



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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Dear Paul:

The Association appreciates your hard work and that of your staff to administer the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. This program provides critical resources to the states, territories and the District of Columbia to better understand and conserve some of our nation's most vulnerable fish and wildlife. This successful partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is meeting the goal of preventing fish and wildlife from becoming endangered.

Over the years, the competitive portion of the State Wildlife Grants program has supported numerous projects that address priorities identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. However, some state agency staff have indicated that improvements could be made by making certain changes to the eligibility criteria and scoring factors for the program. The Association's Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee created a working group to examine eligibility criteria and scoring factors, and recommended changes to the committee that could help make the program even better. Paul Van Ryzin, a member of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration team, served on the working group.

The recommendations of the working group, with some modifications were subsequently approved by the AFWA Business Committee. Principal among the proposed changes is an expansion of the allowance for individual states to receive a competitive grant. Currently only Alaska, Hawaii and the territories are able to do so. There are several reasons for this proposed change. Some states have large geographies and cover all or a significant portion of the range of a species, making interstate collaboration unnecessary or burdensome. In addition, the authorities over certain taxa like invertebrates and habitats can vary between states, sometimes making collaboration by neighboring states impossible.

The working group also recommends that the maximum award for grants be raised. A tiered approach is suggested so that there is still incentive for multiple states to collaborate. Alaska, Hawaii and the territories should individually be able to apply for up to \$500,000, while single states in the contiguous United States should be able to apply for a maximum of \$250,000, two states \$500,000, three states \$750,000 and four or more states up to \$1,000,000. A higher award ceiling will allow states to do larger-scale projects and reduce administrative inefficiencies.

The working group also recommends that the requirement for match be removed as a scoring factor and simply be part of the eligibility criteria. Giving greater consideration to projects that have a higher proportion of non-federal match does not necessarily result in better projects or outcomes and can put states who have challenges acquiring match at a disadvantage.

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A number of changes are suggested for the scoring criteria and are included in an attachment. These changes are intended to help grant writers develop proposals that address priorities identified in State Wildlife Action Plans and emerging issues, address congressional intent in the FY18 omnibus spending bill (Public Law No: 115- 141) report by giving increased weight to projects targeting federal candidate species and clarify language and change scoring weights for objectives, procedures, data management, timeline/compliance, organizational roles, outcomes and benefits, communicating results and budget.

Lastly, in the past the program has given preference to projects with a significant “on-the-ground” component such as habitat management. Although the importance of these types of projects is not disputed, data and information needs that can be served through monitoring and research projects are often a critical need for species and habitat management. We recommend that any requirement that projects include an “on-the-ground” component be eliminated.

We provide these recommendations to you in the spirit of collaboration and interest in improving this important grant program. We are confident you will give them serious consideration. Please reach out to me if you have any questions about the recommendations. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Ed Carter
President

cc: Ron Regan (AFWA)
Sara Parker Pauley (MDOC)
David Whitehurst (VDGIF)
Karen Kinkead (IADNR)
Mark Humpert (AFWA)

Attachment

ATTACHMENT

2019 Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program Recommended changes to scoring criteria

Notes on Eligibility:

Partnership Requirement - We recommend changing the partnership requirement to allow a single state or territory to apply for competitive State Wildlife Grant Program funding. We further recommend a tiered funding cap per project based on the number of states partnering on the project. Our recommendation is: 1 state: \$250,000, 2 states: \$500,000, 3 states: \$750,000, 4 or more states: \$1,000,000. These changes are recommended to allow states the greatest support and flexibility in implementing State Wildlife Action Plans. Because of their isolation, Alaska, Hawaii, and territories should be allowed to apply for up to \$500,000 individually.

Additionally, we recommend changing match requirements based on scoring criteria to an eligibility requirement. Either the applicant can meet the match or they cannot.

Scoring summary of newly proposed criteria:

	Maximum points
Need (33.3%)	
Criterion One: Relevance to & Documentation of Wildlife Action Plan	20 pts
Bonus: Emerging Issue	5 pts
Criterion Two: High Priority Target Species	10 pts
Bonus: Priority Taxa	2 pts
Bonus: DOI Priority	2 pts
Objectives (16.7%)	
Criterion Three: Clarity	5 pts
Criterion Four: Appropriate	5 pts
Criterion Five: Verifiable	5 pts
Approach (22.2% of Points)	
Criterion Six: Procedure	10 pts
Criterion Seven: Data	5 pts
Criterion Eight: Timeline and Compliance	3 pts
Criterion Nine: Personnel	2 pts
Anticipated Outcomes and Benefits (22.2% of Points)	
Criterion Ten: Impact	15 pts
Criterion Eleven: Communication	5 pts
Budget (5.6%)	
Criterion Twelve: Budget Completeness	5 pts

Newly proposed criteria:

Need

Criterion One: Relevance to and Documentation of State Wildlife Action Plan

How is the need for this project identified by the state's wildlife action plan(s)? Are sufficient information and references provided to support the immediacy and relevance to the Wildlife Action Plan(s)? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (20, 15, 10, 5, or 0) as defined below:*

20 points: Project will implement actions identified in multiple Wildlife Action Plan(s), with documentation (i.e., pages cited), and those same multiple states/territories are named as active participants in project implementation.

