

A Vision for Sea Otters in Oregon



As of April 2023

In the Chinook trading language, “elakha” is the word for sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*), which were once plentiful in Oregon’s coastal waters. For thousands of years, sea otters and coastal native people had a strong relationship with each other and the nearshore marine environment. Tragically, sea otters were decimated by hunting for their pelts in the 1700s and 1800s, effectively eliminating them from Oregon by the early 1900s.

Sea otters are a keystone species whose predation and behavior have a profound effect on the ecosystem and mix of species around it. In their absence, Oregon’s marine ecosystem likely became ecologically simpler and less robust.

Today, tribal, nonprofit, community, and conservation leaders are coming together to restore sea otters to Oregon’s nearshore ecosystem and restore their connection to coastal Indian people.

Our shared vision: an Oregon coast 50 years from now where our children and grandchildren co-exist along with a thriving sea otter population and a robust and resilient marine ecosystem.

Our task for the next decade: To assess the scientific and economic feasibility of sea otter restoration, help the region reach consensus on restoration, and, if warranted, proceed with restoration in carefully chosen suitable places along the coast.

Community engagement: To reach good decisions about sea otter restoration, the public must be part of the process, especially those groups and individuals most likely to be affected. This includes tribes, shellfish harvesters, fishermen, ports, businesses, conservation organizations, and local, state, and federal governments.

The Pacific West Coast context: Restoration of sea otters in Oregon must be consistent with the conservation needs of the larger sea otter population along the Pacific Coast of North America, including the Southern Sea Otter (currently located in central California) and Northern Sea Otter (currently located along Washington’s Olympic Peninsula, British Columbia, and Alaska).

Endorsing the Alliance’s Vision: The Elakha Alliance is not yet asking individuals or organizations to endorse a specific plan for sea otter restoration. However, the Alliance is seeking individuals who will sign on as an Oregon Sea Otter Supporter by endorsing this Vision Statement. And then we are asking supporters to help us spread our message and raise the funds necessary to get the job done.

To Endorse the Vision, sign up at www.elakhaalliance.org.