



Returning Sea Otters to Oregon

Robert Bailey, Elakha Alliance



Once, They Were Here.

- Once contiguous population between Northern Japan and Baja California.
- ~300,000 animals.
- China Fur Trade 1741 – 1850 killed all but a few remnant populations.



Populations today

Sea otters present



Sea otters absent



800-mile gap

We care because Sea otters are a keystone species

An ecosystem engineer

With disproportionate influence
beyond immediate food & space;
influences ecosystem structure &
function.



Sea otters promote ecosystem health.

Sea otters present

.....

sea otters absent



Sea otters benefit estuaries, too.

When sea otters are present:

- Improved water quality
- Increased biological productivity
- Habitat for salmon smolts, other juvenile fish



Sea otters help fight climate change.



Photo: Jackie Hildering

Pounds of Carbon Stored/Acre*

With kelp: 1,867 lbs/acre



Photo: Annie Crawley

Without kelp: 21 lbs/acre

* Wilmers et al (2012) [Frontiers in Ecology & Environment](#)

Without sea otters, urchins are attacking Oregon's kelp forests.

Port Orford: Same spot

June 2016

August 2018



Photos courtesy of Dr. Leigh Torres, OSU Marine Mammal Institute

Benefits from restoration:

Ecological benefits:

- More biological productivity in nearshore ocean and coastal estuaries;
- More complex, resilient food webs;
- More eggs, larvae retained;
- More habitat, food for 20+ species of fish;
- Increased substrate for herring spawn, invertebrate grazers;
- Shelter for juvenile salmon, rockfish.



Photo by Alex Mustard

Benefits from restoration:

Cultural/Economic benefits

- Restored connection between sea otters and coastal Indian tribes;
- Improved habitat for commercial and recreational fish species;
- Increased ecosystem resilience supporting all marine life;
- Economic boon: tourism, wildlife viewing.

(Gregar, et al study
June 2020)



Potential negatives from restoration

Possible conflicts

- Local competition with commercial harvest of Dungeness crab, red urchins;
- Local competition with recreational crabbers and clam diggers.





About the Elakha Alliance

Elakha Alliance:



- An Oregon non-profit begun in early 2000 by Dave Hatch, member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.
- Formally organized in 2018.
- Approved 501(c)(3) non-profit status from IRS.
- Oregon Wildlife Foundation is fiscal sponsor.

Elakha Alliance:



Our Mission:

To restore a healthy population of sea otters to the Oregon coast and, in the process, help make Oregon's marine ecosystem more robust and resilient.



What we are doing:

2020 - 2021:

- Begun work on a science-based Feasibility Study (USFWS funding) - Public draft by end of January, 2021 -- Final by end of September 2021;
- Dr. Tim Tinker is lead author;
- 12-member Scientific & Technical Advisory Committee.



Feasibility Study for the Reintroduction of Sea Otters to Oregon

M. Tim Tinker
Nhydra Ecological Consulting
Associate Adjunct Professor,
Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
University of California, Santa Cruz





What we are doing:

2020 - 2021:

- Connecting with people and organizations about our mission (funding from Meyer Memorial Trust).



Mid-Coast Watershed Council

7 DEVILS BREWING CO.
SUNDAY, JANUARY 26TH @ 3PM



**Oregon Sea Otters:
Past, Present and Future**



So why are there NO sea otters on the Oregon coast? There's Otter Rock and Otter Point, but no otters? Why are there sea otters in California and Washington but not Oregon? What's the deal? This talk will explore the history of sea otters in Oregon, their ecological and cultural importance, and the prospects for their return. It will also touch on the mission of the Elakha Alliance, an Oregon non-profit organization devoted to restoring sea otters to the Oregon coast.



By Robert Bailey, Board President, Elakha Alliance; retired manager of the Oregon Coastal Management Program and graduate of North Bend High School Class of 1963!



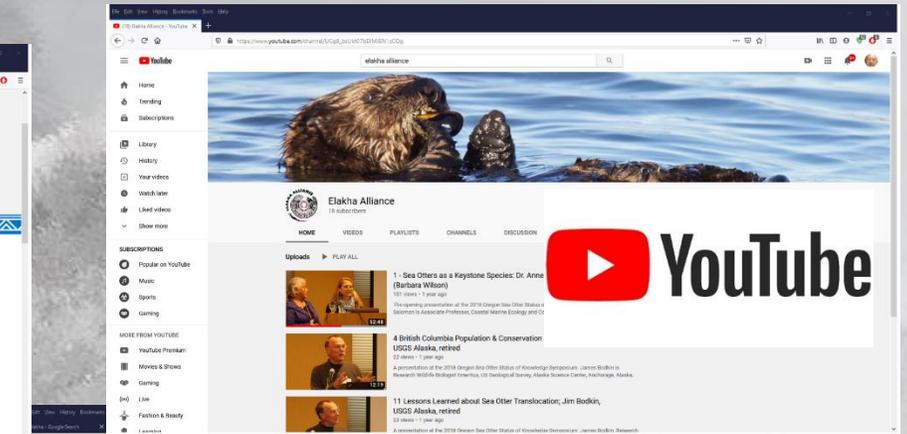
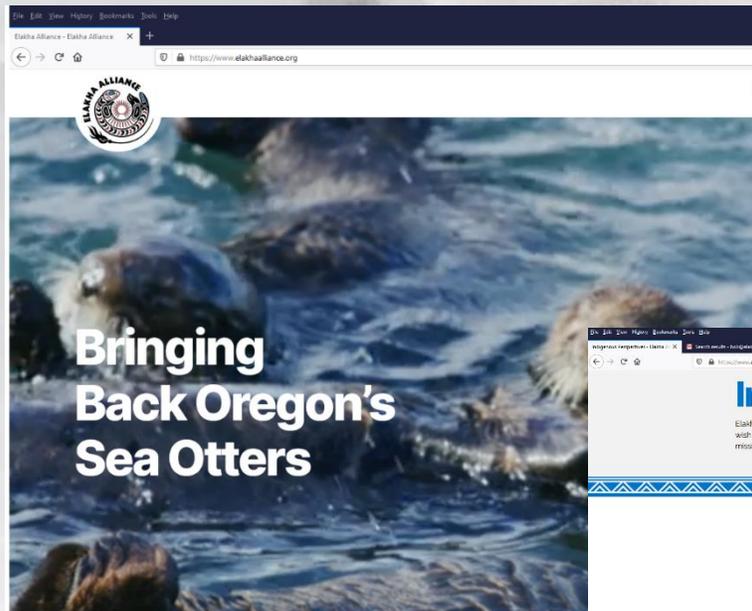
Saltwater Sportsman Show



What we are doing:

2020 - 2021:

- Using our website and social media to connect with people about our mission (funding from Meyer Memorial Trust).





What we plan to do:

2020 - 2021:

- Complete an Economic Impact Assessment (funding pending, USMCC);
- Assist Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians to submit a proposal to USFWS TWG to assess existing habitat/prey information and identify research priorities; coordinate with ODFW, OSU and others;
- Engage with community efforts in Port Orford to address loss of kelp;
- Hold a scientific Status of Knowledge Symposium in October 2021;
- Build long-term strategic relationships.



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**next: legal and administrative
framework for restoration**

2020