

**AGENDA B-5
DECEMBER 2007**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
December 5, 2007

Northern Sea Otter: The southwest Alaska sea otter recovery team (SWAKSORT) met in Anchorage on October 16-18, 2007. Under the April 2007 settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity the Service will either propose critical habitat or make a “not prudent” finding regarding critical habitat by November 30, 2008. The Service will also publish a Final Rule by October 1, 2009. The Team’s webpage is:
<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/recovery.htm>

M/V *Selendang Ayu*/Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment: Nearly a decade after the need for an Aleutian Islands Vessel Traffic Risk Assessment was recognized in 1998, the first stage of the assessment is finally underway. The Transportation Research Board of the National Research Council convened a scoping panel as the first step in completing the assessment. The scoping panel held a meeting in Anchorage October 29-30, which was followed by a site visit to Dutch Harbor to give the panel an on-scene look at shipping in the region. The panel will hold its next meeting January 7-8 in Washington DC, and a final meeting in March in Irvine, California (portions of this meeting will likely be closed to the public.). The scoping panel will then develop parameters for the risk assessment by May 2008. The assessment will begin shortly thereafter, and will take approximately 2 years to complete. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation are sponsoring this project.

Whit Sheard of Pacific Environment, Bruce Wright of the Aleutian Pribilof Island Association (APIA), and Rick Steiner of the University of Alaska’s Marine Advisory Program, testified before the panel at the Anchorage meeting. They requested that the risk assessment include a full characterization of the traffic along the Aleutian shipping route, an analysis of all the risks posed, and a full analysis of risk reduction measures, including rescue tugs and vessel tracking systems. In its testimony to the panel, the Marine Exchange of Alaska indicated that ship traffic through Unimak Pass is much higher than originally reported by the State—4,400 ships in 2007 rather than the 3,100 the State reported. Most of the transits were westbound.