

# National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

## Purpose of National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grant

- Provides funds on a competitive basis for acquisition of interests in coastal lands or waters, and for restoration, enhancement or management of coastal wetlands ecosystems.
- All coastal States except Louisiana are eligible to apply. Proposed projects must provide for long-term conservation of coastal wetlands or waters and the hydrology, water quality, and fish and wildlife dependent thereon.

## Requirements for Proposed Projects

### Activities Allowed or Not Allowed

#### 1. Activities Allowed

- a) Acquisition of a real property interest in coastal lands or waters from willing sellers or partners (coastal wetlands ecosystems), under terms and conditions that will ensure the real property will be administered for long- term conservation.
- b) The restoration, enhancement, or management of coastal wetlands ecosystems.
- c) Planning as a minimal component of project plan development.

#### 2. Activities Not Allowed

- a) Projects that primarily benefit navigation, irrigation, flood control, or mariculture.
- b) Acquisition, restoration, enhancement, or management of lands to mitigate recent or pending habitat losses resulting from the actions of agencies, organizations, companies, or individuals.
- c) Creation of wetlands by humans where wetlands did not previously exist.
- d) Enforcement of fish and wildlife laws and regulations, except when necessary for the accomplishment of approved project purposes.
- e) Research.
- f) Planning as a primary project focus.
- g) Operations and maintenance.
- h) Acquiring and/or restoring upper portions of watersheds where benefits to the coastal wetlands ecosystem are not significant and direct.

- i) Projects providing less than 20 years of conservation benefits.

### **Initial Screening Criteria**

Proposals must include:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424);
2. Statement of Assurances of compliance with applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies.
3. A project statement that identifies and describes:
  - a. The need for the proposed project;
  - b. Discrete, quantifiable, and verifiable objectives to be accomplished during a specific time period;
  - c. Expected results or benefits in terms of coastal lands and waters, the hydrology, water quality, or fish and wildlife dependent on the wetlands;
  - d. The approach to be used in meeting the objectives, including specific procedures, schedules, key personnel, and cooperators;
  - e. A project location, including two maps: a map of the state showing the general location of the proposal and a map of the project site;
  - f. Estimated costs to attain the objectives;
  - g. A concise statement, with documentation, of how the proposal addresses each of the 13 numeric ranking criteria in 50 CFR 84.32, addressing each ranking criteria individually;
  - h. A description of the State trust fund that supports a request for a 75 percent Federal share, or a statement that eligibility has been previously approved and no change has occurred in the fund;
  - i. List of other current coastal acquisition, restoration, enhancement and management action; agencies involved; relationship to the proposed grant; and how the proposal fits into comprehensive natural resource plans for the area; and
  - j. Any public involvement or interagency coordination on coastal wetlands conservation projects that has occurred or is planned that relates to the proposal. Any matching funds from a non-State agency must be documented with a signed letter of commitment from an authorized representative of the match provider in the proposal.

### **Criteria**

Criteria for reviewing and ranking projects were established in the final rule for administering the NCWC Grant Program:

- Wetlands conservation. Will the project reverse coastal wetland loss or habitat degradation in decreasing or stable coastal wetland types?
- Maritime forests on coastal barriers. Will the proposal significantly benefit maritime forests on coastal barriers?

- Long-term conservation. Does the project ensure long-term conservation of coastal wetland functions? The project must provide at least 20 years of conservation benefits to be eligible.
- Coastal watershed management. Would the completed project help accomplish the natural resource goals and objectives of one or more formal, ongoing coastal watershed management plans or efforts?
- Conservation of threatened and endangered species. Will the project benefit any federally listed endangered or threatened species, species proposed for Federal listing, recently delisted species or designated or proposed critical habitat in coastal wetlands? Will it benefit State-listed species?
- Benefits to fish. Will the project provide, restore or enhance important fisheries habitat?
- Benefits to coastal-dependent or migratory birds. Will the project provide, restore or enhance important habitat for coastal-dependent or migratory birds?
- Prevent or reduce contamination. Will the project prevent or reduce input of contaminants to the coastal wetlands and associated coastal waters that are already contaminated?
- Catalyst for future conservation. Is the project designed to leverage other ongoing coastal wetlands conservation efforts in an area or provide additional impetus for conservation?
- Partners in conservation. Will the project receive financial support, including in-kind match, from private, local or other Federal interests?
- Federal share reduced. Does the proposal significantly reduce the Federal share by providing more than the required match amount?
- Education/outreach program or wildlife-oriented recreation. Is the project designed to increase environmental awareness and develop support for coastal wetlands conservation? Does it provide recreational opportunities that are consistent with the conservation goals of the site?
- Other factors. Do any other factors, not covered in the previous criteria, make this project or site particularly unique and valuable?

## **Project Prioritization and Funding Process**

### Eligibility

Eligible applicants include any agency or agencies designated by the Governor of a coastal State. It is usually a State natural resource or fish and wildlife agency.

Project selection is a three-step process: proposal acceptance, proposal ranking, and proposal selection.

- Proposal acceptance – The Regional Federal Assistance Offices determine proposals are complete, substantial, and contain activities that are eligible. Proposals that are not eligible are immediately returned to the State agency. Revision and resubmission of returned proposals is allowable up until the identified dead line for proposal submittals.

- Proposal ranking – Once a proposal is accepted by the Regional Federal Assistance Office, the Regional Office sends the proposal to the National Federal Assistance Office. The National Federal Assistance Office coordinates with the National Office of Fish and Wildlife Management and Habitat Restoration in compiling proposals for review. The National Office of Fish and Wildlife Management and Habitat Restoration coordinates and internal, cross-programmatic review of all accepted proposals by a National Review Panel.
- Proposal selection – The National Review Panel scores and ranks all accepted proposals and provides the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service with a list of recommended proposals. The final list of proposals awarded is determined by the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Schedule**

Proposals are due in the Service's Regional Offices or on Grants.gov in June of each year (exact date varies).

Grant awards will be announced in December or January.