

NWX-DOC CONFERENCING

Moderator: Darius Thibodeaux
March 8, 2021
12:00 pm CT

Coordinator:

Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants' lines will be on a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer session. At that time, you will need to press Star followed by the number 1, unmute your line and record your name clearly as prompted to be introduced. Today's conference is being recorded and if you have any objections, you may disconnect. I'd like now to introduce Natalie McLenaghan. Ma'am, you may begin.

Natalie McLenaghan:

Thanks (Robin) and good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Applicant Webinar for Atlantic Salmon Habitat Restoration Grants. This is Natalie McLenaghan of the NOAA Restoration Center and my colleagues Matt Bernier and Rory Saunders will be joining us later in the presentation for the question-and-answer period.

The purpose of today's information session is to outline the components of the funding opportunities and allow applicants to ask general questions about the competition. If you have highly specific questions about your proposed projects or if you're tuning in for the recording of the webinar following today's presentation, please feel free to reach out to us to set up a call.

In this presentation, I'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 the grants.gov posting under the Related Documents tab. And the roman numerals that appear on the slides correspond to the actual section headers in the funding opportunity. So, you can cross reference them when reading through the document. We will not be highlighting

Sections VII and VIII today during the webinar. So, please refer to the document itself for any questions regarding agency-level contacts and other information.

So, for this funding opportunity we anticipate that up to \$3 million will be available to support all of the selected awards over a three-year project period, with approximately \$1 million available each funding year, pending congressional appropriations. The deadline for proposal submission is Monday, April 12th by 11:59 pm Eastern and October 1st is the earliest potential start date for selected awards.

Section I of the funding opportunity outlines the program objective and priorities. The principal objective of this competition is to support the recovery of the Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment of Atlantic Salmon through multi-year partnerships. The next two slides will cover the program priorities. I want to call your attention to the four program priorities that you can find in Section I.B. The priorities are not listed in any order of importance, but we'll describe them numerically here in the order that they're outlined in the funding opportunity.

So, the first priority that projects will be evaluated on is whether the proposed activities are consistent with priority habitat restoration actions identified in the 2019 Recovery Plan and the Species in the Spotlight five-year Action Plan. Applicants should address the biological criteria for down-listing and delisting outlined in the 2019 Recovery Plan with a focus on criteria for accessible and suitable habitat and productivity.

The second priority that proposals will be evaluated on is the potential to improve fish passage and restore connectivity of spawning and rearing habitat within areas that are designed Critical Habitat. Project sites with river-specific stocks will also be prioritized. The next slide includes a map showing the distribution of Critical Habitat and river-specific stocks across the Salmon Habit Recovery Units, or SHRUs.

And here's the thumbnail version of the map that we have posted on our Program Priorities web page, included here for reference. The website address is posted at the bottom of the slide in

small print, but you can also just navigate to the map by following the web links within the funding opportunity. In short, the range of the Gulf of Maine DPS is shown in yellow and areas with river-specific stocks are in green. Critical Habitat is marked by diagonal hashed lines. So, in this thumbnail version here, it can be pretty hard to distinguish between the green areas and the yellow areas with hashed lines. So, we do encourage all applicants to cross-check their proposed project sites with the map listed on our webpage and to reach out to us with any site-specific questions.

The third priority is the potential to provide sustainable and lasting benefits for Atlantic salmon. Proposals that incorporate proven restoration techniques and focus on removal barriers will receive the highest priority. So, for example, dam removals will receive higher priority than installation of structures that require operations and maintenance, such as fish ladders.

The fourth priority is based on capacity to manage concurrent habitat restoration projects over multiple years. And the ability to manage Federal funds, maintain financial and administrative records, and fulfill reporting requirements. Applicants should demonstrate a willingness to coordinate with NOAA to conduct technically and scientifically sound restoration projects to address the program priorities.

Section II of the funding opportunities deal with funding availability. NOAA will fund multi-year awards for up to three funding years. And as I stated in the beginning, we anticipate up to \$1 million to be available to support all new awards in the first project year, with another \$2 million available over the next two fiscal years for a total of \$3 million, pending Congressional Appropriations. We will not accept proposals with a Federal funding request of less than \$300,000 or more than \$1.5 million over a 3-year project period.

Section III of the funding opportunities deals with eligibility. Eligible applicant types include institutions of higher education, non-profit and for-profit organizations, US territories, and State, Local, and Native American Tribal Governments. Applicants must propose work within one or

more SHRUs in the State of Maine, including Merrymeeting Bay, Penobscot Bay, and/or Downeast Coastal.

We've included some examples here for types of ineligible projects, but please consult the funding opportunity for more details on this. Examples include proposals that focus on marine debris prevention and removal, acquisition of real property, and legally required mitigations. One point that I want to emphasize here on the webinar is the difference between eligibility requirements versus program priorities. So, as you can see here on the slide and in the funding opportunity itself, there aren't many project types that are truly ineligible for this competition. Your proposal will still be eligible for review, even if your project types and locations don't hit all of the program priorities. But please do give us a call or send us an email if you want to talk through these distinctions.

