

Enabling coexistence: Indigenous voices reveal key strategies for navigating the return of sea otters

Through a collaborative partnership with Indigenous leaders and knowledge holders (www.CoastalVoices.net) from Alaska to British Columbia, we conducted workshop focus groups and community surveys that identified a suite of strategies for improving coastal Indigenous people's ability to adapt to the social, ecological, and cultural changes that are triggered by the recovery of sea otters.

Our findings reveal four key strategies are perceived as critical to facilitate the coexistence of people and sea otters:

1 Strengthen Indigenous governance authority

Indigenous and federal governments share power in making decisions about sea otter management planning, policies, research, and monitoring.

2 Establish adaptive co-management

Implement locally-designed co-management plans for sea otters, shellfish, and kelp that can be adapted based on monitoring over time.

Survey results also showed coexistence with sea otters is improved if Indigenous people have the right to engage in the traditional practice of hunting sea otters in their traditional territories.

3 Gather & incorporate Indigenous knowledge

Ensure contemporary management is informed by Indigenous knowledge of sea otters, shellfish, and kelp. This includes information, protocols, and practices, along with cultural values and principles.

4 Build learning platforms

Communities can benefit by learning from others' experiences of navigating sea otter recovery. This can be done by building forums and networks to share experiences, support, and information about management approaches and outcomes.





Our methods

This study was done through a collaborative partnership with Indigenous leaders and knowledge holders representing 19 First Nations and Tribes from B.C. to Alaska.

We conducted workshop focus groups and a literature review to identify a suite of conditions that could improve coastal Indigenous people's ability to adapt to the recovery of sea otters.

We then used community-based survey-interviews to compare adaptation perspectives from two communities with the longest timeframes of recovering sea otters – 1) the Sugpiaq Tribes of Port Graham/Nanawalek, Alaska, and 2) the Kyuquot/Chekleset First Nations in B.C.



Why these results matter...

This study suggests that enhancing Indigenous peoples' ability to coexist with sea otters will require a **transformation in current resource management** if we are to navigate towards a system that is both ecologically sustainable and socially just. Existing examples of Indigenous co-management of marine mammals provide evidence that such a transformation is possible.

We identify a suite of possible actions to improve Indigenous communities' capacity to coexist with sea otters. These are relevant to many communities and governments that are currently navigating or anticipating sea otter recovery across the northeast Pacific.

More broadly, this study illustrates how **regime shifts can disproportionately impact Indigenous communities** that are reliant on subsistence harvest and are frequently marginalized in natural resource management. Our findings highlight the **need for more Indigenous authority, knowledge, and leadership in addressing the challenges that accompany predator-recovery** in complex systems where people and nature are tightly linked.

Learn more at www.CoastalVoices.net



STUDY TITLE: **Enabling coexistence: Navigating predator-induced regime shifts in human-ocean systems**

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