LWCF Land Acquisition projects are evaluated according to a set of criteria derived from USDA Departmental and Forest Service goals and objectives, as well as the enabling legislation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Endangered Species Act. Proposals are evaluated against the National Criteria in a two-stage process which is competitive and merit based. Land purchase proposals are first evaluated at the regional level, then regions send top ranked projects to the Washington Office (WO) for review by a national panel comprised of an inter-disciplinary team of 8-10 subject matter experts from realty and other staffs with expertise in the criteria. The panelists review and score the proposals, then the scores are averaged to determine a final score. The national panel finalizes a draft prioritized list of land purchase projects to recommend for funding. This project list is reviewed by Agency leadership and then forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget through the Department of Agriculture.

The criteria used to evaluate proposed land purchase projects funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations are derived from the following laws and Departmental and Agency Goals:

- Section 7 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1966, as amended;
- Section 5 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended;
- The Secretary of Agriculture’s 7 Strategic Goals for OneUSDA;
- The Forest Service Chief’s Five Priorities; and
- Forest Service Strategic Goals as stated in the Forest Service’s Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

United States Department of Agriculture 7 Strategic Goals for OneUSDA:

**STRATEGIC GOAL #1**: Ensure USDA programs are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, and with Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #2**: Maximize the ability of American agricultural producers to prosper by feeding and clothing the world.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #3**: Promote American agricultural products and exports.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #4**: Facilitate rural prosperity and economic development.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #5**: Strengthen the stewardship of private lands through technology and research.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #6**: Foster productive and sustainable use of our National Forest System lands.
STRATEGIC GOAL #7: Provide all Americans access to a safe, nutritious, and secure food supply.

Forest Service Chief’s Five Priorities for Our Work

These five national priorities do three things: they give urgency and focus to critical needs; help foster the work environment we want for our employees; and set expectations for the manner in which we accomplish our work with citizens, partners, volunteers, and each other.

1. Uplifting and empowering our employees through a respectful, safe working environment.

2. Being good neighbors and providing excellent customer service.

3. Promoting shared stewardship by increasing partnerships and volunteerism.

4. Improving the condition of forests and grasslands.

5. Enhancing recreation opportunities, improving access, and sustaining infrastructure.

Forest Service Strategic Goals and Core Values

STRATEGIC GOAL: Sustain Our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands
- Foster resilient ecosystems
- Mitigate wildfire risk
- Conserve open space

STRATEGIC GOAL: Deliver Benefits to the Public
- Provide abundant clean water
- Strengthen communities
- Connect people to the outdoors

CORE VALUES: Excel as a High-Performing Agency
- Support effective, efficient and transparent business practices
- Leverage strengths and partnerships

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Purposes

Title 1, Section 7 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act provides authority for the “acquisition of land, waters, or interests in land or waters” and directs the National Forest System (NFS) to use LWCF funds to acquire “Inholdings within (a) wilderness areas of the NFS, and (b) other areas of national forests as the boundaries of those forests exist on the effective
date of this Act, or purchase units…, all of which other areas are primarily of value for outdoor
recreation purposes.”

**Endangered Species Act invocation of LWCF**

Section 5(a) and (b) of the Endangered Species Act, state: (b) “Funds made available pursuant to
the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended, may be used for the purpose of
acquiring lands, waters, or interests therein” to (a) “establish and implement a program to
conserve fish, wildlife and plants, including those which are listed as endangered species or
threatened species pursuant to section 4 of this Act.”

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**Scoring Criteria, Points, Weighting and Other Required Information**

There are 6 scored criteria worth 110 points total, and 1 unscored section
Total possible score: 113 points.

