

## **California Department of Fish and Wildlife News Release**

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### **CDFW, partner agencies seek public's help in arresting suspects in sea otter shootings**

MONTEREY COUNTY - A coalition offers a \$21,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for fatally shooting three sea otters in Pacific Grove last fall.

Investigators determined the three dead otters, discovered along Asilomar State Beach in September, died from gunshot wounds, presumably while the animals swam in adjacent ocean waters.

"While these gunshot cases are rare, they are disturbing because they are intentional," said Dr. Melissa Miller, a veterinary pathologist with the Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Marine Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center in Santa Cruz. "These animals are living on the brink, facing a host of threats from pollution to shark attacks. The last thing they need is people actively and intentionally harming them."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) partnered with CDFW and several non-governmental organizations that will offer the reward. USFWS leads the criminal investigation into the shooting as California's Southern sea otter is a federally-listed threatened species. The federal Endangered Species Acts along with state law makes it a crime to injure or kill listed animals. At last count, only about 2,900 of the animals remain in the wild.

CDFW has monitored sea otter mortality for more than 40 years, supported in part by funding from the California Sea Otter Fund. California taxpayers finance this fund through voluntary contributions made on their income tax returns. The fund has put up \$4,500 of the reward monies in this case.

According to Dr. Miller, 10 gunshot sea otters were recovered and examined from 2004 to 2012, an average of about one per year.

“Finding three fresh-dead sea otters at the same location in such a short time frame is unprecedented,” she added.

Anyone with information about the sea otter shootings should contact Special Agent Souphanya of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 650-876-9078. An anonymous report can also be made by calling the US Fish and Wildlife contact line at 703-358-1949, or the California Department of Fish and Wildlife CalTIP line at 1-888-DFG-CALTIP (1-888-334-2258).

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*When you file your California income tax return, please consider making a voluntary contribution to the California Sea Otter Fund (line 410) or the Rare and Endangered Species Fund (line 403). Thank you!*