



## 2023 Annual Summit & Tribal Caucus Summit Highlights

October 16, 2023 - October 19, 2023

Portland, Oregon

### Overview

In October 2023, the West Coast Ocean Alliance (Alliance or WCOA) convened its Annual Members Summit and Tribal Caucus Summit in Portland, Oregon. Both Summits were funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with additional funding from Bonneville Environmental Foundation for the Annual Summit and The Ford Family Foundation, Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians and Roundhouse Foundation for the Tribal Caucus Summit. During the Annual Summit, Tribal, federal, and state government representatives gathered to build and strengthen relationships, discuss Alliance currently-funded projects, and broadly inform the goals of WCOA's 5-year strategic plan. The Tribal Caucus Summit provided Tribal leaders and representatives the opportunity to share stories about their experiences, lessons learned, strategies, and needs related to co-management and stewardship, offshore wind, data sovereignty, joint decision-making, and consultation with federal and state government partners. Both Summits prioritized small group discussions. The Annual Summit was structured to ensure informational updates and perspectives were shared by a wide range of Tribal, federal, and state government representatives.

There were 55 WCOA members present across both Summits, representing 15 Tribal Nations, 4 Tribal organizations, 14 federal government agencies, and 9 state government agencies. This summary provides key highlights and action items from both Summits. Agendas, highlights, and photos are available at the Alliance's website: [www.westcoastoceanalliance.org](http://www.westcoastoceanalliance.org).

For more information about the Alliance, or if you would like to participate in future WCOA activities, please contact John Hansen, Executive Director, at [john@westcoastoceanalliance.org](mailto:john@westcoastoceanalliance.org). For any questions about this summary, contact Bri Goodwin at [bri@westcoastoceanalliance.org](mailto:bri@westcoastoceanalliance.org). For questions about the Tribal Summit, contact Margaret Corvi at [mcorvi@westcoastoceanalliance.org](mailto:mcorvi@westcoastoceanalliance.org).

### Key Highlights

#### Alliance's Role: Now and in the Future

During the Annual Summit, participants confirmed WCOA's unique role as a facilitator of a strategic, holistic, and collaborative approach to regional ocean planning, policy, and management along the West Coast. Summit participants felt the Alliance's mission and purpose were still aligned with their needs and wished to see the partnership gain capacity and grow. Participants viewed WCOA's strengths as bringing together Tribal, federal, and state governments to share information and resources, openly discussing existing and emerging ocean issues, and building partnerships to advance understanding through sharing scientific data and other ways of knowing. The Alliance is considered a trusted space

for dialogue that leads to productive outcomes and informs decision-making. WCOA provides Tribal, federal, and state governments a platform to collaborate and collectively grow a region-wide understanding of ocean health and the most pressing human uses of the ocean through strategically funded projects that augment the activities of its member governments.

Participants celebrated the Alliance for embracing Tribal governments as key partners, unique among the regional ocean partnerships. As WCOA grows, participants see an opportunity to support trust-building and joint power-sharing between Tribal, federal, and state governments. There was also a call to action for the Alliance to engage leaders and decision-makers to strengthen the voice and position of the partnership.

When asked the questions “What do you hope WCOA will achieve in the next ten years?” and “What is the Alliance’s role in the future?” participants shared the following perspectives through discussion and participation in survey questions:

- Continue to convene as an intergovernmental body to share information and advise on shared goals, especially on existing and emerging regional ocean and coastal issues.
- Support dialogue and open lines of communication among Tribal, federal, and state governments on the West Coast.
- Create a forum to prioritize communication and codify relationships with Tribal Nations through early outreach, active listening, and development of performance measures, transparent communication, and processes.
- Serve as a leader in regional coordination to become a model for other coastal planning bodies.
- Serve as a valuable source of information related to West Coast ocean planning activities and provide a connection to other trusted sources of information.
- Facilitate a holistic understanding of West Coast ocean issues to support management decisions by individual member governments.
- Support the implementation of research findings and monitoring plans through engagement and communication strategies.

## Regional Priorities

Throughout the Summits, Tribal, federal, and state government representatives shared their priorities to help inform WCOA’s strategic plan and serve the membership’s needs. The following priorities arose from small and large group discussions and are listed in no particular order. These priorities will be used to help inform discussions and future decisions about the activities of the Alliance through the finalization of its strategic plan and project funding.