Submission information can be found in Section IV of the funding opportunity and then for application packages, Federal forms and sections, go to the grants.gov postings. Applicants should be registered in SAM, the System for Awards Management, and also provide a valid DUNS number on the applications. DUNS is the Data Universal Number System. 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 have registered previously.

In Sub-section IV.B, you can find guidance on the expected structure for the proposals. This is an important section. So, this includes all the page limits as well as the content of the proposal components such as project narrative, budget justifications, federal forms, and all the other pieces. Please also be sure to check requirements for monitoring plans and data management plans and whether an adaptive management plan might be necessary for your proposal. We do have website links in the funding opportunity that provide examples and templates for monitoring plans and data management plans.

So, at the top of Page 17 in Section V of the funding opportunity, you can find the beginning of the evaluation criteria. There are too many sub-criteria to recite all of them here in the webinar

but briefly, the five main criteria are: Importance and Applicability, which is worth a total of 40 points out of 100. Technical and Scientific Merit for 20 points. Applicant Qualifications at 14 points. Projects Costs at 16 points. And Outreach and Education at 10 points. On the next slide I'll highlight the sub-criteria that are associated with the program priorities.

So, under Importance and Applicability, all three of the sub-criteria relate directly to the program priorities. The first is Consistency with the Recovery Plan, which is worth a total of 20 points, so that's definitely an important piece to pay attention to. And Location of Project Sites includes both Critical Habitat and river-specific stocks. And in order to score a 10 out of 10 here on this sub-criterion, all of the project sites would have to be located in Critical Habitat and have river-specific stocks present. So, there's a lot of room here for partial credit on this sub-criterion. So, please give us a call if you have any questions or concerns about your project locations. The next sub-criterion is Sustainability of the Restoration Approach, which is also worth 10 points. The barrier removals are prioritized in this category but again, there's room for partial credit for other approaches. Under Applicant Qualifications, the Management Capacity sub-criterion is worth 8 points and addresses the program priority that encompasses partnerships. So, for all of those evaluation criteria, you can see the scoring guidance embedded within each question. So, please do please pay close attention to this section of the funding opportunity while you're writing your proposal.

All right. Eligibility. Submissions will go undergo technical review, ranking, and selection based on the program priorities and evaluation criteria that I just outlined. And applicants should receive notification regarding funding by the end of June -- it could lead into July -- and the earliest anticipated start date for awards will be October 1st.

And now, here are some helpful reminders and tips for submissions. Number one, start the process of registration now if you haven't yet registered or aren't currently active. SAM registration can take up to several weeks, so save yourself some stress and start early. At grants.gov, you can register your organization and create accounts for people authorized to submit the proposal. Number two, speaking of starting early, don't wait until the last minute to

submit your applications as grants.gov can take up to two business days to validate or reject applications. Number three, please do read the entire funding opportunity and verify that all the requirements are complete before you hit the Submit button. And finally, please do refer to the websites posted within the funding opportunity for more information and examples.

All right. We're moving on to Frequently Asked Questions. The first question is, what is the minimum and maximum allowable funding request? The answer is that NOAA will not accept proposals with a federal funding request of less than \$300,000 or more than \$1.5 million over a 3-year award period. I know I've covered this question already, stating that if you submit a proposal for less than \$300,000 or more than \$1.5 million, it'll get rejected. So, I just want to really emphasize this minimum and maximum here.

All right. The next question. Will matching funds or cost-share be required for this program? While there's no statutory match requirements for this funding, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a one-to-one (federal to non-federal) match to conduct the proposed project. And please note that cost-share is a sub-criterion within the Project Costs section, worth a total of five points. [** Correction: The cost-share sub-criterion is actually worth four points, not five.]

All right. The next question. What types of projects will be supported by this funding? We'll consider proposals across a range of project phases including planning, design, implementation or a combination thereof. That evaluation criteria have been structured to incorporate a range of different project types.

All right. Next question. Will NOAA ensure geographic distribution of selected awards? The applications will be selected in rank order, unless there is justification to select out of rank order based upon standard selection factors that are outlined in the funding opportunity. The geographic distribution is one of the listed selection factors. It's very possible, but not an absolute guarantee, that all SHRUs will be represented with project locations within the final selection of the awards.

And the next question is, will there be another funding opportunity like this one issued next year? We don't anticipate issuing a new funding opportunity specific to Atlantic salmon in FY22. Next year, Atlantic salmon funding will be used to support these multi-year partnerships awarded under this FY21 competition. But please do note that other grants opportunities may be a good fit for your proposed projects, such as the Community-based Restoration Program's Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration Grants, which we do anticipate releasing in FY22.

And the final frequently asked question, how can I verify the contents of my submitted package? So, the advice on grants.gov: After submitting the application package through Workspace, applicants should download a copy of the submitted application for offline recordkeeping and to verify the contents of the submission Zip file. We recommend downloading the submitted application via the Details tab of the Workspace and verifying the contents of each file in the Zip. Applicants can download a Zip file of applications only when the submitted application is in one of the following statuses: Validated, Received by Agency, or Agency Tracking Number assigned. We do encourage folks to visit the Applicant tab and the System-to-System tab on grants.gov or to call the Helpdesk when troubleshooting. So, we're happy to answer questions about program priorities and site locations and the nitty gritty of the funding opportunity, but when it comes to grants.gov, we really recommend contacting them directly for any troubleshooting because our capability is pretty limited with grants.gov.

