

SEA OTTER DISTRIBUTION

Historically, sea otters were found from the Japanese Archipelago north to the Kuril Islands, the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Commander Islands of Russia. Sea otters were also found on the islands of the Aleutian chain east to the Alaska Peninsula and then south along the coast of North America to Baja California in Mexico. Before sea otters were hunted to near extinction, there were an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 scattered throughout this historical range.

Today, although their numbers are nowhere near their historical populations, sea otters occupy most of their historical range from the Kuril Islands northeast to Prince William Sound, Alaska.

Additionally, on the Pacific coast, **transplanted** populations live in southeastern Alaska and in some parts of British Columbia, Canada, and Washington. Sea otters also are found off the coasts of central and southern California.

Sea otter distribution is summarized in the chart below:

	Southern or California Sea Otter (<i>Enhydra lutris nereis</i>)	Northern Sea Otter (<i>Enhydra lutris kenyoni</i>)	Russian Sea Otter (<i>Enhydra lutris lutris</i>)
LOCATION	California	Alaska, Canada, Washington state	Kuril and Commander Islands, Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia; less than a handful in Hoikkaido, Japan
CURRENT NUMBERS	Approximately 2,500	Alaska ~25,000-50,000 Canada ~1,500 Washington ~500	~15,000

Gillnets used by fishing operations can be deadly to sea otters, and one oil spill could potentially wipe out an entire sea otter population. The future of the sea otter population depends on resolving conflicts with the fishing and oil industries.

VOCABULARY

transplanted

to remove from one place or context and settle or introduce elsewhere to relocate

Reading Comprehension Check

Answers

- 1) When a sea otter population is transplanted, it means that the sea otter population was relocated to another area.
- 2) Sea otters are found off the coasts of central and southern California.
- 3) Northern sea otters are found in Alaska, Canada and Washington state.
- 4) Before sea otters were hunted to near extinction, there were an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 sea otters scattered throughout their historical range.
- 5) Answers will vary.