

Priority List of Projects Eligible for Funding in FY 2008 under the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program

The President's Budget for FY 2008 requested \$15 million for the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) for competitively-selected land conservation projects. This report presents the prioritized list of competitively-selected projects under the CELCP that are considered ready and eligible for funding in FY 2008. NOAA would use this list as a guide in selecting projects for funding within the amounts appropriated. This report also describes NOAA's process and criteria used to develop the list.

NOAA's Implementation of the CELCP

In 2002, the Commerce, Justice, State and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2002 directed the Secretary to establish the CELCP for the purpose of protecting important coastal and estuarine areas that have significant conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, or aesthetic values, or that are threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses. The CELCP was also to give priority to lands which can be effectively managed and protected and that have significant ecological value. In 2003, NOAA published guidelines for the program delineating the criteria for grant awards and a process to distribute funds through a competitive process. The guidelines established a three-stage process for implementation of a competitive program, including: 1) a state planning process that identifies conservation needs and priorities within the state; 2) a process to identify and prioritize projects at the state level; and 3) a national competitive process to rank state-nominated projects and select final projects for funding.

State CELCP planning –

Each state that chooses to participate in the CELCP must first develop a coastal and estuarine land conservation plan that identifies the state's priorities for conservation through the program. These plans are intended to identify the ecological, conservation, recreational, historical or aesthetic values that are a priority for protection using CELCP funds, as well as the threats to those values. In developing its CELCP plan, each state may draw on existing land or watershed conservation plans or ecological assessments, if applicable to the state's coastal and estuarine priorities. Nearly all coastal states are in the process of developing CELCP plans. To date, approximately 20 states have submitted draft or final plans for review by NOAA. Because many of these state plans are currently under review, NOAA waived this requirement for the FY 2008 competitive process. Instead, states that had submitted plans to NOAA for review by the time of the competition were eligible to receive additional credit for projects that addressed priorities identified in a state's draft plan.

State Application –

Based on notification from NOAA that competitive funds are available, a state's lead agency may submit projects for funding to NOAA, provided that the state has developed and received approval of a Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan. The state's lead agency may solicit projects from other qualified state or local agencies. Only public agencies specifically authorized to own and manage lands for conservation purposes may apply for

funding or hold title to land or conservation easements under this program, though they may partner with other agencies or nongovernmental organizations. The lead agency is responsible for reviewing and prioritizing projects for submission to NOAA's competitive review process.

National Selection –

Merit reviewers evaluate and score each project received from the states for funding. The scores from individual reviewers are combined to determine each project's average score, which is used to establish a ranked list of projects. Merit reviewers consist of representatives from NOAA, the coastal management community, National Estuarine Research Reserve community, other federal land conservation programs, and the non-governmental sector. Projects are evaluated according to the degree to which they meet national criteria set forth in the guidelines. Program staff provide recommendations to the selecting official (the Assistant Administrator of NOAA's National Ocean Service) as to whether other selection factors described in the funding notice should apply, such as in the case of a tied score. The guidelines allow the selecting official to select from a contingency list in the event that any projects fall through or are completed below the planned cost.

Implementation of FY 2002-2006 projects

The CELCP guidelines have been used to administer the program to ensure that the lands or conservation easements acquired through CELCP projects provide long-term protection, serve a public benefit, and will be managed in a manner that protects the important ecological, conservation, recreational, historical and aesthetic values for which they were acquired. Since 2002, NOAA has worked with state and local governments to administer more than 135 CELCP grants supporting nearly 120 projects. These projects have been located in 25 out of the 34 eligible coastal states. CELCP funds have supported the protection of more than 22,000 acres through projects that have been reported complete.

Development of the National Competitive Selection Process

Based on Congressional direction, in FY 2006, NOAA conducted the first national competitive process for the program to develop a list of projects that were vetted and considered ready and eligible for funding in FY 2007. This list has been used to select projects for FY 2007 funding.

Based on experience with the first competitive process, as well as feedback received from states and merit reviewers, NOAA substantially revised the full funding announcement for FY 2008 to summarize and clarify eligibility criteria from the program guidelines in an effort to reduce technical errors. NOAA also provided more detailed guidance for applicants to address ranking factors within project descriptions and budget narratives.