All right. And that concludes the presentation section of the webinar, so we would now like to open it up for any questions you might have.

Coordinator:

And thank you. At this time for questions from the phone line, you may press Star followed by the number 1. Please unmute your line and record your name clearly as prompted to be introduced. Again, with questions from the phone line, please press Star followed by the number 1. We'll be standing by for questions at this time. Again, as a reminder for questions on the phone line to please press Star followed by number 1. And I'm showing no questions from the phone lines at this time.

Natalie McLenaghan:

Thanks (Robin). Are there are any questions coming in on the webinar?

Darius Thibodeaux:

I see no questions that are coming in through the Chat of the webinar at this time.

Coordinator:

Just another reminder if there's questions from the phone line to please press Star followed by number 1. And I'm showing no questions.

Natalie McLenaghan:

Very well. While we're waiting for any potential questions to pop up, I'll just introduce my colleagues, Matt Bernier and Rory Saunders. If there's anything you wanted to add that wasn't covered, you can feel free to chime in. If not, then we can just wait and see if any questions come in.

Rory Saunders:

This is Rory. I can't think of anything, Natalie. You did a great job covering a lot of what we anticipated for questions that would come. But happy to hang on to the line if folks do come up with any questions. I'm not sure about you, Matt?

Matt Bernier:

Nope. Nothing from me. Good job, Natalie.

Coordinator:

And I'm showing no questions from the phone line. One moment. We have a question. Maranda, your line's open. You may ask your question.

Maranda:

Hi. This is Maranda and I...

Coordinator:

Hi Maranda. If you could please press Star 1 again. Okay. Maranda, your line's open.

Maranda:

Great. Thank you. Hi. This is Maranda and I wanted to ask a question about the flexibility that this grant opportunity will have with projects in the pre-implementation phase? And how that would be incorporated if the project was awarded, you know, and the mechanics of how that would work? Or any guidance on writing the proposal describing, you know, pre-implementation activities that are a little bit more variable in our subject to the next steps prior to implementation? Thank you.

Natalie McLenaghan:

Sure. Thanks Maranda. This is Natalie, and I would answer that, I did state this once in the webinar that the evaluation criteria are structured to be able to handle all ranges of projects phases. But essentially, for anything that's sort of earlier on in the planning or design or any pre-implementation work, the reviewers would take into consideration the likelihood of benefits to Atlantic salmon. So, it would be the same advice as describing construction activities, where the more details you can provide with benefits and cost breakdown and any challenges anticipated and the timeline. All of the components that are laid out in the form and content section. So, I would say that there would be no, there's no real penalty for, you know, proposing something that's not at the implementation stage. And to the contrary, we're accepting, you know, a number of proposals that would have multiple sites as well as multiple phases and just that the expectation would be to work with NOAA throughout the course of the award to evaluate where things might end up going, implementation-wise in terms of techniques, down the road. Hopefully that helps answer the questions. I'll let Matt and/or Rory chime in with anything I might have missed.

Matt Bernier:

Yes, hi Natalie and hi Maranda. This is Matt. I would just add that, you know, given that these are three-year awards, lay out a plan for your three-years, what you want to do. Make sure it's clear what activities you want to do in each year, year one, two, and three. And then for the planning, you know, often you don't know all of the projects that you might eventually want to work on. Like you want to identify all the culverts in a particular watershed or something like that. So, in that case, the planning effort is kind of watershed-based or place-based. You know, you're going to make a list of all of the barriers that are left in the watershed to do and you're going to go through some sort of prioritization effort to develop a workplan for those or something like that. Other projects you may know that you want to do, and you can get specific about those projects, and you need to do a design or funding or something like that. So, it really depends on what you want to do, but that sort of planning exercise is definitely valid under this funding opportunity.

Rory Saunders:

And this is Rory. Nothing further from me. It makes perfect sense to me. Hopefully it answered the question, Maranda.

Coordinator:

Hi Maranda. Does that finish the question?

Maranda:

Hi. Yes. I appreciate the answers. Thank you.

Coordinator:

Thank you. If there's any further questions, it is Star followed by 1. And I'm seeing no questions.

Darius Thibodeaux:

There are also no questions on the webinar at this time.

Coordinator:

And I'm seeing no questions from the audio, I'll turn it back over to Natalie.

Natalie McLenaghan:

Thanks (Robin). So, my contact information is posted here on the last slide. My email, my phone number. So, if you happen to think of any questions after the webinar or if you want to also reach out to Matt Bernier or Rory or other contacts, feel free to do that. And I just want to say, thanks to everyone for listening today.

Coordinator:

And thank you. This does conclude today's audio portion of the call. You may disconnect your lines and thank you for your participation.

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