



REGIONAL DISTRICT OF OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN

SOUTH OKANAGAN CONSERVATION FUND

Leaving a natural legacy for future generations...

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Date

Approved on August 19, 2021

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1. BACKGROUND

In December 2016, the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (“RDOS”), with public assent, adopted Bylaw #2690 to establish an Environmental Conservation Service for the Electoral Areas “A”, “C”, “D”, “E”, “F”, and “I”, the City of Penticton, District of Summerland, and the Town of Oliver (collectively referred to as “the participating areas”). Under this Bylaw, the annual maximum amount to be requisitioned for the cost of the service was not to exceed the greater of \$450,000 or \$0.0292 per thousand dollars of net taxable value of land and improvements in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen. These funds are in support of undertaking and administering activities, projects, and works that include, but are not limited to, water, environment, wildlife, land, and habitat conservation efforts to protect natural areas within the participating areas of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen.

For the purposes of this Terms of Reference, the Environmental Conservation Service is also known as the “South Okanagan Conservation Fund” or “the Fund”.

2. FUND PURPOSE

The South Okanagan Similkameen is biologically, a unique area of Canada. The RDOS has the second highest number of species at risk of any other Regional District in BC as well as the highest proportion of sensitive ecosystems.

Natural lands in both rural and urban areas filter our water, supply open spaces for wildlife and people, and provide quality of life to communities. Unfortunately, these systems are under stress. The current generation must act now to ensure a healthy physical environment for future generations.

The purpose of the Fund is to provide local financial support for projects that will contribute to the conservation of our valuable natural areas; one step towards restoring and preserving a healthy environment. The intent is to provide funding for conservation projects that are not the existing responsibility of the federal, provincial, or local governments.

3. FUND ADMINISTRATION

3.1 RDOS Responsibility

The RDOS is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Fund and retains the responsibility for approval of all matters related thereto, including projects, payments, and financial audits of the Fund.

3.2 Consultant Responsibility

The RDOS may enter into an agreement with a third party to be responsible for aspects of administrative management of the Fund for a set fee defined by contract.

3.3 Technical Advisory Committee

The RDOS may also appoint a Technical Advisory Committee to provide expertise in the review and selection of projects or recipients of funds, as outlined in Appendix 2.

Some of the top-mentioned public environmental concerns from RDOS citizen and public opinion surveys include water quality and quantity, air quality, wildfires, preserving lands and parks, the loss of natural areas due to land conversion and development, population growth and development, sprawl, and the loss or extinction of wildlife.

4. CONSERVATION THEMES AND GOALS

4.1 Themes

The themes for the Fund shall address top public environmental issues including conservation of water quality and quantity stewardship, (aquatic ecosystems, surface, and groundwater), protection, enhancement, and restoration of sensitive terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, wildlife species (including those at risk), and habitat for native fish and wildlife.

These themes are based on market research done in RDOS community surveys between 2010 and 2020, and regional conservation program opinion polling and focus group research in 2004, 2008, and 2016 to identify what residents value in the RDOS region. Themes are also consistent with the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy *Keeping Nature in Our Future*.

A directive of the South Okanagan *Regional Growth Strategy*, the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy *Keeping Nature in Our Future* was developed in collaboration between the RDOS and the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) partners. Accepted by the RDOS Board in 2013, it provides science-based information and strategies to protect important local biodiversity, including the - establishment of a local conservation fund.

4.2 Targets

Projects that can demonstrate a reduction of a known threat to a biodiversity target will be given priority (see Appendix 1 for a list of ineligible projects). Projects on all land tenure types will be considered. The biodiversity targets are:

- Sensitive Ecosystems as defined by Provincial SEI classifications and predominantly occurring in the valley bottom <1200m in elevation*.
 - Riparian, foreshore, and water bodies including gullies, creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, marshes, and swamps.
 - Wetlands are both permanent and ephemeral including wet meadows, marshes, swamps, and shallow open water areas including ponds.
 - Grasslands and shrub-steppe.
 - Sparsely Vegetated rock outcrops, talus, cliffs, and slopes.
 - Broadleaf & coniferous woodlands and old forests.
 - Other important ecosystems such as mature forest and Seasonally Flooded Fields.
 - *Exception is high elevation alpine areas. These are to be included.
- Watersheds are an important source of water protection areas.
- Connectivity for natural areas and wildlife corridors.

- Native fish and wildlife habitat including for species at risk.
- Urban and rural wild-land interface areas.

