PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY TREATY BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MARCH 18, 1985

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# Southern Fund: Call for Project Concepts for the 2026 Project Year

**The Southern Fund Committee (SFC) hereby issues its 2026 Call for Proposals for projects that support the implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST).**

The SFC anticipates approximately $4 million USD will be available for project funding in 2026, based on investment performance. The final amount will be confirmed in early 2026.

Private, non-profit, and public sector applicants are eligible and encouraged to apply. Ongoing projects and individual proponents that have received support from the Southern Fund in previous years are encouraged to apply and must be in good standing at the Stage Two (Detailed Proposal) round to remain eligible[1].

The SFC invites proposals aligned with the three activities associated with the origin and purpose of the Southern Fund - improving information, restoring habitat, and enhancing wild stock production – as well as the Strategic Goals and Objectives of the Southern Fund outlined in the *Strategic Plan of the SFC*[2]. Innovative proposals are encouraged, for example those exploring new technology or new fishery management tools. The SFC has also identified specific priorities for the 2026 funding cycle and welcomes applications that are responsive to these priorities.

The Southern Fund's geographic area encompasses southern British Columbia (including the Fraser River Basin), the States of Washington and Oregon, and the Snake River Basin in Idaho. It is unlikely that funding will be provided to projects that propose activities located outside this area or that concern stocks which do not contribute significantly to fisheries within this area. The SFC works closely with the Northern Fund Committee on funding decisions. If your project is equally relevant to both funds in terms of the geographic area or fishery stocks, please submit your application to both funds.

[1] If a Project Concept is received and (a) the application is for an ongoing Southern Fund project that has overdue reports, or (b) the lead proponent has previously received Southern Fund support for any project with outstanding reports, and if a proponent is invited to submit a Detailed Proposal, overdue reports require submission by the Detailed Proposal submission deadline.

[2] The Strategic Plan has been published alongside this Call for Proposals on the PSC website.

The SFC is not inclined to support routine / ongoing monitoring activities unless the project is designed to address gaps in the understanding of key mechanisms or management approaches.

If your proposed project spans multiple years, it must be identified as such and it is necessary to re-apply for funding each year. If you are applying for funds to continue an existing project, then you must apply by the deadline. This ensures that the SFC will have an overview of every project seeking funding in 2026 and that project concepts are invited to the second round of proposals in a manner which is transparent and responsive to the priorities set out below.

The SFC encourages and looks for co-ordination, collaboration, and partnerships between different agencies, organizations, Tribes, First Nations, and stakeholders.[3]

The deadline to submit a project concept is by **11:59pm on Wednesday, August 20, 2025.** Please submit your application through the grantee portal submission form.[4]

[3] Further instructions are provided in the Project Concept application, Detailed Proposal application, and Guidelines to Stage Two.

[4] Refer to page 12, Application Process, for more details.

## Project priority areas for 2026.

### Habitat Preservation and Restoration

The SFC encourages project concepts for on-the-ground projects designed to benefit wild stocks of salmon by protecting or improving the quality or quantity of their habitat, as described in the Strategic Plan. Projects will seek to:

- Restore salmon habitat in estuaries, supporting soft-shore initiatives by re-establishing eelgrass beds, restoring, or reclaiming saltwater marsh benches, etc.
- Implement modifications of in-stream habitat to improve productivity, e.g., large woody debris structures, spawning gravel placement, boulder clusters and bank stabilization.
- Construct side channels and other off-channel habitat, including spawning and rearing channels or ponds, ox-bow reconnection, dike breaching, etc.
- Restore fish passage through such things as culvert removal / replacement, remediation of barriers to migration.
- Restore and protect wetlands, riparian, and upland habitat, e.g., through activities such as land acquisition, livestock exclusion fencing, riparian re-vegetation and re-planting, upland sediment source remediation, conservation easements, etc.

