

\$884,578 for Ocean Research: Understanding, monitoring nearshore resources

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The Oregon Ocean Science Trust (OOST) has awarded \$884,578 in state funding to ocean researchers to help Oregon better understand and monitor its nearshore resources.

The funding was made available from HB5202, which passed during the 2022 legislative session, and allocated the funds to the Oregon Ocean Science Trust (OOST) to conduct science and monitoring on nearshore keystone species, including sea otters, nearshore marine ecosystems, kelp and eelgrass habitat, and sequestration of blue carbon. Through competitive grants, the funds have been disbursed to nearshore marine researchers.

“House Bill 5202 provided an important source of funding for Oregon to address key gaps in our understanding of nearshore species and habitats, which are critical to the economics and way of life for Oregonians and communities throughout the coast,” Ocean Science Trust Chair Laura Anderson said. “We received a very strong suite of proposals for the amount of funding that was available, and hope to secure

additional funding to further our understanding of nearshore resources, how they are changing, and how we can best manage those resources for multiple benefits.”

The OOST said the 2022 Oregon Legislature funding will help Oregon assess the impacts of climate change on Oregon’s rocky shore species, document kelp communities and their associated species in rocky reefs, map nearshore habitats, produce trophic models of Oregon’s nearshore reefs, enhance understanding of juvenile commercial and recreational fish in Oregon’s nearshore, and inform how Oregon can better integrate and coordinate state and regional ocean data management systems.

“Understanding our coastal ecosystems is critical to understanding our coastal economies,” State Rep. David Gomberg (D-Otis) said. “The bountiful natural capital we have here on our shores is a vital component in our tourism, fishing, and outdoor recreation sectors. Not only will this funding help our communities better understand the impacts of our changing climate, but it will also help us better identify key opportunities to more responsibly leverage our nearshore marine resources.”

The OOST awarded grants to:

Dr. Kirsten Grorud-Colvert and Dr. Su Sponaugle of Oregon State University, in partnership with the Oregon Coast Aquarium and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Reserves Program, was awarded \$169,815 to quantify the dynamics of juvenile commercially and recreationally important fishes along Oregon’s nearshore. This project will inform understanding of the importance of nearshore habitats for fish recruitment, identify key commercially and recreationally important species for upcoming stock assessments, and evaluate the role of marine reserves as refuges for nearshore fishes.

Scott Marion, Marine Habitat Project Leader with the Marine Resources Program at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, was awarded \$181,000 to map nearshore seafloor habitats at the Rogue River Reef Complex. The project will fill a major gap in the understanding of Oregon’s nearshore ecosystems and provide a critical, permanent foundation for a broad range of other studies and efforts that require basic data on the abundance and distribution of rocky seafloor habitats. awarded.

Dr. Will White and Dr. Mark Novak from Oregon State University, and Dr. Leif Rasmuson with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Resources Program, were awarded \$150,000 to model kelp forest dynamics and trophic interactions to forecast the outcomes of potential management activities. Kelp forests are a key ecosystem in Oregon’s nearshore because they provide habitat for important species, such as abalones. The team of scientists will work with the Dungeness Crab Commission, the Oregon Kelp Alliance, and southern Oregon urchin fishermen to achieve project goals.

Dr. Bruce Menge, Dr. Sarah Gravem, and Zechariah Meunier from Oregon State University and Heather Fulton-Bennet from the Little Port Walter Research Station in Alaska were awarded \$190,422 to investigate the abundance, reproduction, and recruitment of seven intertidal kelp species at eight to ten sites along the central and southern coast of Oregon. This research will advance understanding of the current state of kelp populations along the Oregon coast, helping to assess the stability of these ecosystems.

Dr. Steve Rumrill and Scott Groth of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Resources Program were awarded \$193,341 to document how the ecological characteristics of rocky reef habitats differ between areas that have experienced loss of kelp compared to areas where kelp beds exist. This project will inform understanding of the current status of and extent and rate of change in sea urchins, abalone, and sea stars that inhabit kelp beds at priority rocky reef sites in Oregon, helping managers establish new baselines for management of these rocky reef ecosystems.

Deanna Caracciolo and Adrian Laufer of Sea & Shore, LLC were awarded \$10,000 to conduct an assessment of state and regional ocean data management systems. This project will inform how Oregon could best integrate and coordinate data platforms using best management practices.

For more information about each project, and to track the progress of each project during the next two years, visit <https://www.oregonoceanscience.org>.