

NWX-DOC CONFERENCING

Moderator: Rina Studds

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11:30 am CT

Coordinator: Thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. During the question-and-answer session, you may press Star 1 on your phone if you'd like to ask a question. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. Now, I'd like to turn the meeting over to Julie Simmons. Thank you. You may begin.

Julie Simmons: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the applicant webinar for the Great Lakes Fish Habitat Restoration Partnership Grant Competition. I'm Julie Simmons of the NOAA Restoration Center, and I manage our restoration program in the Great Lakes. I'm located here in Ann Arbor.

I'll just note too, that during the presentation, I'll turn the video off, and then we'll turn it back on when we answer questions. Rina, you're on mute.

Rina Studds: Thanks, Julie. Hi. I'm Rina Studds, and a program officer that focuses on restoration work in the Great Lakes, and I'm also the competition manager for this funding opportunity. I normally sit in Silver Spring, Maryland, and I'll be presenting with Julie today.

Julie Simmons: And the purpose of today's information session is to outline the components of the funding opportunity, and allow applicants to ask questions about this competition. But if you have very specific questions about your project, or if you're tuning in to the recording of the webinar, following today's presentation, please feel free to reach out to one of us or set up a call.

So, I'm going to turn my video off, if I can figure out how to do that. Stop video. There we go. Thank you. So, you should be following along with the slides here. Rina, you're up next.

Rina Studds: Okay. For this presentation, we'll be highlighting the most pertinent information from each of the main sections included in the funding opportunity. If you haven't accessed it yet, you can download a PDF from Grants.gov posting under the related documents tab. The roman numerals listed here on the slide, correspond to the actual section headers in the funding opportunity.

You can cross-reference them when reading through the document. We will not be highlighting Sections 7 and 8 today during the webinar, so please refer to the document itself for any questions regarding agency-level contacts or other information. And Julie, I'm passing it over to you.

Julie Simmons: Yes, thank you. So, for this funding opportunity, we anticipate at least 10 million will be available in FY'22 to support selected awards of additional funding available in future years. The deadline for the proposal submission is Wednesday, January 12 by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.

So, kickoff, Section 1, we'll talk about program objectives. Section 1 of the funding opportunity outlines the program objectives and priorities. The objective of this competition is to provide federal financial and technical assistance to support habitat restoration projects that contribute to NOAA and GLRI priorities, by restoring habitat for native Great Lakes fish species, whose populations have been impacted. Ultimately, our goal is to restore functional coastal wetland in nearshore in our riverine habitats that support native fish migration, reproduction growth, and provide seasonal refuge.

The next few slides will cover the program priorities. We want to call your attention to the program priorities that you can find in Section 1b. The first priority that projects will be evaluated on is whether the proposed activities contribute to the GLRI Action Plan III goals.

As outlined in the funding opportunity, priority projects address GLRI focus area one goals, need to fall into the list of AOCs identified in the funding opportunity. Through this competition, we also intend to address the GLRI focus area 4 goals by prioritizing a subset of habitat restoration projects identified by the Lake Committees as environmental priorities.

We'll talk a little bit more about that. The Lake committees are composed of senior officials from State, provincial, and US Inter-Tribal Fisheries Agency. Together, they are responsible for managing the lakes, fisheries, and developing plans and guidance to sustain healthy populations of Great Lakes commercial and recreational fish species.

A subset of environmental priorities in our funding opportunity, are those that are most appropriate for NOAA and the Restoration Center, excluding things, for example, like that focus on regulated dams or nutrient reduction projects that are unrelated to wetland restoration.

The second priority is based on capacity to manage concurrent habitat restoration projects over multiple years, and an ability to manage federal funds. So, applicants should demonstrate a willingness to coordinate with NOAA to address program priorities.

The third priority is to demonstrate willingness and ability to work with stakeholders and communities. Applicants should propose projects that were developed through an inclusive process, and demonstrate appropriate and diverse stakeholder support. Applicants should also plan to share information about project plans, benefits, and results with relevant stakeholders and local communities.

So, as I mentioned earlier, not all AOCs, or areas of concern and environmental

priorities, are included in our funding opportunity. These maps are intended just to give you a quick snapshot of the AOCs environmental priorities that are prioritized. This map includes the AOCs that have been identified or that have identified habitat restoration needs that are necessary for the local needs.

And this map is of the environmental priorities. There are some priorities that are broader than just a point on a map again. So, please do make sure to see Section 1b. So. Rina.

Rina Studds: Thanks, Julie. Section 2 of the funding opportunity deals with funding availability. NOAA will fund multi-year awards for up to three funding years. And as we stated in the beginning, we anticipate up to 10 million to be available to support new awards in the first project year.

