

INTRODUCING THE Elakha Alliance

What is the Elakha Alliance?

The Elakha Alliance is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of sea otters and a healthy marine ecosystem on the Oregon coast. The Alliance is created in the spirit of the original Elakha Alliance organized nearly twenty years ago to promote restoration of sea otters on the Oregon coast.

Who Comprises the Elakha Alliance?

The Elakha Alliance is a partnership of coastal Indian tribes, conservation organizations, academic institutions, community groups, individuals and others interested in sea otter conservation and coastal ecology.

Initial board members are:

- *Don Ivy*, Chief, Coquille Indian Tribe;
- *Robert Kentta*, Tribal Councilor, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians;
- *Cameron LaFollette*, Executive Director, Oregon Coast Alliance;
- *Roy Lowe*, retired manager, Oregon Coastal Refuges of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;
- *Roberta Hall*, Professor Emeritus, Oregon State University;
- *Robert Bailey*, Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition, retired manager of the State of Oregon Coastal Management Program;
- *Peter Hatch*, Confederated Tribes of Siletz, and
- *Avalyn Taylor*, attorney, member of the original Elakha Alliance.

The Alliance will expand the initial partnership by seeking and inviting other organizations, entities, and individuals with interests in sea otters, coastal ecosystems and coastal communities to join our effort in sea otter restoration and conservation.



What Will the Elakha Alliance Do?

The purpose of the Elakha Alliance is to support the restoration and conservation of sea otters and the ecological health of the nearshore marine environment on the Oregon coast.

To carry out this purpose, the Alliance will:

- Reach out to the public to tell the story of sea otters on the Oregon coast, their role in marine ecosystems, and the connections between sea otters, marine ecosystem, and coastal communities;
- Create partnerships with coastal stakeholders to promote and strengthen sea otter conservation on the Oregon coast.
- Encourage and seek funds for a range of scientific research related to sea otters in Oregon including an understanding of the historic presence of sea otters in coastal ecosystems and importance to native cultures, the distribution of suitable sea otter habitat and food availability, potential economic effects of sea otters in the coastal economy, and implications for species resilience throughout their range;
- Act as an information portal about sea otters and be a clearing house to promote cooperation and coordination among various organizations, agencies, individuals, and stakeholders with interests in sea otters, coastal ecosystems and communities; and
- Work with managers and decision-makers to develop policies and actions to ensure successful recovery of sea otters and coastal ecosystems.

Why is the Alliance Necessary?

The Alliance meets a need for an Oregon-based organization devoted solely to sea otter conservation and the ecological health of Oregon's nearshore marine environment.

What Story Will the Elakha Alliance Tell?

The history of sea otters in Oregon and their historical, ecological and cultural significance is an important story. The Alliance is well-suited to share the story of this iconic species.

The story begins with sea otters living in rocky shore areas along the entire Oregon coast, part of contiguous populations once present around the north Pacific Rim from Mexico to Japan. Place names such as Otter Rock, near Newport, and Otter Point, near Gold Beach, as well as otter remains in middens at other coastal sites tell of the presence and importance of sea otters to native people. Remains of fish and shellfish in these middens tell their own story of the composition and health of the ecosystem sea otters inhabited.

Beginning the mid-1700s, sea otters throughout their range were aggressively hunted for their rich fur pelts by Russian, British and, in the 1800s, by American fur traders. They were eventually eliminated from the Oregon coast by 1911. Small remnant populations survived in California and Alaska and became the basis of sea otters populations found today on the coasts of California, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska. However, they are still missing from the Oregon coast. These populations are increasingly vulnerable to an array of pollutants, ship strikes, predation, and the effects of changing environmental conditions from climate change.

The Elakha Alliance will also tell the story of the critical ecological role that sea otters fulfill as a "keystone species" - a species that significantly

affects the structure and function of the surrounding ecological community. The impact of sea otters on coastal ecosystems is an important story for modern coastal communities.

Sea otters result in more extensive and richer kelp forests that, in turn, attract and retain eggs, larvae, and juveniles of many species of fish and shellfish, including those of commercial importance. Kelp forests increase overall marine productivity and offer essential shelter, habitat and food for a wide range of fish, mammals, and seabirds. Kelp forests can help reduce coastal shoreline erosion by absorbing the energy of ocean waves.

For more than a century, Oregon's marine ecosystem has been without this keystone species. While this ecosystem *appears* "healthy," it is highly likely that today's nearshore marine ecosystem is different from and likely less resilient than when sea otters were present. Understanding this shifting baseline is critical to strengthening, through the presence of sea otters, the resiliency and productivity of Oregon's marine ecosystem against effects of climate change and other human impacts on the marine environment.

The Alliance intends to help write the next chapter of the story of sea otters in Oregon by seeking funds to support scientific research related to their potential return to Oregon's marine ecosystem. And the Alliance will work with partners, regulatory agencies and coastal communities to ensure that otters once again thrive on the Oregon coast.

For more information about the Elakha Alliance contact:

Robert Bailey

Elakha.Alliance@gmail.com