



## Restoring California's Salmon Strongholds



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### Proposal Questions

#### Mission/History Of Organization

Save California Salmon (SCS) was founded in 2017 and is dedicated to policy change and community advocacy for Northern California's salmon and fish-dependent people. We support the fisheries and water protection work of local Tribal and rural communities and advocate for effective policy change for

#### JEDI Efforts and Impact

SCS was created to serve and give voice to California's native and EJ communities. We have worked to reform Water and Education Policy and create anti-racism and pollution and public engagement policies that center people of color since our inception and have been successful in creating and

clean water, restored fisheries, and vibrant communities.

We pursue these goals via: 1. Tracking, analyzing, and engaging in policy decisions and implementation that impact protections for our rivers, fish, and Native American communities; 2. Supporting Tribes and the general public in engaging in public comment, testimony, and other processes related to water pollution, dams, fisheries, forest policy, beneficial uses, and solutions to these problems such as LandBack, dam removal, restoration, and more durable legal and permanent protections; 3. Supporting Native youth and families in accessing & engaging in public processes and traditional practices on their ancestral waters and lands.

**Final Success**

Success for the Restoring California's Salmon Strongholds Project looks like dam removal and increased protection for California's Eel, Klamath, Sacramento, and Trinity Rivers and their tributaries, and the Native people that depend on them, having access to traditional foods, such as salmon, cultural materials, and a thriving, restoration-based economy.

**Location Details**

advancing Racial Equity and Traditional Ecological Knowledge policies, regulations and action plans until recently.

As an Indigenous-led non-profit the backlash on JEDI has been jarring. Thus, there is a before and after aspect. We were largely focused on advancing state and federal policies and opportunities that support Indigenous people rights to access abundant fisheries, clean waters, and a healthy landscape stewarded with TEK. Since we are also: 1) holding internal trainings on security for BIPOC activists; 2) increased media and outreach efforts around how new policies harm Native and EJ communities, and 3.) worked with California's DOJ and agencies, and partners, to protect communities.

This is a proposal for Save California Salmon's Restoring Salmon Strongholds Project, which aims to restore California's last salmon strongholds in the Sacramento, Eel, Smith and Klamath (including the Trinity) watersheds. These areas host some of the largest wilderness complexes and concentration of Wild & Scenic Rivers in the nation, but are threatened by climate change and large water projects :

Objectives and activities to achieve our goals in this ecologically-critical region include:

Remove dams owned by Pacific Gas and Energy (PG&E) and others through the Federal Energy Regulatory Process and advocating for the removal of, or better management of, additional dams in the Klamath and Sacramento River watersheds;

Ensure that existing dams are not expanded or built over the next four years on priority rivers so that salmon can hold on until dams are removed. We believe that if we remove/prevent dams and begin restoring rivers and landscapes now, long term protection will be possible in the future;

Secure Outstanding Resource Waters (near-term) and Wild and Scenic Rivers designations (long-term);

Ensure sufficient instream flows and pollutant regulation: Identifying and cleaning up pollution and restoring flows and habitats within the rivers where dam removal is happening is vital to the salmon making it home; and Advocate for land protection and landscape-scale restoration as part of Federal and state nature based climate solutions.

We work with Tribes, NGOs, Federal Agencies such as FERC, NOAA fisheries, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the EPA to advance socially-just, ecologically sound watershed protection. As permanent, federal-level legislative

protections become more and more difficult to secure, we believe staying focused on: a) dam removal for dams that are in the FERC relicensing process; b) community-driven solutions; and c) State level analogs to threatened federal protections offer our best near-term hope of protecting and restoring these vitally-important environmental and cultural resources. This also sets the stage for federal protections in the post-Trump era. Though this project is focused on dam removal and permanent government protections, our conservation and power building work with the Tribes and our communities is ongoing. This work builds on our successes in restoring the Klamath through dam removal, land protection, restoration, and flow protections and progress on Sacramento and Eel River dam removal and flow protections.

#### Biodiversity in Project Area

Our goal is whole river restoration and increased climate and biodiversity resiliency of some of the West's largest forested watersheds. We are building on major successes in the Klamath River, where we not only removed four major dams (opening up more than 400 miles of salmon habitat) but are also returning the unearthened lands back to natural conditions and the Tribes that wish to restore them.

This project is focused on whole watershed restoration and protection of California's three largest river systems, along with other wild rivers like the Smith, and on restoring fisheries to levels that are harvestable for California Native American Tribes and communities. We also intend to keep these climate resilient watersheds in a resilient state. These river systems host the largest wetlands, spring-fed headwaters, Wilderness systems, and concentration of Wild and Scenic Rivers in California (two of them begin in Oregon). However, many of the protections only cover portions of the watersheds and do not incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or even acknowledge the existence of the Native people that live there. These river ecosystems hold so much restoration potential, but they are also suffering from outdated dams, over-allocation, and poor land management stemming from colonization and the Tribal termination era.