We will not accept proposals with a federal funding request of less than 300,000 or more than 30 million over a three-year project period. Section 3 focuses on eligibility. Eligible applicants are listed here, and include institutions of higher education, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, US territories, and State, local, Native American and tribal governments. Applicants must propose work within the Great Lakes Basin and within one of eight US Great Lakes States.

Here, we have included some examples of types of ineligible projects, but again, please consult the funding opportunity for more details. For example, here we show projects that focus on the acquisition of real property or legally required mitigation are not eligible. And there are some other nuances to eligibility that we'd like to mention.

Like we will consider reef restoration projects, but not if they only propose to use molluscicides. Similarly, we will consider funding invasive species removal as a component of restoration, but not if it's proposed alone. And furthermore, projects that improve water quality through the creation or enhancement of fish habitat, such as coastal wetlands, are eligible. However, we'll not consider projects that propose things like upgrading wastewater treatment plants, or the elimination of CSOs.

Section 4 of the funding opportunity includes application submission information, and information on (unintelligible) content of your application. It's a bit boring, but I just

want to make sure to point this out because it's important. For application packages, federal forms, and instructions, please see the grants.gov posting.

Applicants should be registered in SAM, which is called the system - it stands for the System for Award Management, and also provide a valid DUNS number on the application. We're bringing this up now because if you haven't done so already, now would be a good time to initiate the registration process, or to check whether your status is active if you've registered previously.

And in my opinion, one of the most important sections to read and maybe reread in the funding opportunity, is Section 4b, where you can find our recommendations related to the content of the application. Our team spent a lot of time thinking about how we can help applicants and make this process as transparent as possible.

So, our intention with this section was to very clearly explain what should be included in the proposal, based on what reviewers will be looking for. You will notice that it generally follows the order of the evaluation criteria. For consistent review, we recommend that your application follows this order as well.

At the top of Page 24 of this funding opportunity in Section 5, you'll find the evaluation criteria that the reviewers will use to score applications. This is exactly what reviewers will consider in their evaluation. Scoring guidance is provided for reviewers there. So, it's clear there to all applicants what reviewers will be looking for.

The categories of criteria are standard NOAA categories that really try to evaluate the potential proposed work to address NOAA and EPA goals. And if the proposed work will have lasting significant public benefit. The five broad categories NOAs are importance and applicability, technical and scientific merit, applicant qualifications, project costs, and outreach and education.

You see there are several sub-criteria in these categories. I won't walk through them all here. I'll just call your attention to a few, but if you need help interpreting any of the evaluation criteria, please do not hesitate to call your (unintelligible).

((Crosstalk))

Rina Studds: So, I'm going to continue on, just assuming that wasn't a question for us. But if you do have a question, don't hesitate to ask, but then I'll continue here, just in case that was just not for us. So, here, I'm just calling out a few of the evaluation criteria to just hit at home what we're looking for.

Within the importance and applicability section, the first sub-criterion focuses on the relevance of the proposed work to the program priorities. This is worth a total of 15 points. It's definitely an important one to pay attention to. As you'll see in the scoring guidance, for full points, proposed projects must be well aligned with program priorities, as demonstrated by letters of support from relevant entities. So, we recommend that you reach out to the relevant representatives as soon as you can.

Within the applicant qualification section, the management capacity sub-criterion is worth five points, and reflects program priority 2. This priority explains that we're looking for partners that not only demonstrate that they're able to manage federal funds, but also that partners can manage concurrent habitat restoration project.

As it says in the funding opportunity, applicants are encouraged to propose one or more projects. If all projects details cannot be described within the recommended page limits, applicants should consider submitting more than one application. You should notice that there's another sub-criterion that looks at project details.

The outreach and education section reflects Priority 3, a willingness to work with stakeholders and communities. The project narrative should demonstrate that the proposed projects have the support of relevant stakeholders, and applications should include an outreach strategy that encourages long-term stewardship.

Furthermore, the NOAA Restoration Center encourages applicants to consider diversity and inclusion in the identification, design, and implementation of proposed projects. In order to ensure projects are meeting the needs of your communities, we're asking for your ideas and insights on how this can best be accomplished.

So, just as always, eligible applications will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection, based on the program priority and the evaluation criteria that I just outlined.

Applicants will receive notification regarding funding by the beginning of October at the latest. And likely, the earliest start date for awards will be October 1st as well.

So, just a few reminders and tips. We really recommend that you start your registration now if you're not already registered in SAM. It can take several weeks. So, save yourself some stress and start early. For grants.gov, register your organization and create accounts for people authorized to submit proposals.

And speaking of starting early, don't - please don't wait until the last minute to submit your applications because grants.gov can take up to two business days to validate or reject applications. And on top of that, we do our best to screen applications that are submitted early to see if anything is missing. And we go back to applicants to ask for whatever may be needed.