Developing the FY 2008 Priority List:

In September 2006, NOAA published in the Federal Register a notice of funding opportunity to solicit projects that are ready and eligible for funding in FY 2008. A full Federal Funding Opportunity notice, with application materials, was also posted through Grants.gov and

on the CELCP website. The funding notice solicited up to three projects from each eligible coastal state for projects under the CELCP that address priorities identified in a state's CELCP plan, or if a plan has not yet been completed, the state's federally-approved coastal management program. NOAA received 55 proposals by the deadline of 11:59 p.m. EST, October 27, 2006.

The notice of funding opportunity recognized that this solicitation would result in a prioritized list of projects considered ready and eligible for funding. The notice also recognized that funding for projects on the list is contingent upon the availability of fiscal year 2008 Federal appropriations.

Each project was reviewed by NOAA staff for eligibility and completeness, and then evaluated by three merit reviewers according to evaluation criteria described in the full funding opportunity notice. The following criteria were used to evaluate projects: importance and/or relevance of proposed project to the program goals, technical merit, overall qualifications of applicants, and project costs.

Program purpose: To evaluate a project's importance or relevance to program goals, merit reviewers evaluated the ecological, conservation, recreational, aesthetic, historical/cultural value of the proposed project as well as the public benefits expected to be gained from the long-term protection and management of the property. Priority was given to projects that protect lands with significant ecological value, and advance the priorities within a state's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan or the state's coastal management program approved under the CZMA.

Technical merit: Technical merit was evaluated in terms of whether: a project could be effectively managed and protected over the long-term to conserve or restore its ecological, conservation, recreation, aesthetic, or historical/cultural values; involved areas threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses, and could be executed within the performance period.

Qualifications of applicants: Projects were evaluated to determine whether an applicant has the proven capacity (such as staffing, resources, authority and expertise) and experience to execute the land transaction consistent with CELCP guidelines and, directly or through partnerships, to manage property for long-term conservation of its ecological, conservation, recreation, aesthetic, or historical/cultural values, consistent with CELCP guidelines.

Project costs: The proposed budget for each project was evaluated to determine whether: land acquisition costs are reasonable and based on an independent appraisal or other assessment of fair market value; the source of the required non-Federal matching share of funds is consistent with CELCP guidelines and is likely to be available within the performance period; and direct and indirect costs for implementation of the project, if requested, are reasonable and consistent with CELCP guidelines.

Program officers averaged the scores of the three reviewers, ranked the list in priority order based on the average score. Applications were considered for funding in rank order. Several projects received tie scores and therefore are presented with the same ranking number.

In order to select among projects that received tie scores, additional consideration may be given to the following selection factors as listed in the full funding announcement to determine whether any projects would be justified for selection out of rank order: the availability of funds; geographic distribution of projects and/or funds; and, program priorities and policy factors as set forth in section 1A and 1B of the full funding notice. Partial funding was recommended for several of these projects.

The following list identifies, in ranked order, the projects considered to be ready and eligible for funding in FY 2008. For the remaining projects, NOAA was either not able to determine whether the project was ready or eligible based on information presented in the application or the projects were considered to be not ready or eligible based on policy factors set forth in the funding notice and published evaluation criteria, including such factors as eligibility of proposed costs (Federal or non-Federal), feasibility of completing the project within the performance period, or proposed long-term uses of the site(s).

For any projects funded through FY 2008 appropriations, applicants would need to submit additional documentation either at the time of final grant application, or as a condition of a grant award. Documentation includes: an appraisal that meets Federal appraisal standards to support the requested funding amount, evidence of title, and survey plat map. Documentation is needed for each property to be acquired or counted toward the non-Federal cost share. These documents will be used to substantiate cost estimates contained in project proposals and ensure the clear transfer of title or proper recordation of conservation easements to the grant recipient. These requirements are described in section 4.4 of the CELCP program guidelines.

If funding is appropriated for CELCP in FY 2008, NOAA would expect to issue grants between May and October 2008. NOAA recognizes that some projects may cease to become viable before or after a grant is awarded because of the long lead-time between the date of application (October 2006) and the issuance of a grant following FY 2008 appropriations. NOAA would need to check the status of projects prior to making a final selection for funding as appropriated.

NOAA also recognizes that projects selected for funding may fall through prior to completion, even after a grant award has been made. To address this possibility, NOAA will maintain a contingency list of projects, comprised of those that were not able to be funded with available appropriations. NOAA would then select replacement projects in the event that a funded project cannot be completed.