4.3 Classification Scheme

The aim is to “think globally; act locally.” The framework for Technical Review (see Appendix 2) will be based on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classification of direct threats. The value of this classification scheme is to provide nomenclature for practitioners world-wide to describe the common problems they are facing and solutions they are using in a mutually intelligible way. The issues outlined below are those that currently have the highest relevance to the area around RDOS. This is only a partial list and other IUCN threats will be considered in evaluating proposals:

(a) Residential and Commercial Development

Development activity continues to lead to conversion and fragmentation of important habitats and greater demands on water.

(b) Climate Change

Climate change will have a dramatic influence on Okanagan ecosystems over the next 20 years. Higher summer and winter temperatures, declining mountain snowpack, reduced snowfall, long dry summers, and sudden heavy rains are just some of the changes. These changes will have a dramatic impact on fire regimes, geo-hazards and flooding, river flow, water availability, plant distribution, and wildlife populations.

(c) Terrestrial and Aquatic Invasive Species

When natural areas are disturbed, there is often an opportunity for invasive species to flourish. Invasive species, both terrestrial and aquatic, can disrupt natural ecological processes as there are often no natural agents present to keep these species in check. Invasive species can affect fish and wildlife habitat, range values, food security, and timberland.

(d) Natural System Modifications (Fire maintained ecosystems, Dams and Water Management and Use)

When natural systems are modified such as through fire suppression, or non-ecological fireproofing or hydrological flow regimes altered, the ecological degradation and loss of biological diversity can be widespread.

(e) Transportation and Service Corridors

Wildlife mortality and habitat fragmentation are direct consequences of road corridors. These corridors are concentrated in valley bottoms and traffic volumes are increasing over time thereby increasing the risk.

(f) Human Intrusions and Disturbance (Recreational Activity)

Recreational activity, particularly increasing off-road activity, can lead to a range of impacts including soil compaction, erosion, spread of invasive plants, and disturbance to wildlife.

(g) Agriculture and Aquaculture

Threats from farming and ranching as a result of agricultural expansion and intensification, can lead to loss of important ecosystem and wildlife habitat, soil compaction, spread of invasive plants, human health issues with surface

and groundwater.

(h) Biological Resource Use

Harvesting trees and other woody vegetation for timber, fiber, or fuel can have an impact on ecosystems, wildlife habitat, surface, and groundwater, including soil compaction, erosion, spread of invasive plants and disturbance to wildlife.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To best support the most effective projects, the guiding principles of the *Conservation Framework for British Columbia* will be followed:

- **Acting sooner** – before species and ecosystems are at risk.
- **Acting smarter** – priority setting is science-based; the results move us from reactive conservation to prevention using appropriate management actions.
- **Acting together** – coordinated and inclusive action.
- **Investing more wisely** – align conservation investments, priorities, and actions among conservation partners and stakeholders.

Guiding Principles of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

Keeping Nature in Our Future

- PROTECT CORE HABITAT AREAS.
- CONNECT HABITAT AREAS.
- PROTECT A MATRIX OF LANDS OUTSIDE CORE AREAS AND CORRIDORS.
- MAINTAIN DIVERSITY OF ECOSYSTEMS, SPECIES, AND GENETICS.
- THINK REGIONALLY AND SHARE RESPONSIBILITY.
- PRACTICE THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE.

The following guiding principles will also be used with respect to the Fund:

- Projects that fall into the **existing responsibilities of federal, provincial, or local governments will not be eligible** for funding.
- The review process will be as **simple** as possible, particularly for cost effective administration.
- Projects will be ranked on **technical soundness, technical effectiveness, and value for money**. Project evaluation ranking and recommendations will be considered in camera and reported publicly after Board decision.
- Projects will initially be ranked based on technical merit, regardless of where they occur within the participating area. Subsequently, regional equity may be considered in decision-making.
- Only **highly ranked projects** will be funded. If there are not enough high-quality projects in any given year, funds will be carried forward to future years.
- **Changes to program design** will be considered as more is learned about the needs of the areas, provided always that the goals of the Fund are still met.

6. TIMELINES

6.1 General Projects

- Call for proposals – August -September
- RDOS administrative review– October
- Technical review – October - November

- RDOS final approval –December
- Successful applicants advised and informed – January.
- Contribution Agreements between the RDOS and applicants are finalized – February/March
- Interim Report Due – September
- Final Report Due – February

6.2 Land Securement Projects

Land acquisition or covenant proposals may be submitted at any time during the year provided there is sufficient time for the Technical Advisory Committee and RDOS to review the proposals. All securement proposals will be treated as confidential unless other specific arrangements have been approved by all parties. Land acquisition or covenant proposals will not be considered if the land has been purchased previous to applying for funding.