## Southern Panel recommendations

The Pacific Salmon Commission's Southern Panel has considered Coho Technical Committee (CoTC) and Chum Technical Committee (Chum TC) advice on their research priorities for potential consideration and funding by the SFC in the 2026 cycle. The SFC will be mindful of the following prioritized list of research and work topics when considering which projects to support in 2026:

***Coho Technical Committee priorities:***

1. Incorporating environmental change and uncertainty into assessment and management frameworks – High Priority

   *The Committee on Scientific Cooperation (CSC) released a draft report titled "Assessment and management frameworks of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and their robustness to environmental change" in February 2023. This report outlines several challenges in the management and assessment frameworks for Coho salmon. Projects proposing approaches to address these topics at the data collection, analysis and management systems levels to support the implementation of the Coho abundance-based management agreement are encouraged. Projects addressing the effect of environmental change on Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) model parameters (e.g., natural mortality estimates, release mortality estimates) are of particular interest to CoTC.*

2. Continued development of escapement estimates for the Lower Fraser and Strait of Georgia Management Units (MUs) – High Priority

   *Currently, two Canadian MUs (Strait of Georgia (SoG) and Lower Fraser River) are lacking aggregate level abundance data to inform both the development of Management Reference Points and create accurate inputs into FRAM for estimating exploitation rates. Component programs in the Lower Fraser have included work on the Lillooet River, Chilliwack River, Nicomen Slough, and an Assessment Fishery in the Fraser River. A DNA based assessment is being developed in the SoG in addition to increasing the precision and number systems being surveyed, including return rate estimates in several SoG systems such as Cowichan.*

3. Evaluate productivity over time – High Priority

   *During the January 2025 Post-Season Meeting, CSC and ESSA hosted a workshop on time-varying dynamics in salmon. Accounting for changes in salmon population dynamics in assessment and management frameworks can reveal long-term changes in the intrinsic resilience of Pacific salmon stocks and provide estimates of contemporary management reference points that may bolster the sustainability of fisheries under changing conditions. We are interested in proposals that will evaluate how Coho populations are changing over time and how the framework presented at the workshop could be incorporated into long-term management regimes. We are interested in work that will detect time-varying dynamics,*

*estimate biological benchmarks, assess stock status, and develop harvest control rules that could support coho management that is responsive to environmental variation and directional change.*

4. Coho Diversity – High Priority

   *The environmental challenges facing Coho salmon are important to address and the need to change the focus from harvest and concepts of maximum sustainable harvest to diversity (genetic and environmental), resiliency, and precautionary management to account for uncertainty and risk. Identify limits that salmon can tolerate, plasticity and adaptability. Projects to increase understanding of how Coho life histories, productivity and abundance are projected to be affected to forecasts of the magnitude and pace of environmental change, population growth, and development and recommendations to conserve diversity in the face of variability, uncertainty and unpredictability are of particular interest. The list is long - current harvest patterns, temperatures, ecological drought, wildfire, extreme events, sudden change, changes in flow patterns, water scarcity, chemical pollution, erosion, etc. Estimating and characterizing biodiversity, setting goals, and developing strategies for conserving biological and ecological biodiversity are important to ensure resilience to environmental change.*

5. Support efforts to evaluate and further improve input data to the FRAM model e.g. Estimation of post fishery-pre-spawn mortality loss – Medium Priority

   *FRAM is the key tool used by CoTC for pre-season fishery planning and post-season reporting of fishery impacts on coho MUs. Improvements in abundance forecasting, including better understanding of the impacts of environmental variability and uncertainty on forecasts for MUs. In addition, assessments of the sensitivity and uncertainty of pre-season exploitation rate projections and post season exploitation rates estimates to the accuracy of mark rates, catch and release mortalities, and hatchery contributions represent gaps in our current understanding of the model. A potentially important source of mortality affecting production estimates is pre-spawn mortality, but relatively little is known with respect to coho salmon. Proposals to quantify and evaluate Inter-stream and interannual variability within spawning systems and causal factors for coho are desired. Improved estimates of mortality inputs to FRAM including release mortalities in mark selective and non-retention fisheries, incidental fishing mortality (drop-off) are welcomed, as are efforts to incorporate uncertainty in the model (input and output).*

6. Loss of juveniles and adults due to predation or chemicals – Medium Priority

   *Increasing marine mammal populations, particularly pinnipeds, are putting pressure on salmon stocks including southern Coho stocks. Research identifying predation rates on both juveniles and returning adult fish for individual coho MUs will help in assessing the impact of predation as a source of mortality that is not considered through the PST bilateral process of pre-season and post-season analysis of exploitation rates on MUs subject to the southern*

