

Elakha Alliance praises new sea otter report

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On Wednesday, July 27, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a report (<https://www.fws.gov/project/sea-otter-feasibility-assessment>) to Congress on the feasibility of reintroducing sea otters to their former range on the Pacific coast.

The report was required by Public Law 116-260 at the request of Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and enacted by Congress in late December 2020.

Jane Bacchieri, executive director of the Elakha Alliance, an Oregon nonprofit organization advocating for the restoration of sea otters on the Oregon coast, commented, “I commend the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for this outstanding report. It sets the stage for thoughtful, careful restoration of sea otters along the Pacific Coast. I am pleased that its findings, aimed at northern California and Oregon, match those in the Elakha Alliance Feasibility Study completed last December.”

Both studies conclude that reintroducing sea otters would result in major conservation benefits to the species and would have a wide range of ecological benefits in the marine and estuarine environments. Both caution that additional social and economic studies are needed. Neither study recommends specific restoration sites or numbers, but both provide guidance for future work to do so.

Bacchieri added that “we agree that a lot more work is needed at the local level to address risks and uncertainties, especially around impacts to communities and existing ocean users. This is why we have started to engage with communities on the southern Oregon coast. We hope our work at the local level will be a model for how other reintroductions will be planned.”

The report references a more detailed scientific feasibility study (<https://www.elakhaalliance.org/feasibility-study/>) conducted for the Elakha Alliance that is posted on the Elakha Alliance website.

Bacchieri expressed appreciation that the report acknowledges the guidelines of the IUCN SSC (International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission). “The IUCN provides a much-needed set of standards by which to plan for and carry out reintroduction of sea otters. Our work is meeting those standards.”

Bacchieri concluded that “this comprehensive report provides clear direction for future actions to be taken in concert by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies, private conservation organizations, community partners and ocean users to chart a path to successful reintroduction of this important keystone species.”

The Elakha Alliance is an Oregon nonprofit organization incorporated in 2018 with a 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. Its board includes members with tribal, nonprofit, scientific, government and conservation backgrounds. The Alliance commissioned a scientific feasibility study, completed in early 2022, to ensure that the best available scientific information and conservation experience is available to inform discussions and decisions about restoring a population of sea otters to the Oregon coast. This study is available on the organization’s website (<https://www.elakhaalliance.org/>) .