

**To:** whom it may concern/Rocky Habitats Working Group,

**From:** Leigh Anderson, principal author of the recreational divers proposal for coast-wide kelp preservation proposal to the Rocky Habitats Working Group, and a veteran diver of 40 years in Oregon

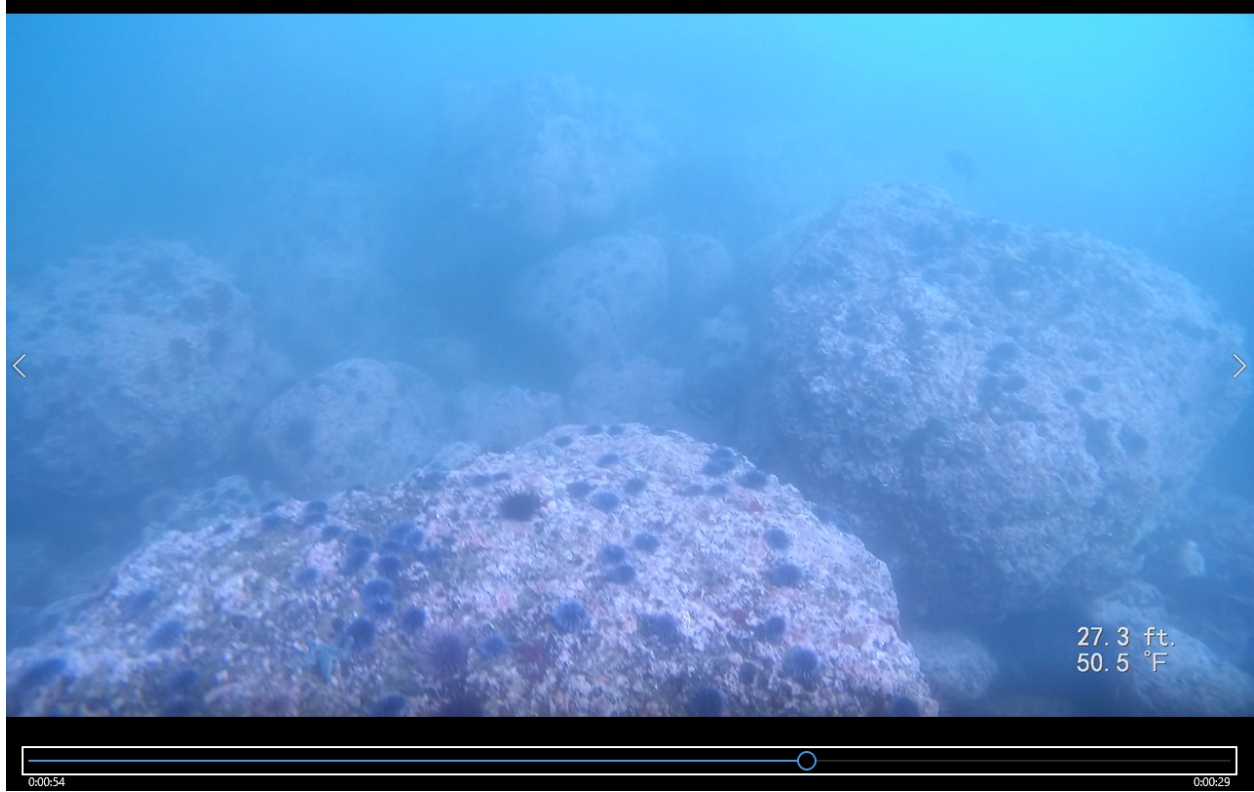
**Regarding:** Support of the Lincoln City Audubon's excellent Rocky Habitat proposal for Cape Lookout.

I have read the Audubon proposal for Cape Lookout in detail. And have several points in support after discussion with several other informal leaders in our Oregon diving community.

1. We are very comfortable and gratified by the explicit preservation of boat access to Cape Lookout, not only for recreational divers access, but also diver access for kelp preservation efforts if permission hopefully is granted by ODFW.
2. We were also very impressed and gratified that the Audubon Proposal acknowledged the underwater kelp forest crisis due to urchin overpopulation - and made that distinction in the proposal, whereas other site-proposals misguidedly added no-take protection to marauding urchins by blindly lumping them in with other invertebrates.
3. The society has even arranged for drone video to be taken and offered to share the video with us divers, to aid in Cape Lookout kelp baseline measurement. We really appreciate that community collaboration spirit.

To document the dire underwater situation, we obtained recent underwater video footage via a freediver at Cape Lookout, which sampled quite a few sites (about 20 video samples) centered almost midway out the south side of the cape. **Zero kelp** was seen, in what should be prime kelp habitat in the very boulder-ey terrain. There was some kelp reported in the shallows closer to the beach so at least there's a spore bank remaining, but the historical kelp range was vastly larger. We found very high purple urchin density, with a minority of reds also present. Some boulders had roughly 5-15 urchins in a square meter in the densest cases vs ~0.5 for a kelp-viable density. The boulders are scraped down to bare rock largely - by the urchin hordes - i.e. very little marine crustal organisms and no vegetation left. Except for one school of rockfish seen and a few singles, not very fishy at all compared to 2012 pre-sea-star die-off. This site used to hold a LOT of Ling cod, but hardly any seen in 2 hours of diving despite looking in dozens of their usual hidey holes. The south Lookout Reef desperately needs urchin culling help, this Spring '21. Very few sea stars, (and of course zero nearly extinct urchin-predating Sunflower sea stars), were seen.

Here's a screen shot that's very representative of the Cape Lookout urchin infestation and their devastation of the former kelp forest, after looking at all 20 video samples. There should be and used to be a dense forest of bull kelp and so much dense crustal marine growth and vegetation on the boulders you wouldn't even see any bare rock at all. **It is an extremely urchin-damaged reef with over 95% loss of keystone kelp habitat.**



Best regards,  
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