Monitoring and Securing Instream Flows Necessary for Klamath Ecosystem Health

Applying Organization	Ridges to Riffles Indigenous Conservation Group	**Application Date**	5/15/2026
Applying Contact	Stephanie Quinn-Davidson	**Status**	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	**Created By**	Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, 5/14/2026, 6:15 PM
		Create Account	☐

Project Overview

Project Name	Monitoring and Securing Instream Flows Necessary for Klamath Ecosystem Health	**Requested Amount**	$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Monitoring and Securing Instream Flows Necessary for Klamath Ecosystem Health		
Type of Project	Restoration	**Project Multiple Locations**	
Project Location (State or Territory)	CA	**Longitude**	124.0384° W
Latitude	41.5265° N		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Ridges to Riffles Indigenous Conservation Group	**Primary address for organization**	PO Box 1161 Hoopa, California 95546 United States
Contact Name	Molli Myers	**Contact Title**	Chief Operations Officer
Contact Email Address	mmyers@ridgestoriffles.org		
Annual Operating Budget	$1,556,992.00	**Tax Status/Organization Type**	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	5	**Main Phone**	707-497-4165
Total Membership		**Organization Website/Social Media Feed**	https://www.ridgestoriffles.org
BIPOC-led	Yes	**C-Suite Staff**	100%

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		**Awarded Date**	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		**Secondary Project Type**	
Term Start Date		**Term End Date**	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Founded in 2020, Ridges to Riffles Indigenous Conservation Group (R2R) is an Indigenous-led 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission to help Indigenous Peoples protect and restore the natural and cultural resources they rely on to maintain their identity and sovereignty. The R2R team brings significant legal expertise, unparalleled connections and working relationships with Tribes in the region, the ability to bridge Indigenous knowledge with western scientific perspectives, and considerable communication and public outreach experience and capacity. R2R advances Indigenous leadership in environmental stewardship through the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Western science, law, policy, and community-based restoration. R2R pursues initiatives that are crucial for restoring the health of our rivers, supporting Indigenous communities, and preserving cultural, spiritual, and ecological heritage for future generations. Our work spans instream flow advocacy, habitat restoration, fisheries monitoring, coalition building, policy reform, and community education.

Location Details

Our project will work to monitor and secure instream flows to restore the health of the Klamath River ecosystem. The Klamath River runs approximately 257 miles from southern Oregon through northern California, before emptying into the Pacific Ocean at the traditional Yurok village of Rek-woi. The river holds deep cultural and historical significance to the Indigenous peoples who have lived on and stewarded the river since time immemorial and was historically the third largest salmon-bearing river in lower continental United States. The river supports several species of salmon, as well as steelhead, eulochon, lamprey, and sturgeon – essential traditional resources that historically supported thriving Indigenous traditional subsistence and commercial fisheries. Unfortunately, with habitat destruction, insufficient water flows, and climate change, salmon populations are down to 1-3% of their historical run size. Coho populations are at risk of extinction and conservation actions have been necessary in recent years to protect lower numbers of Chinook salmon runs.

Dam removal is just the beginning. With the historic removal of four dams along the Klamath River in 2024, salmon and other river species now have access to nearly 400 miles of spawning and rearing habitat that have been blocked for nearly 100 years – a beacon of hope for the threatened and endangered salmon populations. Once in a lifetime/generation opportunity to recover. Numerous habitat restoration projects are underway on the Klamath River to improve spawning and rearing areas for salmon returning to the area for the first time in over 100 years. And now the next step in restoration of this ecosystem is to welcome the salmon home by ensuring adequate, clean, cold water to support their lifecycle.

This monumental restoration effort, however, is just the first step, of many, to restoring the Klamath River ecosystem. Unfortunately, the Klamath River has been at the center of major water disputes between farmers, Tribes, conservation organizations, and government agencies. Climate change and diminishing snow pack are exacerbating these conflicts. Yet, the river needs water. We cannot maximize the restoration benefits of the historic dam removal project without ensuring cold, clean water, adequate water for the river and its species.

Final Success

Instream flows for the entire 257 miles of the Klamath River sustain the ecological health and aquatic and terrestrial resources of the watershed and the people that depend on them.

Impact on Climate and Bioversity

Quantifying and securing the instream flows necessary to support Klamath River ecosystem recovery and ecological function within a changing climate and post-dam removal will be essential to enhancing ecosystem resilience in the Klamath Basin. Adequate water flows support habitat diversity, temperature regulation, and essential ecological processes – all necessary for aiding in climate change adaptation.