These problematic issues will be addressed by connecting protected areas via dam removal and restoration in California's wildest areas. Our goal is to restore rivers to a free flowing state and heal the lands that were underwater, or impacted, and to control and clean up pollution sources on these rivers so that

#### Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Salmon fishing and recreation used to be central to our economy, above and beyond extractive industries like logging and mining, in Humboldt, Siskiyou, Mendocino, Del Norte, Trinity, Shasta, and Tehama Counties. Now, we are looking at a shuttered fishing season for the third year in a row after a 25-year decline on all our rivers. Climate change has also taken a toll, as droughts coupled with poor dam and water operations caused poor water quality and toxic algae blooms on our rivers, and large fires burnt our forests. Dam removal not only will restart tourism and the salmon economy, it will allow our cold, spring-fed watersheds to cool our rivers and restore salmon so boaters and swimmers want to be on the rivers again. In a region with twice the state's average poverty rate and sky-high unemployment numbers on our reservations, expanding the restoration economy in order to restore our recreation economy offers the best hope we have of also restoring our communities and building resilient local economies.

Beyond the positive impacts from having better water quality and a more robust Tribal, recreational and commercial fishing industry, locally dam removal also helps with establishing more public lands and campgrounds, river put-ins for boating and fishing, and trails, which will boost tourism and local job creation. These impacts go far beyond just our rivers, as the entirety of the California and Southern Oregon fishing industry will be positively impacted by this project, as will towns throughout the region. Many outfitting businesses for our rivers are actually located in places like Ashland, Oregon, Arcata, Chico and Sacramento. We have seen the benefits of the restoration economy for hundreds of miles on the Klamath River already.

they can be added to the Outstanding Natural Resource Waters and Wild and Scenic Rivers lists. The areas we are working within host California's largest Tribes and largest reservations, many of whom are leading the nation's restoration and land return efforts and still are on, and caring for, the lands we are working to protect. These Tribes are not only working with groups like ours to take down over a dozen dams on the Eel, Sacramento, and Klamath River watersheds, but to also bring fire back to fire-dependent landscapes and clean up legacy pollutants.

Specifically, by 2030 we aim to: 1.) Remove two dams from the rural Eel River, returning it to a free flowing river system, restoring its flows, and achieving land return and protections; and 2.) Remove at least five dams on Battle Creek in the upper Sacramento.

### Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our goal is to restore and protect the most remote and wild watersheds in the state - the Klamath, the Upper Sacramento and Eel Rivers and to connect wild watersheds and landscapes. These watersheds are critical to the survival of salmon and rural communities. They host our largest wilderness areas, and concentration of wild and scenic rivers. They also are our most climate resilient watersheds, due their rural nature and massive spring-fed systems, and mountains. They are the backbone of California's fishing and recreational industries and the areas where the majority of California's native people, including our staff, live. We believe in the power of communities fighting for restoration and the ability of the land to heal, because we are seeing it happen already. As one of California's few Tribally led environmental groups, and the only one that is centered in our Native communities, we play a critical role in helping get these dams down and landscapes restored as we build movements and provide education on the ground, connect Native communities, influence regulators, and help develop new leaders.

We are looking to connect and restore whole watersheds in one of the few areas in the nation where this is a realistic goal. The main aspects of this project include removing dams, pushing for permanent watershed protection, connecting protected Tribal and public lands after dam removal, and keeping new dams from being built, or raised in areas with important habitat, or sacred sites for Tribes

There are different timelines and strategies around dam removal for owners that want to keep dams, such as

### Key Decision Makers

Achieving dam removal is a complex process that requires multi-agency permitting and decision making. The lead decision makers we need to influence are PG&E (the dam owner) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). FERC is in charge of the National Environmental Policy Act process (NEPA), public comment, and decision notice for the dam relicensing process for private dams, which only occurs every 50 years. Due to how infrequent this process is, relicensing is sometimes the first time dams are subject to environmental and Tribal consultation laws and regulations, along with public utilities reviews. Decommissioning is often an outcome of this process in areas where environmental and economic concerns outweigh benefits. Often we do need to make sure that these concerns are clearly defined because if pollution and impacts to salmon are not expressed, or opposition to removal grows, dams may not come out.

Once the company decides if it wants to apply for relicensing or surrender, it triggers Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Public Utility reviews. We then have to work within these processes and with the company and FERC to make sure decommissioning happens. Otherwise, dams can be auctioned off, or kept in place and not used in some situations. Agencies that have to permit dam removal or relicensing plans include NOAA Fisheries/National Marine Fisheries Service (Endangered Species Act consultation, which can mandate fish passage), the Army Corps of Engineers (404 Clean Water Act permitting), EPA and/or California State Water Resources Control Board (the state agency with



in the Klamath dam removal process, and those that want to surrender them. Fighting a company through the FERC decommission process (explained better below) is timely and costly. This is why the most important entity we are working with on fish passage now is PG&E. PG&E is the largest private owner of dams in rural and wild areas in California, and many of their dams block critical access to cold and wild water sources. Therefore, we have been working with our partners to help PG&E understand that most of the dams that harm salmon in Northern California are marginal assets that are decreasing in value, and that their removal can help save the salmon and local economies, while creating restoration jobs and saving PG&E money.

