



Confederated Tribes of  
Coos, Lower Umpqua  
and Siuslaw Indians

Confederated Tribes  
of Siletz Indians



**Joint News Release**  
**Confederated Tribes of Coos,**  
**Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians**  
**Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians**

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## **Oregon Coastal Tribal Leaders Call for Action to Return Sea Otters to Oregon**

Leaders of two federally recognized Oregon coastal Indian tribes, The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians (“CTCLUSI”) and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (“CTSI”) have called upon US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to “take all appropriate actions to direct the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (“USFWS”) to return sea otters – known to our ancestors as *Xulh-t’ush*, *Giye’we*, or *Ela-ke*’ – to the Oregon coast within the next five years.”

In separate letters to Secretary Haaland, Bradley Kneaper, Chairman of the CTCLUSI Tribal Council, and Delores Pigsley, Chairman of the CTSI Tribal Council, cited the cultural ties between coastal Indian people and sea otters extending back thousands of years. “Our ancestors knew *Xulh-t’ush* as a relative who brought prosperity and plenty to our people” each said.

Both noted the critical importance of sea otters to the ecological health of the ocean. “Science teaches us what our ancestors knew, that these creatures are indeed a keystone species that creates and maintains kelp forest habitat conditions in nearshore ecosystems. Sea otters were thus central to the way of life our ancestors enjoyed for thousands of years - until both sea otters and the way of life they supported were destroyed in the 1800s.”

Once found across the North Pacific Ocean from Japan to Mexico, sea otters were hunted nearly to extinction for their valuable fur more than a century ago. They have recovered on the central California coast and, thanks to reintroduction in the late 1960s and early 1970s, on the coasts of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula, Vancouver Island, and Southeast Alaska.



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But as the leaders point out, sea otters “remain absent from the entire Oregon and northern California coastline” and as a result “our nearshore ecosystem has experienced dramatic changes. Without sea otters, instead of productive kelp forests, our rocky seafloor is covered in ‘urchin barrens,’ biological deserts of purple sea urchins that have devoured these kelp forests and all that they provide to the ecosystem.”

Chairs Kneaper and Pigsley declared “we feel strongly that the time has come to bring *Xvlh-t’vsh* back to Oregon” and called on Secretary Haaland to “direct the USFWS to prioritize returning sea otters to the Oregon coast, set a timeline, prepare a plan, and take other steps necessary to pursue this act of environmental and cultural reconciliation.” They pledged to assist the Secretary and the USFWS toward “bold action that will strengthen our environment, our economy, and our homelands.”

The leaders noted that members of both tribes were instrumental in founding the Elakha Alliance, an Oregon nonprofit organization that has a mission to restore sea otters to the ocean of Oregon, and pointed out that tribal members continue to serve as board members. They cited the work of the Elakha Alliance in building public support, laying “a solid foundation of scientific information” for the return of sea otters, and working with local fishermen to reduce or avoid impacts when sea otters return.

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*Headquartered in Coos Bay, Oregon with a five-county service area including Coos, Curry, Lincoln, Douglas and Lane Counties, The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians are one of the 9 Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon. CTCLUSI is comprised of 3 Tribes (4 Bands): 2 bands of Coos Tribes: Hanis Coos, Miluk Coos; Lower Umpqua Tribe (Quiiich); and Siuslaw Tribe.*

*The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is a confederation of many bands and tribes, each with their own language, territory and customs, whose ancestral homelands combined include all of Western Oregon from what is now Northern California north to the Columbia River and from the summit of the Cascades to the Pacific Ocean. Its headquarters is in Siletz, Oregon, and the tribe also has offices in Portland, Salem and Eugene. It maintains an 11-county service area.*