1. Recreation and Recreational Access: 25 total possible points
2. Watershed Protection/Climate Resilience: 15 total possible points
3. Threatened and Endangered Species: 15 total possible points
4. Tract Location: 15 total possible points
5. Connecting Communities/Partner Support: 15 total possible points
6. Regional Ranking: 25 total possible points
7. Operation and Maintenance (not scored)
   - The Regional Ranking criterion is determined at the regional evaluation
   - 3 “extra” points possible added to the national panel average score to complete “final
     phases”
   - Operation and Maintenance Section is required but not scored

**Proposals support OneUSDA and Forest Service goals**

For each criterion that requires a written narrative, #s 1, 2, 5 and 6, information should include
how the tract(s) proposed for acquisition reflect OneUSDA strategic goals, the Forest Service
Chief’s Priorities, and the Forest Service Strategic Plan. Of particular importance for the 2020
fiscal year is demonstrating that land acquisition can support local economies, contribute to
effective and efficient stewardship of national forests, support shared stewardship through
partnerships, and help deliver excellent customer service. Criteria #s 3 and 4 have forced
rankings and do not require a narrative in their proposal sections to provide the required
information. However, we do recommend a discussion of how these criteria support the
aforementioned goals, in the “Additional Information” section.
1.) 25 Total Possible Points: Recreation and Recreational Access
This criterion evaluates the degree to which the acquisition creates or enhances opportunities for recreation, and access to recreation on National Forests and Grasslands. More points will be awarded to acquisitions that provide significantly new or improved recreational opportunities in support of Administration and Forest Service goals and objectives. Please describe the recreational opportunities provided, who the users will be and the degree of added capacity for increased visitor use.

2.) 15 Total Possible Points: Watershed Protection/Climate Resilience

Watershed Protection
The Forest Service’s Watershed Condition Framework provides a nationally consistent, science-based approach to evaluate watershed conditions and apply integrated improvement and restoration techniques based on local characteristics. This criterion can be quantified in terms of degree of importance a specific tract will contribute to larger stated watershed protection and restoration goals. Acquisitions can protect high functioning watersheds, or, provide needed opportunities to restore impaired watersheds. Support for acquisitions should be described in terms of how a particular tract fits in with Forest Service watershed management goals once the tract is acquired, and not the condition of the parcel while in private, State or other ownership.

- Award points based on the degree to which acquisitions contribute to watershed improvement, protection or restoration. More points could be given to parcels complementing or integrated with Agency watershed restoration projects such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP).

Climate Resilience
Connecting and restoring watersheds, and protecting diverse habitats supports climate resilience. Provide other data or information that supports this acquisition as one that is important to meet Forest Service goals with respect to building resilient ecosystems that can more readily adapt and mitigate conditions brought on by climate change.

More points will be awarded to tracts that support Administration and Forest Service objectives regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation, ecological restoration and resiliency.
3.) 15 Total Possible Points: Threatened and Endangered Species and Habitat (Forced Ranking)

Land acquisition provides an opportunity to protect or restore habitats for fish, wildlife and plants at risk. Proposals are scored based on the tract or tracts capacity to protect or restore habitats for endangered, threatened, or candidate species as classified under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or designated Forest Service sensitive or species of conservation concern in forest plans. A score is assigned according to the level of protection afforded to a species on a specific tract. If there are more than one tract proposed, the score will be assigned according to the tract with the lowest level of species designation or protection represented. This is to prevent one tract with high T&E values from artificially elevating tracts with no T&E protection. With this scoring mechanism, the incentive is to nominate tracts with the highest possible T&E values. However, points may be awarded to a tract that itself has no species of special designation but supports vital ecosystem function for a species with special designation in proximity.

Recognizing the importance of landscape level context to protect species at risk, ecosystem function includes things like ensuring the health of upstream waters or proximate waters, protecting adjacent and proximate tracts whereby residential or commercial development could disrupt growth, mating, nesting, feeding, migration or dispersal of the species. An explanation of the importance of this kind of tract should be included in the “Additional Information” section.