**FY 2008 Prioritized List for the
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program**

Rank	State	Project Name	Eligible Funding #
1	NH	Isinglass River Project	\$1,300,000
2	NC	Chowan Swamp Acquisition *	\$3,000,000
3	CA	Jenner Headlands	\$3,000,000
4	AK	Agulowak River and Salmon Habitat Conservation, Wood-Tikchik State Park, AK ^	\$1,480,000
5	NY	Peconic Estuary/Pipes Cove/Stackler Parcels	\$2,159,433
6	CT	Long Island Sound Coastal Forest Preserve	\$3,000,000
7	WA	Pilot Point Acquisition	\$2,010,000
8	WA	Lummi Island Coastal Conservation Project ^	\$948,050
9	MI	Keeweenaw Coastal Wildlife Corridor ^	\$1,422,573
10	PR	San Miguel Natural Reserve	\$3,000,000
11	FL	Cayo Costa State Park	\$151,900
	NH	Great Bay Drainage *	\$2,849,465
13	MI	Bete Grise Wetlands Project ^	\$1,222,500
14	NH	Exeter River Watershed ^	\$2,015,000
15	SC	Pee Dee River Conservation: Phase II	\$3,000,000
16	MA	Apponagansett Bay	\$3,000,000
17	WA	Green Point	\$1,600,000
18	WI	Mount Ashwabay Acquisition *	\$240,000
19	FL	Florida Keys	\$2,848,969
20	VA	Blackwater River Old Growth Forest	\$400,000
21	DE	Blackbird Creek NERR – Eagle Nest Road Property	\$2,995,000
	MI	Big Rock Point Acquisition	\$3,000,000
23	OR	Beaver Creek Natural Area Partnership	\$450,000
	DE	Blackbird Creek/Blackbird Millington – Loessner *	\$3,000,000
25	NJ	Little Egg Harbor: Sam and Pepper *	\$1,500,000
	ME	Goosefare Brook Project	\$2,000,000
27	RI	Point Judith Park	\$1,500,000
28	AL	Mobile Tensaw Delta/Perdido River Corridor	\$3,000,000
29	WI	Donges Bay Gorge ^	\$1,761,500
30	FL	Keewaydin Island Conservation Project	\$2,000,000
31	CA	Gaviota Cove	\$1,500,000
	VA	North Landing River	\$517,625
	SC	Palmetto Fort	\$400,000
34	OH	East Point of South Bass Island	\$1,151,625
35	PA	French Creek State Park Expansion	\$2,718,750
	TX	Clear Creek Park Acquisition	\$705,000

37	DE	Blackbird DNERR Core Area Headwaters	\$2,667,000
38	OH	West Creek Confluence	\$1,100,000
39	LA	Elmer's Island Preservation Project	\$2,266,038
40	IN	ISG Bailly Property Acquisition	\$2,805,000
41	MA	Herring River Land Acquisition and Restoration *	\$2,532,000
42	ME	Kennebec Estuary Conservation Project	\$1,000,000
43	ME	Ward Property Acquisition	\$250,000
	LA	French Property Preservation Project^	\$732,000
	Nat'l	CELCP Program Management (5%)	\$4,009,971

Notes:

** Signifies projects that will require negotiation or clarification of some elements with applicant. For example, project proposes to retain pre-existing uses on an interim basis or proposes limited harvest of timber for the purposes of restoration of a native coastal forest mix, habitat enhancement, or comparable reasons. NOAA reserves the right to review any lease or management strategy for consistency with CELCP guidelines.*

^ Signifies projects that have been recommended for the list at a reduced funding level from the requested amount due to ineligibility of certain costs and/or proposed uses on portions of the project site(s) or insufficient information to determine the eligibility of proposed Federal costs or expenses to be used as match. In some cases, the project includes proposed costs that are not eligible, but that did not result in a reduction of the requested Federal share (such as match properties if greater than 1:1 match was included in the proposal). NOAA reserves the right to review all costs at the time of formal grant application to make final determinations as to eligibility and reasonableness and request budget changes accordingly.

Signifies that the costs for purchase of lands or easements, or the value of in-kind properties or donated land value proposed as match, must be documented through appraisals that meet Federal "Yellow Book" appraisal standards.