7. GOVERNANCE

The governance model is based:

1. This is a tax-based fund; therefore, in the decision-making process, taxpayers will be represented through their elected officials.
2. The Fund was created to provide a conservation service. Technical merit is of utmost importance to determine which projects are supported.
3. It is important to maintain a simple, cost-effective decision-making structure.

The governance model may be modified as necessary to accommodate the goals of the Fund. A two-tiered process may be employed, with a Technical Advisory Committee (see Appendix 2) making recommendations to the RDOS.

The RDOS may appoint a Technical Advisory Committee based on nominations or applications received in response to an open call to fill a vacancy. Five to seven committee members may be selected for up to three years (extensions may be considered). Some members may be asked to serve for only one or two-year terms to ensure membership continuity in each year. The RDOS will base any appointment of members to a Technical Advisory Committee on qualification criteria found in Appendix 2. The Technical Advisory Committee shall follow the Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Guidelines defined in the *Local Government Act*.

8. FUND DESIGN

- (1) A call for project proposals will be issued annually (August - September).
- (2) Funds will be dispersed based on responses to calls for proposals. Any funds not dispersed shall be carried forward through an established reserve for the next fiscal year or until the Board authorizes the expenditure for a land securement application, which may occur any time throughout the year.
- (3) Projects are eligible to be delivered on any land tenure but must be in the Fund participating areas.
- (4) In accordance with the Emergencies Act The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen and its representatives shall be allowed on all properties/land should a state of local emergency be declared to alleviate the effects of an emergency or disaster.

- (5) Multi-year projects are acceptable for a maximum of three years. Multi-year projects will require annual funding request submission and approval and will be subject to oversight by the Technical Advisory Committee to ensure they are on track.

This fund is intended to support projects, not programs. Proponents that have completed the final year of a multi-year project and submit a new application, that application will be evaluated and considered against additional criteria to determine eligibility at the discretion of the RDOS. This may include, but not be limited to:

- a. The new application meets the definition of a project, not a program (see definitions).
 - b. The new application is substantively different from previous multi-year project(s).
 - c. Whether the application seeks to generate broad organizational or technical benefits to the proponent or includes elements of on-going operational work.
 - d. The history of previous funding provided to the organization, project delivery performance and standing, proposed conservation delivery theme and/or geographic service area.
- (5) Projects must address IUCN threats to biodiversity targets and fall into at least one theme area (see Section 4).
 - (6) Proponents must be an incorporated non-profit society in good standing, or a Qualified Donee as defined by Canada Revenue Agency or must partner with an organization that has registered society status.
 - (7) Project evaluation by the Technical Advisory Committee includes consideration of conservation value for money.
 - (8) Proposals should reflect continuity with the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy *Keeping Nature in Our Future*.
 - (9) If invited, proponents must be prepared to make a 10-minute presentation to the Technical Advisory Committee or the RDOS on the outcomes of their projects on an annual basis, in addition to submitting written interim and final reports.
 - (10) Project proponents will receive 70% of the grant upon signing a contribution agreement and 30% upon completion of the approved final report. Land securement proponents will receive 100% of the grant upon signing a contribution agreement.
 - (11) All significant changes to the workplan and more than 10% reallocation of budget must be approved or denied by the RDOS, upon recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee. Minor workplan adjustments, and changes under 10% may be approved administratively.
 - Extension of final report may be considered in consultation with the RDOS and administration.
 - If the project has not been completed based on the original application that was approved, funds must be returned to the RDOS within the year. New applications will not be accepted until the funds have been returned.
 - (12) Fund recognition. Proponents are required to acknowledge in all communications products including publications, public information releases, advertising,

promotional announcements, activities, speeches, lectures, interviews, ceremonies, and website materials related to the project, including on permanent signage. The RDOS and SOCF logos must appear on all communications and promotional materials.

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APPENDIX 1 INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The following types of projects will not be considered for funding:

- (a) Existing federal, provincial, or local government responsibilities;
- (b) Capacity building or operating only expenses for organizations;
- (c) Projects with recreational benefits only;
- (d) Community infrastructure services;
- (e) Lobbying or advocacy initiatives;
- (f) Wildlife feeding programs;
- (g) Non-applied research (research not related to a conservation action goal);
- (h) Training costs for contractors;
- (i) Enforcement activities;
- (j) Fish rearing, farming, stocking, or hatchery projects;
- (k) *Rehabilitation, captive breeding, or control of wildlife species;
- (l) *Mapping only projects;
- (m) *Inventory only projects;
- (n) *Planning only projects including seed funding;
- (o) Fishing and hunting tour or curriculum guides;
- (p) Information projects on regulations or stocking;
- (q) Production or sponsorship of commercial programs;
- (r) *Creation or management of electronic databases, websites, or file systems.