- **Support the creation of a science entity** co-led by Tribal Nations and federal governments in partnership with state governments that integrates and equally values Western science and traditional knowledge and expertise to advance ocean health and human use data collection, sharing, and recommendations for member governments on research and best practices.
- **Support effective coordination of gathering data** on existing regional ocean health indicators in the West Coast Ocean Health Dashboard, hosted by the West Coast Ocean Data Portal. Participants did not suggest new indicators to add to the current list.
- Advocate for an **offshore wind energy cumulative impacts assessment and adaptive management approach accountable to all ocean co-managers.**

- Support Tribal, federal, and state **marine spatial planning efforts**, including the creation of a new regional plan or refinement of individual member government existing plans, and understanding of alignment among planning products.
- **Create decision-support tools** for decision-makers in holistic ocean planning, policy, and management.
- Support Tribes in their efforts to ensure that **offshore wind energy does not diminish the rights held by Tribal Nations**, such as treaty rights, harvest, use, or protection of traditional and cultural resources, practices, and interests.
- **Support capacity-building for and engagement with Tribes**, including but not limited to their expertise related to ocean use compatibility with offshore wind energy, through the Alliance or non-competitive funds directly provided to Tribes.
- **Support a reimagination process of “consultation” moving toward mutual decision-making** among Tribal, federal, and state governments that is respectful, effective, and occurs within appropriate timeframes.
- **Support Tribal governments in coordination on data sovereignty and equitable access to data.**
- **Gather, curate, and disseminate relevant information** related to ocean health, planning, policy, and management to ensure a common understanding of the regional issues and recommendations by member governments.
- **Restore federal and state caucuses** to align on goals and strategies and to learn from the successes of the Tribal Caucus in providing a forum to discuss issues and problem-solve together.
- **Ensure WCOA’s longevity and vitality**, with potential strategies being the creation of a legally structured nongovernmental organization with diversified funding streams.
- **Continue to convene in-person Summits** for annual meetings and topical issues that are a priority for membership to discuss.

WCOA’s Values

Summit participants were asked to choose 1-3 core values from a list that they felt described WCOA when it was operating at its best or when they envisioned it performing at its best. This word cloud illustrates the responses, with the size of the value words corresponding to the frequency at which they were mentioned.



## WCOA's E-newsletter

WCOA staff have identified the need for a members-only e-newsletter to streamline communications. Participants provided input on their vision for the e-newsletter through virtual and in-person participation in a survey question. Participants shared the following desires for a monthly or quarterly e-newsletter intended to complement WCOA meetings as a source of information.

- Share key relevant resources and information: contacts, funding, and grant opportunities; job postings; products; legislative initiatives; newly published studies and research on ocean topics of relevance to WCOA; upcoming WCOA, member government, and broader ocean community events and meetings; understandable policy, public notices, and comment period timelines; collaboration opportunities with WCOA and non-WCOA members.
- Provide updates and highlight the importance of community: news from WCOA members and partners related to efforts in the region, recently funded projects, and guidance on how members can support each other.
- Spotlight in each edition a member government, recent WCOA accomplishments, or Tribal government actions, interests, perspectives, and history.

## Action Items

- Participants to provide feedback on the Annual Members Summit in the [survey](#).
- Membership to register at the [Blue Pages](#), an innovative coordination tool that provides regional contact information for all Tribal, federal, and state government representatives working on various ocean management topics on the West Coast. Please see the instructions [in this document](#) and contact John with questions.
- The Tribal Caucus will consider sharing key takeaways from the Tribal Caucus Annual Summit report directly with federal and state government leadership as a follow-up to the leadership engagement letter.
- At the Annual Summit, some WCOA members requested a follow-up letter with Summit highlights be sent to leadership to share outcomes.
- WCOA Membership will continue informing the strategic planning process by responding to distributed surveys.
- WCOA Staff and membership to plan the 2024 Offshore Wind Energy Summit to further discuss offshore wind as a priority topic.
- WCOA Staff to consider updating the format and frequency of the member meetings to reflect feedback shared by the membership.
- Leadership Team members will help activate and support all WCOA Caucuses and provide information exchanges between the Caucuses and the Leadership Team.