



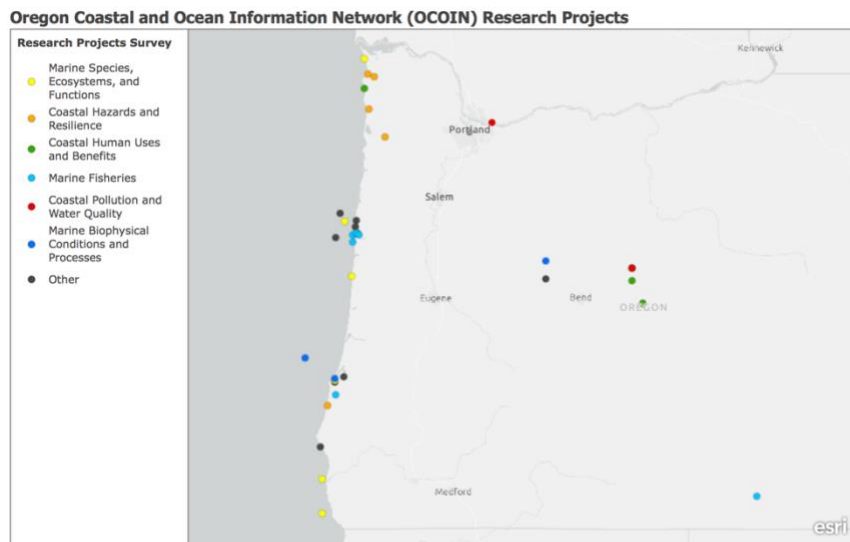
Connecting Coastal Researchers and Policy-Makers: How OCOIN Bridges that Dangerous Gap

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"It's easy to say 'there's a lot of research going on at the coast', but this tool allows you to see the reality of that research. Having a complete dashboard of coastal research projects and the researchers involved allows peers to see what is (or isn't) being studied, creating more efficient collaboration."

– Greg Stelmach, OSU Graduate Student Researcher

A healthy working relationship between scientists and policy-makers is a critical element needed for implementing successful, efficient environmental policy. Former Administrator of NOAA, Jane Lubchenco, echoes this sentiment, explaining that “science is more than just fascinating knowledge, it is also useful knowledge, and should inform our decisions.”¹ However, scientists and decision-makers are too often siloed, with little communication or collaboration across disciplinary lines. One of the primary reasons for this silence is a lack of common spaces where scientists can easily share their research with decision-makers. For a decision-maker, even being able to discover existing research projects is a major barrier to collaboration. The [Oregon Coastal and Ocean Information Network \(OCOIN\)](#) was established with the mission of creating this space, which now exists in the form of a [Coastal Research Explorer tool](#).



The spatial distribution of all research projects included in the Coastal Research Explorer tool, as of August 2018. Projects colored based on the category of their coastal research project.

providing research contacts and illuminating relevant coastal issues. After only 2 years in operation, the explorer contains over 100 research projects that span across the entire Oregon coast.

The *Coastal Research Explorer tool* was launched by OCOIN in 2016, with the purpose of collaboration and communication between researchers working within Oregon’s coast and territorial sea. The tool creates a platform for researchers to share their completed or ongoing projects, explore other projects occurring on the coast, and establish relationships with other coastal users. Additionally, creators of the tool hope that it can assist coastal decision-makers by

¹ Baron, Nancy. *Escape from the Ivory Tower: a Guide to Making Your Science Matter*. Island Press, 2010.

THE TOOL IN ACTION

Despite the tool only recently coming online, it's effective application has already been tested and illustrates its potential to serve as a valuable resource for researchers and policy-makers alike. Each year, students at Oregon State University's Master of Public Policy (MPP) program must complete a research project guided by a real organization. The 2018 cohort assisted the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Marine Reserves program with investigating the perceptions and opinions of one critical stakeholder group: coastal scientists.



A class photo of the MPP cohort that completed this project. Photo taken by Kayla Maria Martin.

Identifying a representative sample of coastal scientists was the first step of this project, and was greatly assisted by the *Coastal Research Explorer*. Students relied on this tool as the backbone of their sampling frame, since it contains a wide range of researchers and affiliations working across the entire Oregon coast. Their final distribution list, which contained both primary investigators and student assistants who reported their research projects, was emailed a short survey asking about their perceptions and opinions of the ODFW Marine Reserve Program.

After only 11 days of survey distribution, students collected 103 unique responses from people representing government agencies, academia, non-governmental organizations, and private companies. This data revealed significant trends among coastal scientists, primarily related to streams of communication, existing knowledge, perceptions of the Marine Reserves Program, and expectations for future Program actions. Their results were synthesized into a report, which was given to ODFW and presented at the Hatfield Marine Science Center.

MOVING FORWARD

The success of this project speaks to the value of OCOIN's *Coastal Research Explorer tool* as a resource for policy research and decision-making. Additionally, it highlights the tool's accessibility and ease of use, as students easily maneuvered the tool to fit their needs. This project only skims the surface of all that is possible with the tool; Hopefully, future users continue to utilize this unique resource to inform their coastal research and decisions, and by doing so take one step closer to uniting researchers and policy-makers.

**If you are a researcher or student working on Oregon coastal or marine topics
[add your research to the map!](#)**