*These activities will be considered if they are part of an eligible project that will lead to 'on-the-ground' implementation or if they provide knowledge which is vital to achieving the overall objectives of the Fund.

*RDOS and member municipalities will not release personal information or contravene the *Personal Information Protection Act*. Proponents are encouraged to access the BC Assessment and Land Title and Survey Authority system for ownership information and any costs associated should be built into the project budget.

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APPENDIX 2

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Technical Advisory Committee (“the Committee”) is to ensure that:

- (a) All proposals to the Fund receive a sound technical review based on a fair assessment of merit and project effectiveness.
- (b) There is a high level of accountability in the review process.
- (c) Recommended lists of technically appropriate proposals are provided to the RDOS.

2. COMPOSITION

The Committee will be comprised of five to seven members with relevant education and expertise in each theme area of hydrology, ecology, conservation biology, ecosystems (sensitive terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, management, enhancement, and restoration), restoration and enhancement of habitat, fish, wildlife conservation including species at risk, and with *syilx* traditional ecological knowledge. To ensure consistency and continuity, some members may be asked to serve on the Committee in consecutive years. Quorum for the Technical Advisory Committee shall be 3.

3. PROPOSAL RANKING GUIDELINES

- (a) Each proposal will be independently reviewed by each Committee member and be rated on what is submitted by the proponent.
- (b) The Committee will only review proposals on their technical merit, feasibility, and effectiveness.
- (c) Experts in fields related to the activities within proposals may be consulted as necessary.
- (d) Each proposal will be discussed collectively, and Committee members will have an opportunity to change their scores based on input from other members.
- (e) Scores from each Committee member will be used to determine the final evaluation score for the proposal. The proposals will be ranked from highest to lowest score.
- (f) New funding proposals will be rated on whether they meet the Fund criteria and if the project should be considered for funding. For continuing projects, ratings will be based on whether the project should be continued and whether it continues to meet the criteria.
- (g) The Committee chair will sign the ranked list, and the Committee’s comments will then be forwarded to the RDOS in a summary report.
- (h) The consultant retained by the RDOS to oversee the administrative management will participate in the technical review process but will not rank proposals or influence the TAC; will provide additional file information as requested by the Committee members before and at review meetings; and will be available to answer questions from the RDOS on behalf of the Committee.

4. TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

4.1 New Projects

(a) Feasibility (i.e., is the project doable – Yes or No)

- Is the overall proposal well written?
- Are the objectives clearly defined?
- Are the techniques and methods being proposed the most appropriate ones to address the threat?
- Does the proponent clearly understand the challenges they may face in completing the project?
- Has the proponent demonstrated that the project will be able to overcome these challenges?
- Are the proposed timelines reasonable?
- Do the proponents have the capacity to deliver the project?
- If applicable, are plans in place to get the required permits or authorizations?
- Have any possible negative implications or effects on other targets been identified and minimized?

Based on the answers to the above questions, rank the feasibility of the project from 0-10 with 10 being the highest ranking.

(b) Cost Effectiveness (Yes or No)

- Is there value for the funding being requested?
- Are the benefits as described in the proposal in line with the cost of the project?
- Are the project budget and in-kind rates realistic?

Based on the answers to the above questions, rank the cost effectiveness of the project from 0-5 with 5 being the highest ranking.

(c) Outside Participation / Cost Sharing (Yes or No)

- Do the proposed activities involve other agencies and organizations?
- Does the project leverage funds from other sources?

Based on the answers to the above questions, rank the leverage potential of the project from 0-5 with 5 being the highest ranking.

(d) Project Effectiveness (i.e., is the project worth doing?)

- Is there a clearly demonstrated ability for the results of this project to reduce an identified threat (IUCN) to a biodiversity target?
- Is the project outside of the realm of regular government responsibilities?
- Is the project rationale science-based and do the results move us from reactive conservation to prevention using appropriate management actions?
- Does the project build on conservation measures from relevant strategies including *Keeping Nature in our Future*?
- Does the project align conservation investments, priorities, and actions among conservation partners and stakeholders?
- Is there an evaluation of project benefit or other measurables or indicators identified in the proposal?

- Is there a clearly described extension component of the project (e.g., communicating results to the community, resource managers, workshops, reports, presentations, etc.)?

Based on the answers to the above questions, rank the effectiveness of the project from 0-20 with 20 being the highest ranking.

(e) Other Comments

- Are there any other technical concerns?
- Are there any technical conditions to funding?
- Are there any other general comments from reviewers?

