Feasibility Assessment for the Poyang Lake Freshwater Fund

1. Background

Conservation International (CI) is exploring a pilot facility for community-led nature-based solutions in the Poyang Lake basin. The concept envisages philanthropic grants and corporate funding, either as upfront contributions or post-verification purchase commitments. Project outcomes would be independently assessed, with water-related benefits quantified using the Volumetric Water Benefit framework and allocated among participating funders.

The pilot is intended to finance freshwater restoration while demonstrating a model that could later mobilize larger-scale private funding. Before designing the financial, governance and legal structure, CI requires a focused assessment of market demand and the conditions under which prospective funders would participate.

The consultancy aims to rapidly test whether donors and corporates have credible interest in funding or purchasing verified freshwater, biodiversity, climate resilience and livelihood outcomes before CI proceeds to detailed instrument design.

2. Objective

The consultant will provide an evidence-based recommendation on whether the proposed facility has sufficient market potential to progress to instrument design, and if so, define the minimum viable proposition that should be taken forward.

3. Scope of work

The assignment will cover four linked workstreams:

1. **Market segmentation and prioritization:** Assess the relevant prospects across: (i) corporates operating in or dependent on (a – priority 1) the Poyang Lake basin/Jiangxi Province and (b- priority 2) downstream of Poyang Lake outlet on the stretch of Yangtze from Nanchang to Shanghai; (ii) national and multinational corporates elsewhere in China with water, nature, climate or community commitments; and (iii) Singapore-based and regional foundations, family offices and philanthropic donors.
2. **Demand and proposition testing:** Test which outcomes resonate, why stakeholders would participate, likely budget sources, preferred contribution mechanism (legal structure), indicative ticket size, payment timing (upfront donor or outcomes purchaser), and required commitment period. Note the **restoration of Poyang Lake will NOT generate significant carbon sequestration outcomes and hence carbon project development is not a viable pathway** for the project.
3. **Outcome and verification requirements:** Assess whether Volumetric Water Benefits and associated biodiversity, livelihood and climate-resilience outcomes are sufficiently credible and useful to funders; identify required evidence, reporting, independent verification and safeguards against double counting or overstated claims.
4. **Governance structure expected:** Assess what governance arrangements would provide donors and corporate participants with sufficient confidence, oversight and influence while preserving efficient decision-making.
5. **Commercial feasibility and next-step recommendation:** Compare a small number of practical models, such as a grant-funded pooled facility, blended donor/corporate facility, upfront corporate contribution model and donor-funded implementation with post-verification corporate offtake. Recommend the most viable route for detailed design. CI team will provide more information on these innovative finance models to the consultant.

4. Core questions to be answered

- Which stakeholder segment(s) show the strongest credible demand, and what motivates participation?
- Which outcomes are most compelling: water replenishment/security, biodiversity, climate adaptation/resilience, livelihoods, or an integrated package?

- Which metric or frameworks for water stewardship, sustainability (if any) are being applied/in exploration at the corporation?
- Would corporates use CSR, sustainability, water-stewardship, supply-chain, risk-management or corporate-foundation budgets?
- Do prospective participants prefer grants, upfront contributions, milestone payments or post-verification offtake commitments?
- What contribution sizes, commitment periods and payment conditions appear realistic?
- What evidence, reporting, verification and corporate claims would be acceptable?
- For companies operating in the China or in Yangtze River Basin, would the project be more compelling if positioned specifically around Poyang Lake or as part of a broader Yangtze River Basin narrative?
- Is Poyang Lake sufficiently relevant to corporates without direct basin exposure and to Singapore-based philanthropies?
- What would be required from an anchor funder to crowd in other participants?
- Are expected measurement, verification and transaction costs proportionate to a pilot of this scale?

5. Methodology and level of effort

The consultant should apply a rapid, interview-led approach proportionate to a 5-6 week assignment with maximum fees of USD 40,000 including travel and taxes, if applicable. At minimum, the work should include:

- Desk review of the concept deck, existing program information and relevant market context. A couple of meetings will be organized with the CI team to discuss project context and preliminary instrument design options.
- A prioritized prospect list of approximately 25-35 organizations in total across the three target segments. CI will review the list and will exclude existing donors of CI China or Lake Poyang project.
- At least 25 substantive interviews, including 6-8 basin-linked or China-based corporates, 6-8 other national/multinational corporates, 8-10 individual donors or family offices.
- Structured testing of 2-3 instrument options with indicative potential commitment, payment approaches and timelines. The assessment must distinguish general interest from willingness to pursue internal approval or provide a non-binding indication of interest.
- Validation session with relevant CI teams to test preliminary findings and agree with the recommended pathway.

6. Deliverables

Timing	Deliverable	Outcome
Week 1	**Inception note**	Refined methodology, interview targets, question guides, and workplan
Week 3-4	**Interim findings discussion**	Early evidence by segment, emerging challenges, preferred propositions and gaps requiring further testing. **Note:** Interim report is required by last week of January.
Week 4-6	**Final feasibility report**	Concise findings, interview notes, prospect pipeline, demand assessment, preferred model, key risks, and clear recommendation.
Week 4-6	**Design parameters brief**	Recommended target funders, value proposition, funding approach, ticket-size range, outcome package, verification expectations, anchor-funder role and priority next steps for instrument design.

7. Expected recommendation and decision criteria

The final recommendation should state whether there is a credible pathway to launch and should assess at minimum:

- Evidence of at least one plausible anchor or catalytic funder and several credible corporate follow-up prospects.
- A realistic pathway to secure meaningful initial funding, rather than relying only on expressions of general interest.
- A clearly preferred outcome proposition and participation mechanism for each priority segment.

8. Consultant profile

The consultant or team should demonstrate:

- Experience of designing and delivering projects with NGOs preferably in conservation finance, blended finance, outcome-based funding or corporate sustainability partnerships.
- Practical knowledge of corporate water stewardship, freshwater nature-based solutions and impact measurement or comparable approaches.
- Bring a strong network of relevant corporate and philanthropic decisionmakers in China and Singapore.
- Experience conducting rapid market validation, willingness-to-pay testing and translating findings into actionable design parameters.
- Professional fluency in English and Mandarin capability is strongly must.

9. Governance, confidentiality and exclusions

The consultant will report to CI's designated Poyang Lake project team consisting of CI China representatives, Nature Finance expert and Freshwater Science expert. All materials and stakeholder information will remain confidential. Engagements must be presented as market testing, not as an offer of securities, credits or a final product.

The assignment excludes detailed financial modelling, legal or tax advice, fund establishment, preparation of transaction documents, formal fundraising representation and negotiation of binding commitments. These activities may follow only if the feasibility assessment supports progression.

10. Project Timelines

Expected Start Date for the Project is December 1, 2026, and End Date is March 31, 2027.

11. Proposal submission

Proposals should include a short methodology, workplan, team composition, relevant experience (please provide CVs), evidence of access to target stakeholders, level of effort, fees and two relevant references. Selection will place greatest weight on relevant market-validation experience, China/Singapore/Hongkong networks, corporate water expertise, practicality of approach and value for money.

All correspondence, including submission of Proposals and Clarifications should be sent by email to GCUAsia@conservation.org. All submissions are due to CI by November 24 11:59PM Singapore Time (SGT).

Note: Proposals will be reviewed on a rolling basis, with submissions accepted for one week from the date of announcement.