As part of this we are working with Tribes, agencies and communities to:

- Identify controversial issues that can be solved, or explored;
- Create surrender and decommission plans that include actions that will be necessary in upcoming 401 and ESA permitting;
- Ensure Tribal resources are protected as this is important to timely (and just) dam removal;
- Mitigate local and Presidential backlash to ensure FERC can approve decommissioning plans within the next two years.

If agencies work with us on consultations and permitting, once there is a plan into FERC, we can get at least seven of our priority dams out by the end of the decade, and hopefully start moving for more federal permanent protections.

We are also identifying critical dam removal and salmon reintroduction programs above dams that will not be removed, but are critical to Tribes and species survival such as Shasta and Trinity dams. Some of the state's best habitats are above these major federal dams. Making sure these reservoirs are not expanded, and are managed to protect downstream needs over the next couple of years will be critical, as will removing smaller dams above some of these large dams where salmon are being reintroduced, or land is being preserved after years of Tribal advocacy.

Perhaps the most critical areas that we will address over the next couple of years is the threat of raising the Shasta Dam, which would flood the Wild and Scenic McCloud River, protecting the winter run Chinook reintroduction program, and supporting the fight to take down PG&E's McCloud River dam, which the Winnemem Wintu Tribe is leading.

delegated 401 Certification Authority). Public Utility Commissions in each state also have to approve removal plans. In complex cases, bankruptcy courts can also be involved.

These are long, complex, and arduous processes, but we are confident we can get most of these agencies' support. Engagement of the business community with federal and state reps would help greatly.

For all of these processes, SCS is one of the few groups teaching about the watersheds, conducting training on all aspects of the long processes, supporting Tribal engagement, engaging impacted communities, and alerting the public to both opportunities and successes. We are important to these processes as we live in these rural communities and are not afraid to try to work issues out, or take on people that disagree with restoration proposals. We do not cut and run when dams are out or rivers are protected. We educate the youth in the schools on, and engage the communities in, the restoration, and hold events and webinars on the recovery of the rivers. We get youth on the river and share stories of the families that benefit. There will never be a time where rural communities agree on issues, but nothing builds opposition faster than outside groups dictating processes and nothing breaks down barriers faster than learning together.

#### **Elevate Voices**

Our region is a place where river restoration, land protection, and Tribal management is possible; however, since the Gold Rush it has been used by California as a resource extraction center. Our communities retain Traditional ecological knowledge and remain dependent on clean water, healthy forests, and fisheries for food, culture, identity, and wellbeing, but are suffering from their loss. Therefore, bringing fisheries and clean water back to Tribal communities and restoring Tribal health, traditional foods, and practices is central to our work. We feel Tribal communities engagement is critical to healing that land and people, and leads to management and decisions that benefit all people.

This is why we are committed to empowering, serving, and representing our Native communities and working closely with Tribes and other Native and environmental justice groups. Our board and staff consists mainly of Native women and youth. Our board is 100% California Natives and 80% women. Our staff averages 80% Native, 30% youth, 90% women, and 30% queer. Our communities may lack resources, but they are motivated to heal the land and people. We help facilitate their engagement. We are well-positioned to expand Tribal capacity for defending and restoring our watersheds, because we have been doing it - as an entity since 2017, and for most of us since long before that. We engage and elevate the voices of our communities by: Offering comprehensible information, trainings, and material support so they have the tools and resources to engage in decisions

#### **Measurable On-Ground Outcomes**

On-the-ground outcomes that we hope to accomplish over the next year are:  
Dam removal/ Surrender EIS from FERC for the two Eel River dams  
Dam Removal Surrender Draft for up to five PG&E dam on Battle Creek  
Finish creek restoration and safety actions on the undammed section of the Klamath, and help create a plan for fish passage or removal for the remaining PacifiCorp dam (now owned by the Bureau of Reclamation), and support building of recreation facilities and the first community raft trips down the undammed river.  
Restore flows for salmon in key tributaries on a temporary basis and advance plans for long term protections.



Hosting cleanups, education and restoration days, and working with them to proactively engage agencies on priority issues and the need for informed consent  
Engaging agencies to support neutral venues and third party events that support safer engagement  
Our robust earned and social media presence, which highlights Indigenous leadership and accomplishments  
Hosting listening sessions and free cultural/recreation events

**TCA Funding Plan**

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**How long it took to complete application**

2 days

**Confidential Items**

**Other Relevant Application Details**

No thank you.