Low water flows can be disastrous for migrating adult salmon causing heat stress to salmon that makes them more susceptible to disease and pathogen, as seen in 2002, when over seventy thousand adult Chinook salmon died within the Yurok Reservation due to disease driven by excessive upstream irrigation water withdrawals and poor river water quality.

Since the 2002 fish kill, the largest fish kill in American history, climate change has continued to exacerbate the risks caused by inadequate river flows. Warming waters and lower flows are climate hazards that are expected to be more prevalent as the climate continues to change. Flows help moderate temperature extremes, preventing heat stress during hot periods. This temperature regulation is vital for the survival of salmon and numerous other Klamath River species. Securing water rights will help mitigate extreme weather events post-dam removal, ensuring climate resilience and conditions optimal for the long-term sustainability of salmon.

Water rights informed by science and secured by law will provide water flows to promote the overall health of the Klamath River ecosystem and will enhance the resilience of the river system in the face of climate change and other environmental stressors. Furthermore, by restoring the ecological health throughout the basin, instream water flows will enhance the benefits of other protected areas, such as the Klamath Wild and Scenic River designated areas.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Quantifying instream flows and securing water rights necessary to support and restore the Klamath River would have numerous economic and outdoor recreational impacts. Enough water in the river would move us back towards a natural hydrograph that supports wild salmon and other species – similar to the water flows the species evolved with and the river enjoyed pre-colonization. Adequate water flows would improve salmon habitat and decrease disease prevalence, both of which are essential as river temperatures increase with climate change. As salmon populations

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The main project goal is monitoring instream flows and securing adequate flows and water rights for the restoration of the Klamath River ecosystem, the species that call it home, and the people who depend on it all. R2R will continue both legal and scientific work to secure instream flows necessary to support the long-term sustainability of the Klamath River ecosystem and aquatic resources. Current water management by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has provided water to upstream agriculture to the detriment of downstream fishery and river needs. Accordingly, only the bare

recover, there would be a revitalization of the traditional subsistence and commercial instream and offshore salmon fisheries, which is estimated to be worth over $500 million in revenue if salmon populations are healthy. Sustainable fisheries lead to sustainable economic development through job creation from fish processing, distribution, and sales.

Clean, cool, and adequate water flows would also improve river health in a way that would improve recreational/sport fishing and river rafting and create potential new opportunities for eco-tourism for the Yurok and other Tribes along the river. An increase in direct tourism businesses would also generate additional revenue for local hotels, restaurants, and related industries. The Klamath River already offers recreational opportunities through whitewater rafting, steelhead and trout sport fishing, and camping. A restored Klamath River would only enhance and expand these opportunities.

minimum flows required by the Endangered Species Act to support Coho salmon are provided, the minimum to stave off extinction, but not to recover or restore the species' or other aquatic resources' resilience.

This project would support R2R working in tandem with the Yurok Tribe to monitor and secure instream flows for the ecological health of the Klamath River, moving back to a more natural hydrograph with which the river and species evolved. With a new federal administration, R2R continues to respond to changing management objectives and revising its strategy to accommodate the new political and ecological situation. A short-term plan to ensure adequate water is flowing in the river this summer 2026 is necessary to continue to capture the restoration potential from the removal of the four dams. This short-term plan will support the long-term goal of asserting and quantifying the Yurok Tribe's federally reserved water rights down the road.

This grant will support R2R's ongoing legal and scientific strategy, which will likely include:
1) Ongoing water flow litigation
2) Comprehensive instream flow studies on the Klamath River post-dam removal
3) A rapid response monitoring team to evaluate low flow impacts on ecosystem health

Ongoing litigation - Fall 2026 - Summer 2027
We will continue to represent the Tribe in several lawsuits, including Yurok v. BOR, an Endangered Species Act ("ESA") case that aims to secure water and habitat to support coho salmon that has expanded into other issues such as the supremacy of federal law over state law concerning water rights and the discretion of the federal government to operate the Klamath Reclamation Project consistent with the ESA and tribal rights. The Tribe won in the lower court where the Judge held that water needs for coho salmon listed on the ESA take precedent over agricultural deliveries and that the US Bureau of Reclamation has discretion to curtail agricultural deliveries to protect coho salmon. This decision is on appeal. Should the lower court decision be upheld, this case will be critical to defending Trump's attempts to harm endangered species. Currently, Amy is representing the Yurok Tribe in a challenge to the Trump Administration's 2026 Annual Klamath Reclamation Project Operations plan that illegally reorders the water allocation priorities to elevate agricultural deliveries over tribal water rights and endangered species act needs. These efforts are necessary to

ensure minimum instream flows for salmon and Klamath River ecological health remain. Beyond litigation, Amy also represents Yurok in collaborative work to secure water for salmon on the Trinity River and Klamath Rivers in discussions with Counties, Irrigation Districts, States and other Tribes.

