

2-25-1885

Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, relative to the protection of seal and the enforcement of laws in Alaska, and recommending an appropriation of \$25,000 for the Revenue Marine Service in that territory

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

H.R. Exec. Doc. No. 252, 48th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1885)

This House Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

REVENUE MARINE SERVICE.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

RELATIVE TO

The protection of seal and the enforcement of laws in Alaska, and recommending an appropriation of \$25,000 for the Revenue Marine Service in that Territory.

FEBRUARY 25, 1885.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
February 24, 1885.

SIR: Congress has for several years past appropriated annually the sum of \$25,000 to enable the Secretary of the Treasury to use revenue steamers for the protection of the seal fisheries, the sea-otter hunting grounds, and the Government's interests generally in Alaska. Last year the sum of \$15,000 only was appropriated, which amount is inadequate to meet the expenses of cruising by this service up to the close of the present fiscal year. The sum of \$10,000, therefore, has been inserted in the estimates for the deficiency bill.

In this connection I beg to call the attention of Congress to the importance of the work performed in Alaska by the revenue cutters. The seal fisheries yield annually to the Government a revenue of about \$300,000. The islands on which the seals are taken are protected from incursions of marauding vessels alone through the cruising of the revenue cutters. Last year the officers of the cutter Corwin seized a schooner engaged in taking seals unlawfully. The importance of protecting these seal fisheries lies not simply in securing the revenue from this source to the Government, but in protecting the seal life from destruction. The islands of the Prybilov group contain the most important seal-rookeries of the world. They are located, however, not far from islands on the Asiatic coast under the control of the Russian Government, where a large number of seals have their breeding grounds. Should the number of seals taken annually in the Prybilov group be considerably increased, or should fire-arms or other improper means be made use of in killing the seals (the proper method only being in use by the natives at the Seal Islands), the effect would be to drive away the seals from their present habitat, and might cause them to seek other breeding grounds beyond this country's territory.

Without the use of the cutters the seal-fur industry has no protection. There are also a large number of native Eskimo or Indians inhabiting Northwestern Alaska, over whom the Territorial government has no power of exercising jurisdiction or control. The Indian laws are not extended to this territory, and these people are without protection or government supervision save such as is extended to them by the annual visits of the revenue cutter.

The unlawful traffic in rum and fire-arms which was carried on in times past with the natives of Northwestern Alaska has been almost entirely suppressed within the last few years by the vigilance and active operations of the revenue marine officers. In former years most disastrous consequences resulted to the native population by the prosecution of the illegal traffic referred to, whole villages having been swept away by starvation and disease, the result of demoralization incident to this nefarious traffic.

Furthermore, the whaling fleet in the Northwestern Arctic has been largely relieved every year through the agency of the revenue marine vessels. The steamer Corwin in the last three years has brought down from the Arctic Ocean more than a hundred persons found upon the desolate Alaskan coasts or adjacent waters, shipwrecked or in destitute circumstances.

The present Territorial government is powerless to perform any of the duties above named which are committed to the revenue marine in Alaska. The protection of the seal fisheries and the sea-otter hunting grounds, the prevention of illegal traffic in rum and fire-arms, the relief of the whaling fleet and other distressed people in Alaskan waters, the suppression of lawlessness and the enforcement of order amongst the natives, as well as the prevention of smuggling in Alaska, are the important duties confided to the revenue cutter cruising in those waters. Should Congress fail to make adequate appropriation for the continuance of this work, these interests could not be properly looked after.

It is to be added that the annual appropriation for the maintenance of the Revenue Marine Service, if it were properly applicable to meet the expenses of the Alaskan service, is not sufficient. I respectfully commend the subject to the attention of Congress.

The sum of \$25,000 for the work in Alaska has been included in the estimates for next year, and I beg to say that a less amount will be insufficient to carry on the work for the year.

Very respectfully,

H. McCULLOCH,
Secretary.

Hon. JOHN G. CARLISLE,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.