

## River Otter — Aaquyaq

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CUUMI NUKALLPIAQ AAQYANEK PISURTAALLRIIT. – MEN BEFORE USED TO ALWAYS GO HUNTING FOR RIVER OTTER.

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Photo: River otter on the shore of Karluk Lake. Photo by Mark Rusk.

Kodiak is home to two varieties of otters, the sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) that inhabits nearshore coastal waters, and the land otter (*Lutra canadensis*) that lives primarily in freshwater lakes and streams but ventures into saltwater to hunt. River otters are opportunistic feeders that eat everything from fish to waterfowl, insects, rodents, and plants. River otters live in family groups, inhabiting the same den for many years. Like the sea otter, river otters have a soft, warm pelt that Alutiiq people fashion into clothing. River otters were once captured in deadfall traps weighted with a large rock or in snares made of flexible sticks.

An Alutiiq legend from Prince William Sound explains the river otter's use of both the sea and the land. When the spirits of the land and sea divided the animals between them, the river otter was left behind. At that time the otter had a short tail. The two spirits quarreled over the otter, tugging on its tail until it stretched. The otter cried, "Please let me go! I will stay with both of you."