Comprehensive Instream Flow Study - Ongoing (subject to funding from NOAA)
It was originally anticipated that an instream flow study could be completed by December 2025. Unfortunately, the instream flow study has been held up due to insufficient funding. R2R submitted a grant to NOAA in May 2025 for a comprehensive instream flow study and no funding decision has been made by NOAA to date. R2R secured funding from the Humboldt Area Foundation to assemble a technical advisory committee (TAC) of experts from Klamath basin Tribes to develop a study plan for an instream flow study, so that when funding does come through, R2R can hit the ground running with implementation. The TAC facilitation and study plan development is ongoing. In the meantime, the Yurok Tribe is collecting hydrologic, bathymetric, and LIDAR data for the entire length of the Klamath River this summer and fall that will be essential to developing a hydrodynamic model of flows. That model will be an integral part of the subsequent instream flow study. We are collaborating closely with the Yurok Tribe to share those data when they become available and to identify locations requiring further data collection.

Rapid Response Monitoring Team - Late Summer/Fall 2026
Until further funding is secured for the full instream flow study, we believe it will be important to have a rapid response monitoring plan should flows drop below minimum requirements due to water challenges in the upper basin. A rapid response monitoring plan would identify areas of concern – e.g. areas where adult salmon may encounter migration problems with low flows – and identify critical data to collect that would both help inform the future flow study and help document real-time ecosystem impacts of low flows. These real-time response data may be useful should litigation arise over flow management on the river, especially in years of low water like we are experiencing in 2026.

Key Decision Makers

Working With Business Community

It would be helpful for the business community to start a public education campaign that highlights the human right to clean water to drink, recreate, fish and gather on rivers.

Elevate Voices

Since colonization, Tribes have largely been left out of decision-making which

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Instream flows are increased on the Klamath River, supporting the restoration

has impacted their traditional ways of life and legal rights. While dam removal marks an historic and important step in restoring the damage done through colonialism, the work to restore the Klamath River is just beginning.

Despite the Yurok Tribe having senior federally reserved water rights to support the Klamath River tribal fishery, those rights are unquantified and unprovided. Current water management by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has favored upstream agriculture to the detriment of downstream fishery and river needs because these rights remain unquantified. This project engages directly with the Yurok Tribe and is, not only elevating their voices, but advocating for their rights. Resolving the Tribe's water rights, which courts have already held includes instream flows to support the Tribe's commercial, subsistence, and ceremonial fisheries, is key to securing instream water flows on the Klamath mainstem to support fish health, ecosystem health, and human communities' health.

Furthermore, throughout our work, R2R is establishing ourselves in critical decision-making spaces to ensure Indigenous-voices are uplifted and at the table. Led by government agencies and a colonized system, these spaces have historically disenfranchised Tribal input and are not respectful of Indigenous perspectives and values. Our staff bridge their education and experience in the Western system with traditional Indigenous values and knowledge to address water challenges exacerbated by climate change and an unsustainable extractive economy in a way that honors our connection to the land and waters, and promotes equity and environmental justice.

TCA Funding Plan

There are two steps necessary for securing adequate flow for ecosystem and salmon restoration on the Klamath River. The first is conducting an instream flow study that will quantify the water necessary to sustain and recover salmon populations. The second is ensuring adequate flows moving forward. R2R submitted a NOAA grant to support the instream flow studies (May 2025) and the Yurok Tribe has already started collecting data critical to developing the instream flow models. TCA's support will move the project forward by supporting the second, equally important, step in this restoration process, which will include R2R's legal work to draft motions, briefs, or other legal documents necessary to support a strategy to secure instream flows. Private philanthropy is, perhaps, the only financial option for supporting the legal

and recovery of salmon populations.
- Water management decisions on the Klamath River prioritize Tribal and ecosystem needs.
- Aquatic habitat diversity increases, providing cool water refugia for migrating salmon populations during extreme heat events.

It is important to note that the restoration of the Klamath River basin is a long-term outcome that goes well-beyond the scope of this project. It is possible some of the outcomes listed here could take years to quantify, but R2R is committed to seeing this restoration through with Tribes and partner organizations on the river.

Confidential Items

We respectfully request that references to litigation and securing water rights be kept confidential.

strategy and TCA's support would be opportunistically leveraged with the research funding from NOAA and the Yurok Tribe.

Other Relevant Application Details