Office, (916) 539-6124

 [Visit the otter's Facebook page for updates on her condition](#)

An oiled sea otter rescued Sunday from Sunset State Beach in Monterey Bay is recuperating at Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) marine mammal care facility in Santa Cruz. The endangered marine mammal was likely the victim of oil from a natural seep off the Monterey coast.

New research and technologies aided in the successful rehabilitation of the ailing otter, estimated to be about a year old. The young female received care and attention including being bathed in olive oil and then washed intensively for two hours. The otter is expected to fully recover and be released back into the ocean within a few weeks.

Sea otters are particularly susceptible to oil, which impairs their ability to keep warm and is toxic when ingested. The treatment program for oiled otters, including the type and temperature of the water, has been carefully researched over recent years to improve the animals' survival rate. Innovative technologies being used in the otter's rehabilitation include infrared imaging and a temperature-sensitive chip (like those used to identify lost pets) under the otter's skin to track its condition at each stage of the recovery process.

Prior to being delivered to DFG's Marine Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center, the otter received care from staff at the Marine Mammal Center and the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

DFG believes that more sea otters, seabirds and other marine wildlife may be impacted by the Monterey formation oil, which was churned up during recent winter storms. The public is asked to report sightings of oiled sea otters and other wildlife to the Oiled Wildlife Care Network Response Hotline at 1-877-UCD-OWCN. They are also asked to not attempt to rescue oiled wildlife, as they might injure themselves and cause further harm to the animal.

The sea otter is protected under both the federal Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act and has "fully protected" status under California state law. Currently, the California sea otter population is estimated at slightly over 2,800 animals.

In the marine ecosystem, sea otters are considered "keystone species," meaning that their presence or absence has a significant impact on other marine species and marine ecosystems. Sea otters help sustain vital kelp forests by feeding on the shellfish and other plant-eating species that would otherwise consume kelp forests. Kelp forests, in turn, serve as important nursery grounds for many types of fin fishes.

In order to help the sea otter population recover, the California Sea Otter Fund has been established. The fund supports otter research and recovery projects including those conducted at DFG's Marine Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center in Santa Cruz.

California taxpayers can support the Sea Otter Fund and DFG's otter research by making a contribution on their California income tax form 540. Simply look for line 410, labeled CA Sea Otter Fund, under contributions and fill out the amount you wish to donate.