15 points: Project will implement actions identified in a Wildlife Action Plan, with documentation, that targets a species for which the current and historical range is entirely in one jurisdiction (i.e., an endemic species).

10 points: Project will implement actions identified in multiple Wildlife Action Plans, with documentation (i.e., pages cited), but project will only be implemented in one state/territory and no other states/territories are named as active participants.

5 points: Project will implement actions that are unique to an individual Wildlife Action Plan, with documentation (i.e., pages cited) and project will only be implemented in that one state/territory.

0 points: None of the above.

BONUS: Up to 5 points for emerging issue: The proposal clearly states the time sensitive window for crisis, emergency situations related to data collection (e.g. response to catastrophic wildfire, or new disease outbreak (e.g. white-nose syndrome), habitat restoration, or other emerging issues and must provide documentation as to why it is an emerging crisis.

Criterion Two: High Priority Target Species

Is the project targeting a priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in the Wildlife Action Plan? Is the species a federal candidate species? Is the species identified by a federal work plan? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (10, 7, 5, 3 or 0) as defined below:*

10 points: Project targets a SGCN that is a federal candidate species (i.e. species with a positive 12-month finding under ESA).

7 points: Project targets a SGCN with a positive 90-day finding under ESA.

5 points: Project targets a SGCN that is a state threatened or endangered species, state sensitive species, or a priority species identified in a Wildlife Action Plan.

3 points: Project targets other SGCN (which fits none of the above categories)?

0 point: Project targets a species that is not a SGCN.

BONUS

Priority taxa: Up to 2 points: Will the project benefit SGCN amphibian, reptile, invertebrate, or nongame fish species?

BONUS

Relevancy to Federal Priorities: Up to 2 points: Does the proposal support the Department of the Interior financial assistance priorities as detailed above in Section I. Description of Funding Opportunity (P. 7)?

Proposal includes a supporting statement explaining how the proposed project helps advance one or more of the priorities (priorities will vary annually based on guidance from the Secretary of the Interior and will be identified in the NOFO). For FY18 these priorities were the following: 1) creating a conservation legacy second only to Teddy Roosevelt; 2) utilizing our natural resources; and 3) restoring trust with our local communities).

Objectives

Criterion Three: Clarity

Are the objectives clear, specific, and time bound? Is it clear what will happen in the project?

Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:

5 points: Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound (SMART).

3 points: Objectives do not meet all of the SMART definition (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound).

0 points: Objectives do not meet any of the SMART definition or are not included in the proposal.

Criterion Four: Appropriate

Are the objectives sufficient for addressing the need? If objectives are completed, will the established need be sufficiently addressed? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:*

5 points: Background information and appropriate references are provided to sufficiently justify the established objectives for addressing the project need.

3 points: Background information and appropriate references are not sufficient to justify that the need will be adequately addressed.

0 points: Background information or references are not included in the proposal.

Criterion Five: Verifiable

Are the objectives measurable? How will we know if the objectives are met? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:*

5 points: Objectives are measurable and proposal includes detail about how objectives will be assessed.

3 points: Objectives are measurable but details are not provided to allow an understanding of how objectives will be assessed.

0 points: Objectives are not measurable and the proposal lacks detail about how objectives will be assessed.

Approach

Criterion Six: Procedure

Where will the work occur? How will the work get done? What methods will be used and are they likely to achieve the objectives and anticipated outcomes? Are best practices sufficiently cited? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (10, 4, or 0) as defined below:*

10 points: Approach describes location(s) in sufficient detail, procedures are described clearly and succinctly, references are provided and Best Practices documents are cited when applicable.

4 points: Approach includes some but not all of the following components: describes location(s) in sufficient detail, procedures are described clearly and succinctly, references are provided and best practices documents are cited when applicable.

0 points: Approach is not included in the proposal.

Criterion Seven: Data

How will the data be stored, analyzed and managed? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:*

5 points: Proposal clearly identifies how data/information will be captured, stored, and analyzed.