*Coho abundance-based management regime described in Chapter 5. In addition to pinniped predation, projects to identify and quantify loss of salmon due to environmental chemicals (e.g., from tires, wildfire suppression, pollutants) are also welcome.*

7. Establish new and improved data collection and sampling for coho MUs and component populations – Medium Priority

   *The CoTC is interested in projects proposing new data streams and sampling methods such as parentage-based tagging and PIT tags and projects proposing to address issues identified in PSC Technical Report 25 ("An Action Plan in Response to the Coded Wire Tag Expert Panel Recommendations") and the SFEC Coho DIT report related to sampling and addressing biases in the Coded Wire Tag data.*

### *Chum Technical Committee Priorities*

This table summarizes high priority research needs identified by the Chum TC for 2026 proposals relevant to Southern BC and Washington State Chum Salmon.

| Research need | Priority Rank | Chum TC Recommendation |
|---|---|---|
| Ongoing module development and maintenance of the Chum Genetic Environmental Model (ChumGEM) | 1 | Support for proposals that align with the goals of ChumGEM development, including the fishery planning module.<br>May include pilot technical support position within the Secretariat. |
| Methodologies for establishing biological escapement goals and fishery reference points | 2 | Support for the development of Chum related goals/reference points. |
| Chum Wild and Enhanced Contributions | 3 | Support projects that assess methodologies to review and evaluate the contribution of hatchery and wild to escapement and fisheries. |
| Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) baseline development | 4 | Continued support to refine (as needed) the Bilateral Chum SNP baseline. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Genetic Stock Identification (GSI) sampling of Chum in mixed-stock fisheries | 5 | Continued support required to better evaluate stock composition variability: focus on under-sampled and new fisheries. |
| Improve understanding of juvenile Chum | 6 | Support sampling of juvenile collections in various areas (freshwater, estuarine, marine) to evaluate stock composition and distribution. |
| Assess biological and environmental variables affecting Chum survival and productivity | 7 | Support research on environmental and biological variables influencing Chum survival and productivity. |
| Stock-specific temporal and spatial distribution of migrating Chum salmon | 8 | Meta-analysis of Juan de Fuca work is ongoing. Seek to improve understanding of migration rate along entire migration route and further refine migration around Vancouver Island. Support other projects that seek to address this research need. |
| Improvement of Chum escapement assessments | 9 | Continued support for new escapement assessments (tools and technology). |

## Fraser River Panel (FRP) recommendations

The SFC has received advice about funding priorities from the FRP which will inform decisions about 2026 projects. The FRP has not assigned a relative priority to the topics listed below.

1. Additional Fraser sockeye salmon juvenile monitoring.

   *Projects addressing the following elements are desired: (a) monitoring of juvenile sockeye in upstream locations in the Fraser watershed including either out-migrating smolts or lake surveys, (b) monitoring of juvenile salmon in lower Fraser locations, and (c) monitoring of coastal juvenile salmon migration.*

2. Examination of mechanisms affecting survival of adult and juvenile Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon.

   *These projects would aim to understand why some Fraser River stocks in 2022 (e.g., Late Shuswap/Portage) returned well below forecast compared to other Fraser River stocks (e.g., Birkenhead, Nadina, Weaver) which returned well above forecast as did other sockeye runs (e.g., Skeena, Nass) along the Pacific Coast.*

3. Improvement of species composition estimates in the Fraser River during adult sockeye and pink salmon migration.

   *Given the low returns of Fraser River sockeye salmon in recent years, species composition estimates and the possible bias they may create for both the daily and total sockeye abundance estimates require additional scrutiny. Proposals could include methods to improve the in-season assessment of the daily abundance of other salmon species comigrating with sockeye salmon within the Fraser River, methods to improve the timeliness of estimates, methods to improve species composition estimates derived from test fishery or hydroacoustic data, or integrated multispecies assessment methods.*

4. Building on Test Fishery workshops, evaluate Test Fishery design and operation to collect the necessary data for in-season estimates, while reducing unnecessary fishing mortality and operating costs.

