

Fort Ross Conservancy's Russian America Ocean Connections



The history of Fort Ross is inextricably tied to the Pacific Ocean's resources. Russians settled Alaska in their hunt for "soft gold," and later migrated down the Pacific coast with two primary goals: to find a warmer location whereby they could grow enough food to feed those Alaskan settlements, and to expand their hunting range. It's worth noting that at that time many nationalities, in particular the Russians, British, and Americans, hunted sea otters, northern fur seals, and other mammals that once thrived along our coast, often trading these goods with the Chinese. Russians and others realized that the hunting was putting many species on the brink of extinction, and the Russians created one of the earliest moratoriums on hunting practices during the Fort Ross era.

For Russians and Americans, the Pacific Ocean is our shared resource, the life-affirming border connecting our countries. Fort Ross Conservancy (FRC) would like to strengthen and personalize this connection through a series of marine ecology outdoor research projects suitable for middle, high school and university students. Ideally we would include sites in Alaska as well.

Project Goals

Fort Ross Conservancy's proposed **Russian America Ocean Connections** project will bring together young Russians and Americans to experience and collaborate on a series of place-based marine ecology and citizen science projects. Our goal is to bridge the Pacific ocean and reconnect Fort Ross to the Russian Federation's Far East by coordinating citizen science projects and sharing the findings using mobile data collection apps, video conferencing, and Google Classroom-style technologies. We use iNaturalist for many of our projects and we would like to continue with that platform if a Russian language version is available.

Proposed Projects

Two or more times a year we will coordinate with our partners to decide on a timely and appropriate topic around which to coordinate the season's field work. Potential projects:

- Sea star wasting - undertake regular census work to determine the health of sea stars in the intertidal zone on both coasts. Over a period of over a year, sea stars populations from California to Oregon declined from this wasting condition. Did the west coast of the Pacific experience this as well, and is the recovery we see in California widespread?
- Marine Mammal census, and sharing of tagged/branded animals; Steller Sea Lion - census work to establish populations.
- Survey of kelp forest health and density. Kelp forests around the world are in decline due to overpopulation of sea urchins. Is this a problem in Alaska and Russia as well?
- Using an underwater drone at multiple sites would allow us to share video footage of the intertidal zone, monitor the health and compare differences between our coasts.
- Plastics -- Are they present in the oceans we are observing, is there a collaborated effort that needs to be made to clean up our rocky intertidal zones or sandy beaches?



Resources

These organizations are currently working with us or have expressed an interest in partnering with Fort Ross Conservancy:

- Bodega Marine Lab (associated with University of California Davis)
- The California Academy of Sciences
- Greater Farallones Association
- The Marine Mammal Center
- U.S. Consulate General in Vladivostok

Needs

- FRC seeks to partner with an international organization who will help us define the collaboration and assist us in partnering with organizations in Russia's Far East.
- FRC has access to Google Nonprofit Virtual Classroom technology but Fort Ross State Historic Park needs better bandwidth at our office, and vastly improved cell coverage in the field.
- We currently use iNaturalist which is an excellent, well established app.

Related Fort Ross Conservancy Links

- Fort Ross Conservancy brings over 4,000 students to our park each year for both one and two day programming which delves into the history and marine ecology of Fort Ross. Youth programming at Fort Ross is described at: <https://programs.fortross.org/>
- Late 1800s Ranch-era Dog Hole Ports project with California State Parks and NOAA: <https://www.fortross.org/doghole.htm>

Fort Ross Conservancy

- Stewards 9,400 acres -- from intertidal habitat to redwood groves
- Preserves 15 historic buildings and cultural features
- Engages 977,000 visitors over the last three years
- Staffs 2 Visitor Centers
- Maintains 30 miles of trails
- Organizes large scale events that bring >3,500 people to our park each year to celebrate our diverse history
- Maintains our www.fortross.org website, which receives over 300 hits per day
- Publishes dozens of high quality books, brochures, interpretive signage, and trail guides to improve our visitors' experience.