3 points: Proposal includes some but not all of the following components: information on how data/information will be captured, stored and analyzed.

0 points: Proposal lacks information on how data/information will be captured, stored and analyzed.

Criterion Eight: Timeline and Compliance

Can the work be done in the identified timeframe? Is the timeline appropriate? The applicant identifies the permits and approvals needed to complete the work and incorporates them into the timeline. Will the project comply with state, federal, and/or tribal requirements in the allotted timeframe for the project? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (3, 2, 1, or 0) as defined below:*

3 points: Timeline is included for all tasks and permits or approvals needed to accomplish the work are identified and built into the project timeline, thereby ensuring the project can be completed within the allotted time frame. If no such approvals are necessary, proposal clearly explains why not.

2 points: A timeline is included for some tasks included in the project but does not address compliance needs.

1 point: Compliance needs are addressed but proposal does not include a timeline for the other tasks needed to complete the project.

0 points: A timeline is not included and compliance needs are not addressed or are not appropriate for the tasks included in the project.

Criterion Nine: Organizational Roles

What entity or entities will be responsible for each action? How does their participation ensure success of the project? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (2 or 0) as defined below:*

2 points: Entity or entities responsible for each action are described in detail.

0 points: Entity or entities responsible for each action are not described or described in sufficient detail.

Anticipated Outcomes and Benefits

Criterion Ten: Impact

How does this project help a State(s) implement their Wildlife Action Plan(s)? How will this project impact the targeted SGCN or its habitat? How will the project benefit additional SGCN beyond the target species? A long list of species without documentation is not sufficient. How will the project collect information/data important to the conservation of SGCN? Project will make a significant contribution to the implementation of the targeted Wildlife Action Plan(s). Contributions will be varied and can include filling data gaps, reducing threats, creating or improving habitat, or monitoring species response to conservation actions. *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (15, 11, 8, 4, or 0) as defined below:*

15 points: Full points are awarded if the proposal describes the significance of the project outcomes, and provides justification (e.g., conceptual model, references) as to how the project results (including research and monitoring (or data-gap-filling) projects) are expected to inform conservation and/or benefit the targeted species. The project describes how it will meaningfully benefit secondary SGCN in addition to the targeted SGCN.

11 points: Proposal describes the significance of the project outcomes, and provides justification (e.g. conceptual model, references) as to how the project results (including research and monitoring (or data-gap-filling) projects) are expected to inform conservation and/or benefit the targeted species but does not address secondary species.

8 points: Proposal includes some but not all of the following components: the significance of the project outcomes, and justification (e.g., conceptual model, references) as to how the project results (including research and monitoring (or data-gap-filling) projects) are expected to inform conservation and/or benefit the targeted species. The project describes how it will meaningfully benefit secondary SGCN in addition to the targeted SGCN.

4 points: Proposal includes some but not all of the following components: the significance of the project outcomes, and justification (e.g., conceptual model, references) as to how the project results (including research and monitoring (or data-gap-filling) projects) are expected to inform conservation and/or benefit the targeted species.

0 points: Proposal fails to describe the significance of the project outcomes.

Criterion Eleven: Communication

How will the results of the project, lessons learned, and information gained be shared? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:*

5 points: Proposal includes information on how project knowledge will be shared externally to inform future decision-making. Suggested guidance could include: published papers, a posted final report on the agency website in a predefined space, sending out a media blitz on the outcome of the project, or creating an e-newsletter or listserv to get information to colleagues and researchers.

3 points: Proposal includes information on how project knowledge will be shared internally to inform future decision making (e.g. data entered into an agency database).

0 points: Proposal does not include information on how the project results will be shared to inform future decision-making.

Budget

Criterion Twelve: Budget Completeness

Is the budget complete, clear, accurate and sufficiently detailed? Are the amounts requested in the budget sufficient to do the work proposed? Are the amounts requested in the budget sufficiently justified? *Proposal reviewers must award one of the following (5, 3, or 0) as defined below:*

5 points: Throughout the document, all budget figures and budget narrative are consistent, adequately detailed, appropriately organized, easily understandable, and supported with necessary documentation. This budget justification should include information on grant recipients and processes, such as whether participating States will submit individual grant amendments to USFWS Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration (WSFR); or if one State will serve as lead and submit a single grant/amendment to WSFR that includes sub-grants to the other participating States. Is the budget large enough to complete the proposed work or are additional funds described to ensure proposed work has the funding to be completed?

3 points: Budget figures and narrative are generally consistent, but not all of the above components are included and addressed.

0 points: Budget figures and narrative are inconsistent, inadequately detailed, poorly organized and are not documented.