North American river otter
*Lontra canadensis*

**Class:** Mammalia  
**Order:** Carnivora

### Conservation Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G Rank: G5</td>
<td>USFWS/NOAA:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Rank: S5</td>
<td>SOA:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Final Rank

**Conservation category:** IX. Blue  
**IX = low status and low biological vulnerability and action need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>-20 to 20</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>-50 to 50</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>-40 to 40</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Higher numerical scores denote greater concern**

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**Status** - variables measure the trend in a taxon’s population status or distribution. Higher status scores denote taxa with known declining trends. Status scores range from -20 (increasing) to 20 (decreasing).  

*Population Trend (-10 to 10)*

Population relatively stable, especially in coastal areas (ADFG 1978).  

*Distribution Trend (-10 to 10)*

Several locality records, track sightings, and a drowned otter have been found in northern Alaska may suggest a northward range extension since the 1950s (MacDonald and Cook 2009).  

**Biological** - variables measure aspects of a taxon’s distribution, abundance and life history. Higher biological scores suggest greater vulnerability to extirpation. Biological scores range from -50 (least vulnerable) to 50 (most vulnerable).  

*Population Size (-10 to 10)*

Unknown, but suspected large. Density estimates of coastal river otters include 0.85 animals/km of shoreline in Kelp Bay (Woolington 1984), 0.5 animals/km on Prince of Wales (Larsen 1983, 1984), and 0.2-0.8 animals/km in Prince William Sound (Testa et al. 1994).  

*Range Size (-10 to 10)*

Found throughout most of Alaska south of the Brooks Range (MacDonald and Cook 2009). ~1,210,800 square kilometers.  

*Population Concentration (-10 to 10)*

Found in small groups (Solf and Golden 2008).  

*Reproductive Potential*

*Age of First Reproduction (-5 to 5)*

Females do not reproduce until 2 years of age. Males are also sexually mature at 2 years (Lariviere and Walton 1998).  

*Number of Young (-5 to 5)*

Average litter size is 2-3 pups. One litter per year (NatureServe 2007b).
North American river otter

**Ecological Specialization**

**Dietary (-5 to 5)**

Diet is mainly comprised of fish. In marine habitats, feeds on fish that are abundant, midsized, and close to shore. Amphibians, crustaceans, small mammals, molluscs, birds, and fruits may be consumed (Lariviere and Walton 1998). Preys on nesting seabirds in some areas (NatureServe 2007b).

**Habitat (-5 to 5)**

Wide variety of coastal marine and freshwater habitats, including streams, lakes, ponds, marshes, estuaries (in some areas), beaver flowages, and exposed outer coast. When inactive, occupies hollow logs, space under roots, logs, or overhangs, abandoned beaver lodges, dense thickets near water, or burrows of other animals (NatureServe 2007b).

**Biological Total:** -37

**Action** - variables measure current state of knowledge or extent of conservation efforts directed toward a given taxon. Higher action scores denote greater information needs due of lack of knowledge or conservation action. Action scores range from -40 (lower needs) to 40 (greater needs).

**Management Needs (-10 to 10)**

No direct management. Open to trapping with no bag limit (ADFG 2009).

**Score:** 10

**Monitoring Needs (-10 to 10)**

Harvest data from pelt sealing. Surveyed locally (e.g., Prince William Sound, Southwest Alaska National Parks). In ADFG technique development report (Golden 2004), new techniques were being developed to monitor river otter density using identification of individuals from DNA microsatellites to conduct mark-resighting analysis. Ben-David et al. (2005) are testing scat deposition rates at latrines as a method for estimating river population levels and trends along the coastline of southwest Alaska National Parks.

**Score:** 2

**Research Needs (-10 to 10)**

Harvest and habitat degradation are the two primary threats and have resulted in local and regional declines. Oil contamination in Alaska reduced available habitat (Bowyer et al. 1995). Susceptible to pollution due to accumulation of mercury and organochlorine compounds (Francis and Bennett 1994, Halbrook et al. 1996) and their position at the top of the food chain (Lariviere and Walton 1998). Extensive timber harvest in beach fringe habitat in SE Alaska a major concern (Suring and Larsen 1991). Less abundant in clearcuts, heavily settled, polluted, or food poor areas (Toweill and Tabor 1982, Suring and Larsen 1991). Natural recolonization following local extirpations may be delayed due to low female dispersal rates. This, along with their metapopulation structure indicates the importance of connectivity between subpopulations to the preservation of genetic diversity (Blundell et al. 2002).

**Score:** -10

**Survey Needs (-10 to 10)**


**Score:** -10

**Action Total:** -8

**Supplemental Information** - variables do not receive numerical scores. Instead, they that are used to sort taxa to answer specific biological or managerial questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harvest:</th>
<th>Substantial, regulations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal Occurrence:</td>
<td>Year-round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomic Significance:</td>
<td>Monotypic genus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Global Range in Alaska:</td>
<td>&gt;10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Global Population in Alaska:</td>
<td>&gt;25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Range Map**
References


Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). 2009. 2009-2010 Alaska Trapping Regulations. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage, AK.


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