And lastly, and this goes without saying, and I'm sorry to be heavy-handed, but do read the entire funding opportunity. It's a beast, I think, at 39 pages, but you just - we just really suggest you read it all so that you can verify that all requirements are complete before you hit the submit button. And Julie, I'll pass it to you.

Julie Simmons: I have to remember to unmute myself. So, thanks, Rina, for all those great tips and reminders. I'm going to - I can turn my video back on because - there I am. We were anticipating what the most frequently asked questions were. So, I have a couple, and then we'll open it up to questions from participants.

So, first, will matching funds be - matching funds or cost-share be required for this program? So, there is no match required for this funding. However, match is always encouraged. Please note that cost share is in sub-criteria - the sub-criteria within the project cost section, and it's worth two points.

And then, again - oops, I went too fast. Another question I anticipate too is, will there be another funding opportunity like this one issued next year? So, typically, we compete partnerships every three years, with additional obligation of funds in out years. But depending on the needs of our grantees and funding available, we could run additional competitions.

So, that's it for our presentation, and I'm hoping the moderator could help if there are any questions. I'm not sure how to do that. Should I - should stop sharing my screen or I can leave this slide up here for our contact information. So, moderator, go ahead.

Coordinator: We will now begin our question-and-answer session. If you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1 from your phone, unmute your line and record your name clearly when prompted. If you'd like to withdraw your question, please press Star 2. One moment as we wait for our first question.

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Julie Simmons: I do see a question in the chat. Should I go ahead and answer that? It says, I don't see the map of priorities in the 39-page funding opportunity. Where can I find that map? That's a great question. That map we just created as like a quick snapshot. I don't - I mean, we can share our presentation, but it's not precise.

I think the list in that 39 pages is actually a better description versus a point on the map. We will have this presentation posted to our - to the web - our web page, so you can go through the presentation and see that map, but it's not so precise.

Coordinator: As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1. If you'd like to withdraw your question, please press Star 2. One moment as we wait for our second question.

Julie Simmons: While we're waiting, I see another one in the chat. For this opportunity, is a historic Chicago River watershed considered eligible? Are you asking for questions like? So, historic Chicago River watershed considered eligible? Does it drain to Lake Michigan? I mean, projects in the Great Lakes Basin are eligible. And I guess that that doesn't answer your question. Feel free to contact Rina and I directly.

- Coordinator: As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1. If you'd like to withdraw your question, please press Star 2. One moment as we wait for additional questions.
- Julie Simmons: I see another question in the chat. It seems like that might be the preferred route to ask questions, which is fine. Rina and I can keep looking at that too. So, I see one from Isabel. Do you fund restoration reintroduction of species into recently restored habitats? So, Rina, I'll take this and you can chime in if you like, but we're focused on funding habitat restoration. So, not necessarily reintroduction of species.
- Rina Studds: And I see another one there about dam removal. Would dam removal be an appropriate project for this funding source? Yes, dam removal, we call them fish passage projects. You can see more information about what we're looking for related to fish passage projects in section - I think it's 4b. Fish passage projects and dam removals are appropriate, as long as they meet the priorities of the NOFO, that they're intended to benefit native fish in the Great Lakes.
- Julie Simmons: Okay. I see another question. What level of commitment for in-time services is required for the grant application? A letter of commitment or something more detailed? Rina, you want to answer that first?
- Rina Studds: You know, yes, I'm having a hard time seeing the chat questions. So I might have missed a bit of what you just said, Julie. But what exactly is looking - what are we looking for in letters of support?
- Julie Simmons: You know, I think I see two parts of the question. So, what level of commitment for in-time services is required for the grant application? Then a letter of commitment or something more detailed. So, first, I would say, a letter of - what level of commitment for in-kind services is required, is kind of the first question, and I think I'd answer that as, there's not a requirement. No match is required for this funding opportunity, although it's preferred and encouraged.
- And then what - do we need a letter of commitment or something more detailed? And Rina, I'll let you answer that.

Rina Studds: We don't have a specific requirement about that. It's flexible. However, whatever seems appropriate from the organization that's submitting it. And I'm happy to talk to you more about that.

Julie Simmons: I'll read the next question. Is design only for dam removal fundable, or does the project need to be construction-ready? Rina, you want to - I'll read the questions, you respond. We can tag team.

Rina Studds: Sure. I'm saying I'm not seeing them. Thank you, Julie. This is a competition that's open for planning projects, as well as implementation level work. So, by all means, if a project is in its early stages, it's eligible, again, as long as it meets the priorities of the competition. But again, you know, pay a lot of attention to the evaluation criteria to decide if you think your project could rank well.

