

Project Area Stewardship and Ongoing Obligations

An RCO grant comes with long-term obligations to maintain and protect the project area after a project is complete. “Project area” means the area consistent with the geographic limits of the scope of work of the project. For a restoration project, the project area must include the physical limits of the project’s final site plans or final design plans. For an acquisition project, the project area must include the area described by the legal description of the properties acquired in the project. The long-term obligations for the salmon program are in Washington Administrative Code 420-12-085 for restoration projects and Washington Administrative Code 420-12-080 for acquisition projects. A [sample grant agreement](#) may be found on RCO’s website.

RCO recognizes that changes occur over time and that some acquisitions may become obsolete or the land needed for something else. The law discourages casual discards of land and facilities by ensuring that a project sponsor replaces the lost value when changes or conversions of use take place.

In general, the project area funded with an RCO grant must remain dedicated to the use as originally funded, such as for salmon recovery purposes, for as long as defined in the grant agreement. For an acquisition project, that period is perpetual. For a restoration project, the ongoing obligation is a minimum of ten years from the date of project closure or more as specified in the landowner agreement (or stewardship plan for sponsor-owned project areas).

A conversion occurs when the project area acquired, developed, or restored with RCO grants is used for purposes other than what it was funded for originally. See *RCO Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations* for a discussion of conversions and the process required for replacement of the public investment. Non-compliance with the long-term obligations for an RCO grant may jeopardize an organization’s ability to obtain future RCO grants.

Prohibited Uses on Salmon Recovery Funding Board-Funded Land

Uses of Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB)-funded land generally are limited to restoration and protection for salmon recovery purposes. Except as further provided for below and as specifically allowed by RCO as part of a grant agreement or other review process, all uses, infrastructure, and improvements inconsistent with the salmon recovery purposes of the grant are prohibited and must be avoided, removed, or demolished.

As part of the application process, an applicant should check with RCO grants managers if any existing or planned permanent uses, improvements, or infrastructure are being considered as part of ongoing stewardship and development of the project area. This information will be reviewed by RCO in accordance with this policy and used to develop the grant agreement together with the project sponsor. When merging a SRFB-funded acquisition project with RCO funding from another program, other relevant policy manuals may be used to determine allowable uses, infrastructure, and improvements.

If a project sponsor plans to install permanent improvements or infrastructure on SRFB-funded land after grant closing, RCO shall be given the opportunity to review the proposal in accordance with this policy. All requested improvements or infrastructure that are not allowed specifically below or which do not clearly meet the criteria below will be reviewed under RCO's Allowable Uses Framework in *Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations*.

Allowed Uses on SRFB-Funded Acquisitions

Public Use

Projects receiving SRFB grants for fee-simple land acquisition must be available for public use unless otherwise approved by RCO. For more information on public access requirements and restrictions, see *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* and *Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations*. This policy does not apply to restoration projects or areas purchased under a conservation easement or similar less-than-fee-simple method.

Public use of SRFB-funded sites generally will be limited to low-impact, passive recreational and cultural uses consistent with the salmon recovery purposes funded by the SRFB.

Public Use Infrastructure

To provide for the safety and enjoyment of the public, sponsors may keep or build minimal outdoor access infrastructure on SRFB-funded properties. Existing structures may be kept if essential to supporting safe and sustainable public use. New infrastructure is limited to the following:

- Unpaved parking areas and associated access roads if they remain at grade or use existing road beds, and are in existing rights-of-way, in previously disturbed open areas, or areas recently cleared as part of demolition.
- Trails, paths, boardwalks, railings, and bridges if they avoid sensitive areas, stay at grade whenever possible, minimize riparian vegetation disturbance, and use gravel or wood chips sparingly as needed to support public safety and accessibility goals.
- Fencing and gates to protect riparian plantings or sensitive habitat from public access, or to delineate high-use recreational areas such as parking lots or trailheads.
- Signs and kiosks to identify boundaries and entrances, recognize funders, share trail information and rules, or provide interpretive information.

- Recreational amenities such as benches, tables, vault toilets, water spigots, drinking fountains, trash cans, bike racks, and small open-air shelters, provided they are sited to minimize disturbance.

The list above describes public use infrastructure that may be allowed on SRFB-funded properties, but most infrastructure costs are not eligible for SRFB funding. SRFB funding may be provided for new infrastructure if it is an eligible cost (see “Eligible Project Costs” in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* or *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*).

Maintenance Infrastructure

Pending review by RCO, limited retention and/or development of permanent maintenance infrastructure is allowed on SRFB-funded land if needed to support long-term salmon recovery restoration, associated habitat stewardship, or management of public use. Existing structures and associated utilities may remain if essential to the operations and maintenance of the funded site; otherwise they must be demolished. New infrastructure is limited to the following:

- Small, enclosed storage or maintenance sheds needed to house tools, vehicles, and other infrastructure and materials essential to the salmon recovery resources of the site.
- Fencing to prevent disturbance of sensitive habitat, natural features, and riparian plantings on the property.

Not all allowed maintenance infrastructure above is eligible for SRFB funding. SRFB funding may be provided for new infrastructure if it is an eligible cost (see “Eligible Project Costs” in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* or *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*).

Fish Acclimation

Acclimation ponds for rearing juvenile fish species are not eligible for SRFB funds or match, but may be allowed on SRFB-funded properties under the following conditions:

- Fish acclimation occurs in a natural pond, wetland, or stream channel (off-channel or side channel).
- No earth moving, water diversion, or substantial alteration to the existing habitat conditions is conducted. Efforts are taken to use the least impactful methods to achieve project goals; any impacts are mitigated post-project.
- Proposed use is consistent with the terms of the existing SRFB conservation easement between the sponsor and landowner and approved by the conservation easement holder, where applicable.
- The salmon recovery region or lead entity reviewed and approved the supplementation proposal for consistency with the salmon recovery plan.
- Listed species are not harmed or negatively affected.
- Use of the project site will not impair stream, riparian, or wetland habitat.

- The acclimation period is short-term (typically less than ninety days) and all acclimation-related infrastructure is removed after juveniles are released each season.
- RCO grants manager has approved specific acclimation activities.

Requests for acclimation ponds that do not meet the criteria above must be reviewed under RCO's Allowable Uses Framework.