Forced Ranking:

- Threatened or endangered species: 15 points
- Candidate species, Forest Service sensitive or species of conservation concern: 10 points
- No special species designation on the tract itself but the tract supports a direct vital ecosystem function for a designated species: 5 points
- No special species designation: 0 points

Example:
1.) Green Acres Tract protects Endangered Kirtland’s Warbler = 15 points
2.) Red Acres Tract protects the Species of Conservation Concern Northern Short-Tailed Shrew=10 points
3.) Blue Acres contains no species with special designation=0 points
4.) Purple Acres contains no species with special designation but protects some ecosystem function vital to the support of the Kirtland’s Warbler on adjacent Green Acres Tract=5 points

If Green Acres tract is submitted alone the points awarded in this criterion are 15.
If Green Acres tract and Red Acres tract are submitted together the points awarded are 10.
If Green, Red and Blue Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 0.
If Green, Red, Blue and Purple Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 0.
If Purple Acres tract is submitted alone the points are 5.
4.) **15 Total Possible Points: Proposal Tract Location (forced ranking)**

This criterion supports the specific language in the LWCF authority for the Forest Service that directs the Agency to acquire lands with higher levels of protection like congressionally designated areas (CDA) such as wilderness. It also recognizes that forest plans designate areas for specific uses or needs such as an inventoried roadless areas, proposed wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness study Areas. Please ask the WO if there are any questions about which designations are eligible. Points are awarded by a forced ranking.

**Forced ranking:**

**15 points: Inside Congressionally or Presidentially Designated Area.** Acquisitions within a congressionally or Presidentially designated area such as wilderness, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic areas, national recreation areas, national historic and scenic trail corridors, national monuments or other special management or emphasis areas designated by Congress or the President of the United States.

**10 points: Area with special designation by NFS Plan.** Acquisitions that are within an inventoried roadless area, wildlife management area, proposed wilderness, wilderness study area, or wild and scenic river corridor, research natural areas or other special designation per NFS planning goals within National Forest or Grassland boundaries. If you are not sure if a tract is in or out of a NFS designation please contact Nancy Parachini at 202-570-9009.

**5 points: Inside NFS boundaries.** Proposed acquisitions that are within NFS boundaries but not included in a special designation.

**5 points: Tracts have no special designation but are vital to the integrity of an area with a special designation.** Tract can be in or out of NFS boundary. The tract warrants acquisition in order to protect some vital function or feature of an adjacent tract with a special designation. An explanation of the importance of the tract should be included in the “Additional Information” section. An example would be acquisition of a tract to prevent incompatible development directly adjacent to a wilderness.

**0 Points.** Outside NFS boundaries, excludes national historic and scenic trails

The score assigned will be based on the location of the tract proposed. If there are more than one tract proposed, the score for the criterion will be assigned according to the **lowest** scoring tract. This is to prevent one tract that occurs within a congressionally or presidentially designated area from artificially elevating tracts with no special designation. With this scoring mechanism, the incentive is to nominate the highest priority tracts with respect to Congressional and Presidential direction, forest planning and resource management.
Example:
1.) Green Acres Tract occurs in a CDA or national monument = 15 points
2.) Red Acres Tract occurs in wilderness study area or inventoried roadless area=10 points
3.) Blue Acres occurs on NFS lands with no special designation=5 points
4.) White Acres occurs outside of NFS boundaries = 0 points
5.) Purple Acres occurs adjacent to a tract with a special designation and its protection is vital to the integrity of the benefits conferred by the specially designated tract =5 points

If Green Acres tract is submitted alone the points awarded in this criterion are 15.
If Green Acres tract and Red Acres tract are submitted together the points awarded are 10.
If Green, Red and Blue Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 5
If Green, Red, Blue and Purple Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 5

5.) **15 Points: Connecting Communities/Partner Support**

This criterion evaluates a project based on the degree of public support for the acquisition. The focus is on partnerships and community support and involvement. Explain how the acquisition helps the Forest Service work in partnership with the local community and the benefits provided. Explain who the partners and supporters are and why this support is important.