   *In 2018, a two year SFC-funded project to review Fraser River Test fisheries was concluded (http://www.psc.org/download/33/psc-technical-reports/10620/psc-technical-report-no-40.pdf). The FRP supports proposals to conduct work in support of the report's five recommendations as well as in the area of live sampling.*

5. Improvement to in-season and post-season assessment of Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon stocks.

*For sockeye salmon, declining run sizes have made it challenging to obtain sufficient information from test fishing catches for stock assessment purposes. In addition, it has become increasingly important to limit the impact of the in-season assessment programs on the resource, both to support conservation needs as well as reduce competition with other user groups when harvestable surpluses are available. Proposals to explore alternative non-lethal and cost-effective assessment methods to obtain reliable abundance, species composition and stock ID information, even when abundances are low, are encouraged.*

*In 2024, a Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) peer review process on Run Size Adjustments (RSAs) highlighted the need for continued effort to improve the quality of postseason run size estimates by improving stock-specific estimates of en route mortality, catch and spawning escapement. Proposals to improve any or all of these components will help support recovery and rebuilding plans for Fraser sockeye, allow for flexibility to deal with extreme migration conditions and reductions in catch and/or spawning escapements and potentially improve pre-season and in-season Difference Between Estimates and Management Adjustment estimates.*

6. Work to restore salmon habitat that would be of benefit to Fraser River sockeye and pink populations (and possibly also other salmon species).

   *Over the past decade or more a number of Fraser River sockeye stocks which used to contribute to important fisheries have experienced significant declines, and despite large reductions in fishing pressure, have not recovered. Consequently, fishing opportunities for the two countries have been affected. While marine survival is likely a factor, changes to freshwater habitats may also be contributing to conservation challenges. The FRP is therefore interested in opportunities to restore sockeye habitat, with the objective of taking action to address persistent limitations to sockeye productivity in freshwater spawning and rearing habitats. In particular, with the possible permanent loss of Gates spawning channel and the effects on sample collection, the FRP is interested in proposals that would restore this spawning channel. Also, with more extreme weather events happening, especially in 2022, Weaver spawning channel suffered from drought conditions and the FRP is also interested in proposals to mitigate this in the future. Lastly, the FRP acknowledges the challenges fish had with the high flows in recent years and is seeking a better understanding of exactly where those areas are along freshwater migration routes and if there are potential mitigative measures that can be identified for future years.*

7. Projects that would help to further advance hydro-acoustic or other assessment techniques in the lower Fraser River, in support of continually improving in-season estimates of sockeye and pink salmon abundance.

   *To ensure that conservation needs are met for stocks of Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon the FRP requires accurate and cost-effective assessment of abundance. Furthermore,*

*to ensure that appropriate fishery management actions are taken in a timely manner these assessments must provide actionable data to the FRP as early as possible.*

8. Facilitate dialog between U.S. Tribes and Canadian First Nations to improve collaboration and communication between the parties.

   *Plan and coordinate meetings/workshops between Canadian First Nations and the U.S. Tribes focused on improving the collaboration between the Parties on issues related to Fraser Panel Chapter 4 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.*

## Chinook Technical Committee (CTC) Priorities

The SFC has received advice about funding priorities from the CTC which will inform decisions about 2026 proposals. The CTC has not assigned a relative priority to the areas listed below:

*Priorities for CTC analytical improvements:*

- PSC Coast Wide Chinook Model and Exploitation Rate Analysis development and improvement using contemporary modelling software (e.g., R).
- Improvement of methods for stock and fishery assessments (e.g., estimation of spatial/temporal stock-age distribution, projection of maturation rates for incomplete broods, systematic evaluation of current analytical methods using the Data Generation Model).
- Improvements to the forecasting tools (e.g., models and evaluations) used to inform CTC analyses.
- Research and development work related to improving the PSC Chinook Model or exploring alternative modelling/management strategies for Chapter 3 of the PST.
- Incorporating environmental factors (e.g., changes in incidental fishing mortalities, predation loss, distribution patterns, interspecies interactions, alteration of maturation schedules and productivities, sudden extreme events, and pre-spawn mortality) into analytical methods for stock and fishery assessments.
- Measures to cope with declines in productivity of natural-origin stocks and uncertainties relating to environmental change.

