

For Immediate Release
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Funds Announced for Puntledge River Fish and Wildlife

COURTENAY – Three projects that will help conserve Chinook Salmon in the Puntledge River watershed will benefit from more than \$73,000 in funding from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP).

The first of two projects to be delivered by the K'ómoks First Nation will help maintain genetic distinctions between wild and hatchery Chinook in support of the recovery of summer Chinook populations. The second project will examine the influence of Harbour Seal predation on Chinook populations. And the third project, led by the Comox Valley Project Watershed Society, will assess if Chinook Salmon are migrating back to Comox Lake where their chances for survival are greatest.

Projects funded in the Puntledge River watershed will start this spring and conclude by early 2015. They are among 31 fish and wildlife projects approved for more than \$1.7 million in funding this year in the FWCP's Coastal Region. Learn more at www.fwcp.ca.

QUOTES:

Don McRae, MLA for Comox Valley

"These projects bring government, industry, researchers, communities and First Nations together to support healthy, functioning watersheds and ecological communities. The Puntledge River watershed supports diverse fish and wildlife populations and is an important system in our region."

Brian Assu, Chair, FWCP- Coastal Regional Board

"Chinook stocks are of great importance to the K'ómoks First Nation and others, and these projects will contribute to the long-term conservation of this fish species. We are fortunate to have strong working partnerships with First Nations and conservation groups making a real difference in this watershed."

Patrice Rother, Manager, Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program

"We are pleased with the strong interest in the FWCP and the quality of project proposals that support the FWCP vision of thriving populations in watersheds that are functioning and sustainable."

A few facts about the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program

- The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program funds conservation and enhancement projects in the Coastal, Columbia River and Peace River regions. The Coastal Region includes Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland and the Southern Interior.
- In 2014, the FWCP will provide more than \$7 million towards more than 80 fish and wildlife projects province-wide in its Coastal, Columbia and Peace regions.
- FWCP funds are provided by BC Hydro and managed in a partnership with the Province of British Columbia, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, First Nations and the public to conserve and enhance fish and wildlife impacted by the creation of BC Hydro dams.
- Funding applications are received each fall and reviewed annually in the Coastal Region by technical committees and FWCP Coastal Board members. Projects are chosen based on technical merit, linkages to watershed-specific priorities, cost-effectiveness, level of partnership, and overall benefit to the FWCP's mandate and vision.

- For a full list and descriptions of all 2014 projects funded by the FWCP across the province, and information on how you can apply for funding next year, visit fwcp.ca.

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FWCP Projects Funded in the Puntledge River Watershed – 2014-2015

DNA Analysis of Puntledge Summer Chinook – Assessment of Run Timing Inheritance and BKD (Bacterial Kidney Disease) Resistance

K'ómoks First Nation

\$29,678

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) considers the Puntledge summer Chinook Salmon, which is distinct from fall Chinook, a population of high conservation concern. While both runs have different migration timings, they both spawn at the same time – from early October to early November. One contributing factor to recent observed declining trend in escapements is the prevalence of Bacterial Kidney Disease (BKD) in the population.

The goal of this project is to support the long-term viability of the summer Chinook population by helping to reduce the future occurrence of BKD; and providing a thorough understanding of the genetics controlling run-timing in Puntledge summer Chinook. These results will enable modification of hatchery practices to maintain productivity, sustainability and the adaptability of summer Chinook.

Assessment of the Homing Behaviour of Three- and Four-Year-Old Puntledge Summer Chinook Adult Returns from Lake- and River-imprinted Juveniles

Comox Valley Project Watershed Society

\$30,767

This is year four in a proposed five-year project (future FWCP funding to be confirmed) that will evaluate whether juvenile summer Chinook that are imprinted in Comox Lake will migrate to the lake as adults, in greater abundance than adults that were reared and released as juveniles in the river below the diversion dam.

DFO's new hatchery production strategy focuses on replicating historic behaviour and life-cycle of summer Chinook; by releasing summer Chinook hatchery smolts in Comox Lake, DFO anticipates that juveniles will imprint on the lake and thus will migrate back to the lake where they will have the greatest chance of survival.

DNA Scat Analyses of Puntledge Estuary Seals to Determine Whether Harbour Seals in Comox Preferentially Prey Upon Female Chinook Salmon

K'ómoks First Nation

\$13,031

The overall health of Puntledge River Chinook stocks (in fall and summer) is of great importance to K'ómoks First Nation, and Harbour Seal predation has been identified as an important mortality factor. Harbor Seal predation may also have additional demographic effects by preferentially preying on adult female Chinook Salmon and may, at least, partially be responsible for sometimes extremely male-biased sex ratios in the Puntledge.

This project will determine quantities of male and female Chinook DNA in the scats of Harbour Seals collected in the region. During the last two years, hundreds of scats have been collected from nearby Harbour Seal haul-outs and these are being analyzed to determine their diet composition.

The FWCP is a partnership of:

