



Restoring Scotland's river catchments for nature and people

Prospectus



January 2026



About the Scottish Rivers Fund

The Scottish Rivers Fund is an innovative funding mechanism dedicated to restoring Scotland's river catchments for the benefit of nature and people. The Fund will launch in 2026.

The Fund is a novel opportunity for engagement, welcoming contributions from all interested groups, businesses, and individuals.

Using science-based and national policy-aligned criteria, the Fund's capital will be distributed on a strategic basis to local projects across Scotland that deliver measurable environmental, social, and business-relevant outcomes for river catchments.

The Scottish Rivers Fund is modelled on the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF). Together, the two mechanisms form a comprehensive 'Source to Sea' approach that recognises the interconnectedness of freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems.

The development of the Scottish Rivers Fund has been led by **Fisheries Management Scotland** in partnership with **NatureScot** who will host the Fund, the **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)**, the **Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government**, and **Crown Estate Scotland**.

The Fund development is supported by the **Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS)**, delivered by **NatureScot**, the **Scottish Government**, and the **National Lottery Heritage Fund**. Additional support was provided by the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**, **The Missing Salmon Alliance**, and the **Golden Bottle Trust**.

The Focus: Scotland's Rivers

Scotland's landscape-defining network of rivers and streams - spanning more than 125,000 kilometres¹ - are truly special. They have shaped local history and culture and represent a shared, precious resource for the communities that live beside them, the businesses that depend on them, and the species that inhabit them.

Yet, the health, biodiversity, and resilience of our river ecosystems are under increasing pressures. Climate-induced warming, habitat degradation and a range of human-induced pressures have put our rivers and lochs under threat, with significant implications for biodiversity, water availability, water quality, and water temperature.

According to data from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), 45 per cent of Scottish surface waters are in less than "good" ecological status.²

Our iconic wild Atlantic salmon, a keystone and indicator species for most Scottish rivers, is now classified as "endangered" in the UK with a 30-50% decline in British populations since 2006.³

The Scottish Rivers Fund will enable the action needed to restore our rivers.

¹ Visit Scotland's Environment Web: <https://www.environment.gov.scot/>

² Visit SEPA's Water Classification Hub: <https://informatics.sepa.org.uk/WaterClassificationHub/>

³ Darwall, W.R.T. & Noble, R.A. 2023. *Salmo salar* (Great Britain subpopulation). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023.

Fund Outcomes

The Scottish Rivers Fund aims to provide an effective, long-term funding mechanism that delivers five business-relevant thematic outcomes for river catchments:

Biodiversity and ecosystems



Improving the quality, extent and resilience of instream, floodplain, and non-floodplain habitats

Cold, clean water



Improving water quality and moderating instream temperatures that support healthy aquatic life

Water quantity



Improving hydrological processes and restoring more natural flow regimes of river systems

Climate adaptation and resilience



Strengthening the ability of river ecosystems to be resilient and adaptable to a changing climate

Community benefit & engagement



Fostering strong human–river connections that generate long-lasting, positive conservation and restoration outcomes

Monitoring and reporting all project outcomes delivered through the Fund will ensure that contributors can demonstrate measurable and credible impact aligned with recognised frameworks, such as:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)

Project Pipeline

The Scottish Rivers Fund already has an identified and scalable pipeline of projects across Scotland that includes:

- **~50 ready-to-go projects**, with a combined value of over £10.5 million
- **~200 projects that are almost ready for funding** (requiring support for project development)

The ready-to-go projects encompass a diverse range of interventions, including in-stream, bankside, and broader land-based habitat improvements to benefit rivers, and that enable local knowledge and participation. Collectively, these have the potential to deliver significant benefits:



~2 million trees planted



~100 km of rivers restored



4 barriers removed or mitigated



~1,200 ha of land restored



~40 jobs supported



Policy Alignment

The Scottish Rivers Fund is closely aligned with national policy priorities including the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, the Wild Salmon Strategy, Scotland's River Basin Management Plan, and the Scottish Government's Natural Capital Market Framework.

The Fund's grant giving mechanism follows a robust, science-based approach that ensures investments are directed towards projects with the potential to deliver the greatest environmental and social benefits, independent of the project size.

This provides Fund contributors with confidence that their investments are strategically placed for maximum impact and supported by national policy.

Good Governance

The Scottish Rivers Fund can provide assurance to contributors that building on the track record of SMEEF, the Scottish Rivers Fund has robust governance arrangements allowing for clear, transparent, and accountable decision-making and fund management processes, whilst ensuring the projects funded have access to the best advice.

The core functions of the Fund will be managed by the Fund's operational team and overseen by a Steering Group. An Ethical Contributions Board and Grants Approval Panel will provide further layers of governance and assurance.

The Opportunity

We are seeking start-up funding to support initial core costs, alongside investment to support 10 initial projects ranging from £25,000 to £250,000.

Rivers are vital to our economy, communities, and wellbeing, and they form an integral part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. Yet they face growing pressures.

We are therefore inviting businesses across all sectors to invest in Scotland's rivers and help restore river catchments at scale.

Your investment in the Scottish Rivers Fund offers an opportunity to:

- **Mitigate operational and supply chain risks** through nature-positive action
- **Access data and insights to recognised standards** that reflect Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments
- **Respond to customer expectations** for responsible and sustainable practices
- **Gain recognition as a key supporter** through the Fund's communications and visibility initiatives
- **Collaborate with peers** to drive catchment-scale restoration and long-term water stewardship