

Vancouver Island, First Nations in BC will need to be equipped to bring their priorities for estuary fisheries and habitat protection to the table.

Workshop

Following a discussion about the proposed concept and any required changes or input from AAROMs and First Nations without an AAROM, the workshop will focus on identifying the parameters and estimated cost of the project over two to four years.

For example, this project could include the following elements:

- Research and assess existing estuary habitat management plans and any gaps
- Assess current estuary habitat management planning activities being undertaken by AAROMs and First Nations communities, including participation in plans with municipalities or other partners, to identify any best practises and gaps related to traditional fisheries
- Leverage the best practises of North and Central Coast First Nations in protecting traditional fisheries and fish habitat at marine spatial planning decision-making tables
- Support the development or update of estuary habitat management plans to include more First Nations fisheries-focussed information (e.g., times of year when access to the fishery is required, areas that should not be open to shipping or energy exploration due to salmonid lifecycle or habitat needs, etc.)
- Align any estuary habitat data collection and monitoring needs to the work plans of AAROM/community monitors³ to leverage expertise and to provide more work opportunities
- In year three, explore opportunities for more First Nations to collaborate in the Nature Trust BCSRIF project which is using the Marsh Resilience to Sea-Level Rise (MARS) tool to evaluate and compare the ability of tidal marshes to persist and thrive as sea levels rise

Why is this Concept Being Considered?

First Nations fisheries for food, socio-economic and cultural purposes are a priority right that is protected by the Constitution (section 35.1). However, this right is not always respected in the policies, decisions or activities of governments (or the activities of industry) as was pointed out in a number of examples during Indigenous Program Review.⁴

BCSRIF is an opportunity to ensure the priority rights of First Nations fisheries are prominently featured in estuary habitat management plans. With updated estuary habitat management plans, First Nations that presently (or traditionally) fish in estuarine areas will have a key tool to bring to marine spatial planning decision-making tables to ensure that the import of their fisheries is balanced alongside the interests of other oceans users.

³ As described in *Concept #1: Standardizing Data Collection and Monitoring Tools and Training*

⁴ *Indigenous Program Review: Phase Two Final Report*, National Indigenous Fisheries Institute, May 2019, page 16.



Increasing the development of more estuary habitat management plans and/or the participation of more First Nations in existing plans may also result in future collaborations and/or benefits to communities. For example, there could be opportunities for Nature Trust of BC to partner with other First Nations in its BCSRIF-funded estuary project.

Over the long-term, this activity may also benefit First Nations communities in other ways. For example, once an estuary habitat management plan is in place (or updated to include local First Nations), communities or AAROMs could pursue other programs to support research, data collection or monitoring of eelgrass beds and salt marshes. These plans could also be expanded as a tool to prepare for environmental response efforts to oil spills and clean-up efforts.

Alignment with BCSRIF Priorities

This project would invest in the protection and restoration of priority wild fish stocks, including salmon, as well as activities which will ensure that First Nations' fisheries are positioned for long-term environmental and economic sustainability.

Alignment with Other Initiatives (Potential Partners)

BCSRIF support may be used to augment the funding or activities of other programs.

- **Coastal Restoration Fund**

This \$75-million program supports project that help restore coastal aquatic habitat by addressing threats to marine habitats and species. This includes efforts to identify and respond to restoration priorities, to long-term sustainability and to build capacity. It also engages Indigenous groups (and others) in planning, restoration, capacity building, monitoring, reporting and the mitigation of stressors affecting aquatic habitats and marine life.

- **Indigenous Habitat Participation Program**

One part of this \$50M grants and contributions fund is targeting collaborative activities that support the conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat with long-term benefits.

- **Nature Trust of British Columbia**

Nature Trust has a five-year, BCSRIF-funded project to improve estuary habitat to enhance the long-term sustainability and health of wild BC fish stocks by extending the coverage of the Marsh Resilience to Sea-Level Rise (MARS) tool into Canada. This project is a partnership with Coastal First Nations and the West Coast Conservation Land Management Program. It entails monitoring and researching estuary resilience to sea-level rise at 15 sites on Vancouver Island, the central coast, and Haida Gwaii, and implementing several major ecological restoration projects that will restore estuarine processes.