Julie Simmons: I think one nice thing too about the way that this funding opportunity is structured, is that because it's a multi-year cooperative agreement, a project can be funded in phases. So, you might put in a proposal, as an example, that asks for funding in year one for the design of a dam removal.

And then with the expectation that through a partnership, you would ask for construction funding within that three-year cooperative agreement. So, projects can be phased. Another way that I want to answer this question, though, too, is design only for the dam removal fundable?

And that, to me, gets to, we do have a threshold of the minimum amount that can be requested of 300,000 over the three-year period. So, if your ask is just for the dam removal, design, it would have to meet that minimum threshold of 300,000. I'm looking to see any additional questions come in.

Coordinator: Currently, there are no questions in the queue. As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1. If you'd like to withdraw your questions, please press Star 2. One moment while we wait for additional questions.

Julie Simmons: Okay. I see a question. Is this funding associated with infrastructure build? So, short answer, no. This funding - the funding through this competition is through the Great

Lakes Restoration Initiative, with the allocation that we anticipated prior to the infrastructure bill passing.

Next question. Would waterway cleanup equipment be eligible for this grant, such as motorized trash collectors? Rina.

Rina Studds: Tossed me a hard one. Again, this is a habitat restoration competition focused on restoring habitat for native fish in the Great Lakes. So, if there's a story related to the equipment and that they could - that work could contribute to habitat restoration and it's part of a broader project, we could consider that.

But I should note that in the eligibility section or ineligibility section, we say there that a project that's focused solely on marine debris or debris removal, is not eligible. We have to really learn more about what you're proposing, and we'd be happy to talk to you more about.

Julie Simmons: Okay. Next question I'll read. Would you elaborate on why this program is titled partnership grants in quotes? Is there a requirement on partners, et cetera? Do you want to handle that? It's like, we've been doing partnership grants since I started with NOAA 11 years ago. Rina, you want to take that? And then I'm happy to add in.

Rina Studds: I think we think of all of our work as partnerships. So, this is partnership with a lower p. We really - we give out - our awards are cooperative agreements. So, we really intend to work closely with our (grantees). We have technical monitors that work closely with our grantees.

So, there's nothing specific about that other than our intention is to really work closely together. But we also encourage applicants to propose multiple projects. So, we would be entering partnerships with grantees in this case. We're intending to work together on many projects together through our award.

Julie Simmons: Yes. And Rina, I'll just add too. I mean, the partnership I think is also with NOAA and the entity too, and that, as Rina said, all of these are through cooperative agreements versus grants. So, we have expectations that our staff are involved in all aspects of projects. So, we - when we award a partnership, we assign technical monitors or

technical staff to all the projects to work with those partners. Again, we do really value these as partnerships too.

Are fish cleaning stations considered habitat restoration? I think Rina kind of answered that already, too, about, I don't think so. Alone, fish cleaning stations is not habitat restoration. Rina, would you like to add anything further to that?

Rina Studds: I would answer the same way, but again, we are very, very happy to answer any questions and talk about specific projects. Just get in touch.

Julie Simmons: Yes. I think about, you know, where we have done restoration work and we're primarily funding on the ground habitat restoration like the earth-moving stuff. Where other partners have interests that go beyond our awards, you know, we have seen other amenities added, but not through our funding necessarily.

So, you might restore a restoration site that also has access, but then then there might - you might bring match. That might be a good example of where you could bring some leverage or match to restoration work. And I see a couple thank yous. No additional questions in the chat right now.

Coordinator: Currently, there are no questions in the queue. As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1. If you'd like to withdraw your question, please press Star 2. One moment as we wait for additional questions.

Julie Simmons: Seeing a question. Are culvert replacement projects to restore fish passage allowable? Yes, absolutely allowable. Rina, I think you said the section. Where is that at in the funding opportunity?

Rina Studds: You know, I've read this so many times you'd think I'd know, but I think it's 4b. It's 4b.

Julie Simmons: Well, as - I'm still sharing my screen, right? Our contact information is up there, Julie.Simmons@noaa.gov. And then also Rina.Studds@noaa.gov. We're happy to answer any questions generally or for your project specifically.

Rina Studds: And as a reminder, the application deadline is January 12th. Sorry to bring you guys over the holidays.

Julie Simmons: Okay. I think questions are slowing down.

Coordinator: Currently, there are no questions in the audio queue.

Julie Simmons: Well, I think that's a wrap. If people want to email us and contact us if they have further questions. Okay. So, the recording will be available on our webpage.

Rina Studds: And the transcript within a couple of days. We very much look forward to hearing from you.

Julie Simmons: All right. So I think we can hang up. Thanks, everybody.

Coordinator: This concludes today's conference. All lines may disconnect at this time. Speakers, please stand by.

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