

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) National Panel Scoring Guidance for the 2013 Fiscal Year

Purpose

The purpose of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) National Review Panel is to recommend the mix of projects and funding recommendations that will represent the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture in the LWCF Program, consistent with Forest Service and USDA public policy objectives.

National Review Panel Responsibilities

- Review the proposed land acquisitions submitted by the Regions;
- Develop a national land acquisition proposal considering regional rankings;
- Make funding recommendations for the land acquisition proposal; and
- Employ the national criteria listed below.

National Panel Scoring Criteria

Total Points=60 (plus 1.5 possible “extra” points)

- There are 7 total criteria., 6 worth 10 points each, and two worth 5 points. The National panel allocates points for 5 criteria. The other 2 criteria are derived from the Regional priority project list.

Criteria used by national panel.

1.) National Importance. The degree to which the acquisition supports Land and Water Conservation Fund purposes—specifically to improve and maintain outdoor recreation access and opportunities; protection of threatened and endangered species habitat; protection of water resources. **1-10 points**

- More points should be awarded to acquisitions that further the purposes of LWCF Act through key federal legislation such as the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, National Recreation Area authorities, National Trails System Act, or acquisitions that protect interstate/international resources (e.g., migratory species or trail and waterways that cross state or international boundaries).

2.) Landscape Level Impact. Ability for the acquisition to enhance or consolidate already protected lands; provide key linkages to or within National Forest System lands, parcels adjacent to lands administered by other Federal, State, local, Tribal or non-governmental agencies. This category can also articulate unique opportunities the acquisition will provide. **1-10 points**

- Points should be awarded based on the degree to which an acquisition helps contribute to a larger conservation impact, whether through consolidation or key linkages, or unique opportunities.

3.) Public and Partner Support. This criterion evaluates a project based on the degree and coordination of support for an acquisition. Support can come from members of Congress, State and local government, Tribes, NGOs, hunting and fishing interests, business interests, and local community groups. **1-10 points**

- Points should be awarded based on type and degree of support including funding, planning, political, volunteers, management, stewardship, and outreach.

4.) Urgency to Forest and Community. This criterion is defined as the compelling need for the acquisition. The need may arise from the threats to the parcel such as development, contamination, loss of access, invasive species; threat to the area surrounding the parcel, or even the fact that the project is only partially completed and is straining public support and/or funding in order to be completed. Ownership by a third party conservation group does not diminish urgency if the acquisition was conducted in order to convey it into Federal ownership. **1-5 points**

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- Points should be awarded based on urgency of the acquisition to the interests of the Forest and the Community should the parcel not be acquired, or developed to a non-forest use, in the next 1-2 years.

5.) Annual Operation and Maintenance improvements, savings or costs. How does the acquisition improve the ability of the acquiring unit to perform its work and deliver benefits to the public with greater efficiency and lower costs? Or does the acquisition incur costs? Is the cost outweighed by a longer term benefit?

- Points should be awarded based on how the acquisition makes a net positive contribution to operation and maintenance measured in terms of verifiable cost savings or other quantifiable efficiencies. **1-5 points**

These two categories will not be scored by the National Panel. They are derived from the Regional Ranking

6.) Regional Criteria Ranking Score: The highest ranking project based on the SLARS criteria receives 10 points, second highest receives 9 points. etc. This criterion is meant to capture the importance of the Regional rank. **1-10 points**

7.) Regional Priority Score: Points will be assigned based on Regional priority which is independent of the other SLARS criteria. The highest priority for the Region, receives 10 points, the second priority project receives 9 points etc. This criterion is meant to amplify the importance of the Regional priorities. **1-10 points**

Extra Points

Project Readiness. Readiness means “ability to obligate funds”. WO will automatically apply an extra half (.5) extra point to the average score if the responsible unit will be able to obligate funds in the same fiscal year as appropriated. The WO will solicit information about readiness from the Regions in advance of the National Panel. Ability to obligate funds will be evaluated on a case by case basis on the following three factors. The extra half point can be awarded for any one of the three factors below. The half point can only be awarded once.

- Demonstrated capacity to obligate funds to a phased project or ongoing acquisition over 2 or more fiscal years.
- *Demonstrated capacity means funds are obligated in the same fiscal year as appropriated.
- Completion of the following due diligence: survey, appraisal and environmental assessment.
- Ownership or purchase option held by a third party conservation partner **and** completion of survey, appraisal and environmental assessment due diligence items.

Project Completion. In order to try to ensure that phased projects reach completion, the WO will add an extra point (1) to the final phase of an acquisition.

Project Definitions:

Phased acquisition: A single property, can be comprised of multiple parcels under single ownership, that was appraised as a whole but is functionally divided into smaller parts in order to be acquired over more than one year due to anticipated limited funding.

On-going project acquisitions: Multiple discreet tracts, often under different ownerships, in the same landscape that are grouped under a general heading that is often repeated for several years. Tracts are often prioritized for acquisition.

Single acquisition: A single property that can be acquired in one conveyance

Other considerations

The panel will use the following information to inform decisions about project funding.

- **Unobligated Balances.** Unspent funds from prior years’ appropriations. Projects with unobligated balances 2 years old or older.
- **Budget Considerations:** The Panel’s recommendations will take account of anticipated appropriation levels.