If the proposal is forwarded to the National Panel, regions are strongly encouraged to obtain and submit letters of support to supplement the nomination, particularly support from locally elected officials, members of Congress, adjoining landowners and community members. **Letters from local groups and elected officials should be current. Provide updated copies of the support letters with the proposal, as they will not be accepted after the submission deadline.**

- More points will be awarded to projects that clearly demonstrate that the acquisition provides an economic benefit for the local community, or helps deliver a needed service to the community.
6.) 25 Points: Regional Ranking

**Regional Ranking:** This criterion is scored at the regional evaluation. Regional Offices can apply 25 points based on regional factors and goals. The national panel will not rescore this criterion. It will import the regional Score into the national evaluation. Regions may choose to award points based on specific regional goals and circumstances. For example, tracts that may require more points could be those with important cultural features, or are extremely threatened, or for whatever reason may be important and warrant more points to be competitive. Explain the rationale for how regional points were awarded.

The points may be allocated in any configuration but **in total** cannot exceed 25 points. Example point allocations:

- **Project 1:** 20 points
- **Project 2:** 5
- **Project 3:** 0
- **Project 4:** 0
- **Project 5:** 0

7.) Operation and Maintenance-not scored

This criterion is not scored but the information is important and required by Congress. Explain how the acquisition improves the ability of the acquiring unit to perform its work and deliver benefits to the public with greater efficiency and lower costs. If the acquisition incurs costs, explain how the cost is outweighed by a longer term benefit. Please try to describe how the acquisition makes a net positive contribution to operation and maintenance measured in terms of verifiable cost savings or other quantifiable efficiencies.

**Additional Information and Attachments**

**Additional Information Page**
Page four of the fact sheet can be used to include any additional information for any of the criteria.

**Photos and other attachments**
One page of photos is allowed. Maps are an allowed attachment.

**Maps**
Maps must be submitted in the legislative map standard outlined in interim directive 1510-2011-1. Proposals may include as many maps as necessary, within reason. Please try to provide a “vicinity map” that shows where the tract(s) are located in a landscape context relative to NFS boundaries, roads, cities, and other protected lands. Individual maps for each tract should be
included. Please use green to represent NFS lands and red to indicate tracts proposed for acquisition. Map features need to correspond to locations, features and other elements described in the narrative. For instance, if the narrative describes a trail, be sure to show the trail on the map.

Support Letters
Current letters from elected officials, local entities, and conservation partners can demonstrate the level of support for the federal acquisition.

National Panel Considerations
Extra Points for Project Completion. In order to try to ensure that partially completed projects reach completion, a project before the National Panel review will receive an extra three points to the average score of a project ONLY if the request is for the final phase or tract(s) and is $3.0 million or less. 3 points

Unobligated Balances and Readiness
The panel will use the following information to inform decisions about project funding.

- **Unobligated Balances.** Unspent funds from prior appropriations could influence ranking especially if the project has unobligated balances of two (2) years old or older. Also, the Region’s ability to obligate funds awarded in prior fiscal years can be considered.

- **Readiness.** Per Congressional direction the following due diligence must be addressed in the fact sheet:
  1.) Whether or not the landowner has signed an option;
  2.) Whether or not an appraisal is finished, is the proposed value is based on an approved appraisal to Federal standards, or a market analysis.

- **Budget Considerations:** The Panel’s recommendations will take account of anticipated appropriation levels.

Project Definitions:
- **Phased acquisition:** One large tract with one owner, divided into two or more smaller parts (“phases”) in order to be acquired over more than one year.
- **On-going project acquisitions:** Multiple discrete tracts, often under different ownerships, in the same landscape that are grouped under a general heading that is often repeated for several years. Tracts that make up the project are often prioritized for acquisition until the project is complete.
- **Single acquisition:** A single acquisition that can be completed in one purchase.