4.2 Multi-Year, Continuing Projects

Each Committee member answers Yes or No to the following criteria and on whether the project should continue to be funded. Continuing projects have undergone an extensive review to receive original approval; therefore, no evaluation score is needed.

(a) Progress to Date

- Has there been satisfactory progress to date in terms of the project's scheduled activities?
- Does the proposal build on past accomplishments?
- If difficulties arose in the previous or current year, will they affect proposal activities?
- Should the proposal be modified to address any problems arising from the previous year?
- Are any budget changes justified?

(b) Overall Evaluation

- Should the project continue to be funded?
- Are there any conditions for continued funding?
- Does the scope continue to meet the criteria?

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APPENDIX 3

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDELINES

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- (a) Technical Advisory Committee (“Committee”) members will act at all times with honesty and in good faith, for the public interest.
- (b) The conduct and language of Committee members will be free from any discrimination or harassment prohibited by the *Human Rights Code of Canada*.
- (c) The conduct of Committee members will reflect social standards of courtesy, respect, and dignity.

2. CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

- (a) Committee members will not reveal or divulge confidential information (defined as that which cannot be obtained from other sources) received in the course of Committee duties.
- (b) Confidential information must not be used for any purposes outside that of undertaking the work of the Committee.
- (c) Committee members shall refrain from discussing a proposal with anyone, including the proponent. Committee members and proponents must direct questions, concerns, clarifications to the Fund Administrator.

3. DUTY TO INFORM

- (a) Committee members will disclose any perceived or real conflict of interest which may have a negative or harmful effect on their ability to perform the duties required of the appointment or the reputation of the Committee. The member will advise all other members and staff, in writing (email accepted), well in advance of the Committee meeting: (a) that there is a potential conflict; (b) the nature and scope of the conflict; and (c) the specific project to which the conflict may apply.
- (b) Upon disclosure of any conflict, the Committee member(s) shall leave the meeting during the discussion of such proposals.

4. STATEMENT OF INTENT

- (a) Participation in Committee work should not result in any personal or private financial or other substantive gain.
- (b) Members of the Committee will avoid any conflict of interest that may impair or impugn the independence, integrity, or impartiality of the RDOS.
- (c) There shall be no apprehension of bias based on what a reasonably knowledgeable and informed observer might perceive of the actions of the Committee or the actions of an individual member of the Committee.

5. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION IN DETERMINING CONFLICT

- (a) Activities undertaken as a citizen must be kept separate and distinct from any responsibilities held as a member of the Committee.
- (b) Activities undertaken as a Committee member must be kept separate and distinct from other activities as a citizen.
- (c) Other memberships, directorships, voluntary or paid positions, or affiliations remain distinct from work undertaken in the course of Committee work.
- (d) Committee members will not assist anyone in their dealings with the Committee if this may result in advantageous treatment or the perception of advantageous treatment by a reasonably knowledgeable and informed observer.
- (e) Actions taken in the course of Committee duties can neither cause nor suggest to a reasonably knowledgeable and informed observer that members' ability to exercise those duties has or could be affected by private gain or interest.
- (f) All personal financial interests, assets, and holdings must be kept distinct from and independent of any decision, information or other matter that may be heard by or acted upon by the Committee.
- (g) Personal employment shall not be dependent on any decision, information or other matter that may be heard by or acted upon by the Committee. If such a situation arises, Committee members must disclose to the Committee any involvement in a proposal or issue before the proposal or issue is discussed by the Committee. Members will leave the meeting during discussion of the project.

DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and considered the conflict-of-interest guidelines for Technical Advisory Committee members of the South Okanagan Conservation Fund and agree to conduct myself in accordance with these guidelines.

Name of Committee Member (print) _____

Signature of Committee Member _____

Date Signed _____

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APPENDIX 4

DEFINITIONS

1. Fund Administrator means RDOS manager, employee or contracted administrator acting on behalf of the RDOS.
2. Project means a singular, focused endeavor to deliver a tangible output with a defined time frame and budget. The components are specific and exact, and the scope and goals are well-defined. Projects are normally focused on achieving tangible outcomes and results.
3. Program means coordinated management of two or more projects which are managed and delivered as a single package. Different projects complement each other to assist the program in achieving its overall objectives; the benefits provided by a program depend on the collective benefits of its projects. Programs often take a longer time to complete than a project and are generally focused on generating broad organizational or technical benefits and may include elements of on-going operational work.
4. Qualified Donee is determined by the Canada Revenue Agency and means organizations that are registered and can issue official donation receipts for gifts they receive from - individuals and corporations under the *Income Tax Act*.