

# FOREST LEGACY

## NATIONAL PROJECT SCORING GUIDANCE

### **Introduction:**

This guidance outlines the approach to be used to score individual Forest Legacy projects for the national project ranking process and defines the core national criteria, project readiness and other evaluation considerations used in this process. Its objectives are to:

- Provide a clear and defensible ranking process that can be articulated easily to program participants and partners; and
- Ensure fair, equitable and thorough review of all projects by the National Panel

### **National Project Selection:**

Regional Role:

- Work with States to produce highly competitive FLP projects
- Work with States to produce projects that are “Ready”
- Work with States to assure that all pertinent project information is in FLIS
- Learn and understand project details
- Be assured that projects meet State AON objectives
- Confirm that projects have been reviewed and evaluated by the State Forest Stewardship Committee
- Be assured that projects comply with FLP Implementation Guidelines
- Work with States to advance top projects to the national selection process

National Role:

- Work with regions to produce highly competitive FLP submissions
- Apply national “Importance” core criteria and score projects on that criteria
- Apply national “Threatened” core criteria and score projects on that criteria
- Apply national “Strategic” core criteria and score projects on that criteria
- Apply “Readiness” criteria and organize projects on that criteria
- Ensure that project selections meet congressional direction
- Ensure that project selections meet national program goals
- Develop a National List of ranked projects

### **National Core Criteria:**

**Importance** – The public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property.

- Outstanding/Exceptional value – 30 points – A national scale community of interest;
- Very Good – 20 points – A regional scale community of interest (multi-State or within State);
- Medium / Average – 10 points – A local scale community of interest; or
- Poor – 0 points – No clear community of interest

This criterion reflects the ecological assets and the economic and social values conserved by the project and the scale of people's interest in its protection. It is meant to assess the attributes to be conserved and the size of the community receiving those benefits.

Examples of high quality attributes include:

Scenic – In the viewshed of a designated scenic area

Fish and wildlife habitat – Important fish or wildlife habitat exists.

Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat – Site has known habitat for rare, threatened or endangered plants and animals or includes unique forest types or communities

Water supply protection – Contiguous riparian area, Sensitive watershed lands, lakefront, buffer to public drinking water supply

Forestry – Integral in supporting the local resource-based economy for a community or region and the tract is a foundation to maintain the economic viability of forestry for the community or region

Recreation – The property is a public access location or acts as a gateway to increased public access

Cultural – known culturally and historically significant values are located on site

For Example:

An Outstanding/Exceptional project –

- A 5-acre forest area that is the stop-off point of the Monarch Butterfly migration. This project area may be small in size, but it is critical for a species and is of interest to many people.
- A large forest that will protect the States largest and most ecologically significant forest wetland ecosystem and the nation's second largest delta recognized as a National Natural Landmark. This large property plays a part in the conservation of a nationally significant asset.

A Very Good project -

- An extensive contiguous forest that is part of a conservation strategy outside a large metropolitan area. The project contains extensive habitat and provides watershed protection to a municipal water supply. This large project has an impact on people in a State or perhaps multiple States.
- A project that protects a corridor along a major river protecting the flood plain, clusters of unique forest types and associated plant communities, and is being used for environmental education as well as experimental and commercial forestry. It has a history of regional public access and will continue that use.

A Medium/Average project -

- A project that has a series of parcels that will protect forest in an area experiencing second home development. The parcels add to an existing or connect existing protected lands together.
- A forested parcel that has a gorge, recreational trails in place, engages in active forestry operations and is threatened by development into house lots.

A Poor project –

- An isolated parcel with no protected lands in the vicinity.

- There are no significant forest resources on the tract.

**Threatened** - Conversion to non-forest uses is possible to imminent and will result in a loss of forest values and public benefits.

- Imminent – 30 points
- Likely – 20 points
- Possible – 10 points
- Unlikely any time soon (within 10 years) – 0 points

This criterion reflects an estimate of the urgency of the threat of conversion. It is meant to reflect the likelihood of a conversion that would result in the loss or diminution of the assets of a larger forest area.

**Strategic** - The project fits within a larger conservation plan, strategy, or initiative and enhances previous conservation investments.

- A key property in regional, bi state or landscape conservation effort – 30 points
- A key property in a state plan or focused protection strategy - 20 points
- Will lead to additional conservation action in its region or area – 10 points
- It is an isolated tract with no known connection at this time – 0 points

This criterion reflects the project’s relevance or relationship to conservation efforts on a broader perspective.

*The points assigned to the criterion are minimums at those levels. Point level assignments can be made between those lines of demarcation, but must be accompanied with comments justifying the variation. For example, a “Threatened” score between Likely and Imminent can be given (say 25 points), but should be accompanied with information in the comment box to justify it.*

### **Additional Criteria**

#### **Project Readiness**

A graduated scale indicating the level of commitment and likelihood a project will be completed in a predictable timeline.

- Level 1 – 4 items completed
- Level 2 – 3 items completed
- Level 3 – 2 items completed
- Level 4 – 1 item completed
- Level 5 – 0 items completed

Items to be completed include:

- Completed appraisal
- Final easement or fee acquisition conditions
- Cost Share commitment
- Signed option or purchase and sales agreement
- Held by a third party at the request of the State

Project readiness is a criterion that reflects the degree of due diligence applied and the certainty of a successful FLP project. It is intended to be a guide to project selection decisions. The readiness level is determined by the cumulative progression of items completed.

EXAMPLE TABLE

Project Name/State	Importance (0-30 pts.)	Threatened (0-30 pts.)	Strategic (0-30 pts.)	Readiness (Level 1-5)	Score	Comments

**Other considerations:**

- Where did the State rank the project?
- What has been the performance of the State program? What is its current caseload (capacity)?
- How does the project enhance federal investment?
- What is the cost share of the project? Does it provide good leverage? When will it be made toward the project?

The scored projects will be assembled into a matrix.

	<b>Project Quality *</b>			
	90 - 65 pts	64 – 40 pts	39 – 20 pts	19 – 0 pts
<b>Project Readiness</b>				
Level 1	1. Project Title 2. Project Title 3. Project Title	1. Project Title 2. Project Title 3. Project Title		
Level 2	1. Project Title 2. Project Title 3. Project Title	1. Project Title 2. Project Title 3. Project Title		
Level 3				
Level 4				
Level 5				

\* *Quality (90 pt max) = Importance + Threatened + Strategic scores*

This matrix will serve as the basis for the decision making of the National Panel. The Panel will select projects that have the highest level of Quality and use Readiness as a factor to guide decisions. The additional considerations will be applied to all projects and will be particularly helpful in selecting projects around the cutoff line of available funding.

The output from this process will be a ranked and prioritized list of FLP projects to be submitted with the President’s Budget.