*Priorities for coded-wire tag (CWT) network improvement:*

- Sampling in fisheries and escapements, lab processing, and data reporting to support the recovery of adequate numbers of CWT to support estimation of precise statistics used in CTC analyses.
- Coded-wire tagging of CTC exploitation rate indicator stocks (single index tagging and double index tagging) designed to improve the quality and quantity of CWT data identified in PSC CWT guidelines.
- Improve precision and accuracy of CWT-based statistics used by the CTC.
- Accelerate processing and reporting of CWT data for the pre-season planning process.

*Priorities for improvements in Chinook abundance estimation:*

- Continued or improved estimates of catch, terminal returns, and escapements to meet CTC data standards and support the Chapter 3 Catch and Escapement Improvement Initiative (CEII; e.g., development of more timely catch, terminal run, and escapement data).
- Revision of existing escapement goals (e.g., due to shifts in size and age at maturity), development of additional escapement goals, and stock-specific exploitation rate management objectives needed to implement the Chinook management regime, targeted at stocks listed in Chapter 3 Attachment 1 of the PST.
- Examine the degree to which indicator stocks for exploitation and escapement represent PSC Chinook Model aggregate stocks, such as hatchery vs. wild stocks, and address knowledge gaps.
- Improve understanding of hatchery composition of spawners in escapement indicator stocks, in particular, large aggregate stocks.
- Improve accuracy and precision in estimates of incidental mortality (e.g., improved methods used to estimate the incidental mortality using CWT data and to quantify releases, and studies to improve estimates of drop-off and drop-out mortality rates).
- Efforts toward incorporating genetic information in estimation of PST stock composition of catch and escapement, including standardization of existing data sets, development of statistical techniques, and improvements to genetic analyses.
- Modelling the impacts of stochastic climate events on local Chinook abundance.
- Precautionary management measures for responding to uncertainty and changes in productivity.

## Okanagan Work Group (OWG) Priorities

The SFC has received advice about funding priorities from the OWG which will inform decisions about 2026 proposals. The OWG has not assigned a relative priority to the areas listed below:

- Restoration activities that benefit the salmon ecosystem in the Okanagan.
- Projects in the Okanagan and Columbia River that prevent, monitor, respond to, and suppress the spread of invasive species that are predators on salmon or species and habitat modifications that lead to increased predation on salmon.
- Activities that support improvements to the bilateral enhancement programs for Okanagan summer Chinook, including research into juvenile survival and improvements to the collection and survival of adult broodstock.
- Activities that could benefit the abundance and productivity of Okanagan summer Chinook.

## Other / General

The SFC encourages project concepts that are aligned with the Southern Fund's three core purposes; achieving the outcomes described in the Strategic Plan; or are relevant to the implementation of the PST. The SFC will consider projects that are designed to benefit wild stocks of Pacific salmon and may be outside the scope of the five priority areas described above.

## Application Process

The SFC uses a two-stage submission and review process. The initial review stage is designed primarily to evaluate the proposal's relevance and significance to the PST and the priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan and this Call for Proposals. Project proponents should focus on providing a clear description of project objectives and benefits in this first round concept stage rather than providing detailed information about project implementation and budgets. That information will need to be provided for those project concepts selected for second stage review.

With this initial call comes a short Project Concept application. **For the 2026 Call you must use complete the application online via the grantee portal submission form.** This allows the SFC to conduct its first-round review of submissions in a fair and expeditious manner.

The first-round review of all Project Concepts will take place in September 2025. Those proponents whose Project Concepts best match the priorities described within this Call for Proposals will be invited to prepare a more Detailed Proposal for stage two. Projects invited to the second stage will have approximately one month to submit final, detailed proposals. The detailed proposals will be subject to an in-depth technical review. The SFC will make final funding decisions in February 2026.

### Deadlines

Project concepts must be submitted online through the grantee portal submission form and received by **11:59pm PDT on Wednesday August 20, 2025**.

Late applications will not be considered; applicants are encouraged to submit proposals well ahead of time. You will receive an automatic notification that your proposal has been received.

### Contact Information

Questions should be directed to the Grant Program Manager, Sascha Bendt, or the Fund Assistant, Victor Keong, via email at funds@psc.org or phone at (604) 684-8081.