



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington, D.C. 20240

In Reply Refer To:
FWS/AES/DCHR/008994

OCT 1 - 2002

Dear Interested Partner:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recently issued a request for proposals under two new competitive grant programs that support conservation efforts on private lands, the \$40 million Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) and the \$10 million Private Stewardship Grants Program (PSGP). We appreciate the assistance many of you have provided in developing our plans to implement these important new programs.

The LIP provides competitive grant funds for State and territorial fish and wildlife agencies and Tribes to establish or supplement their own landowner incentive programs. States, Territories, and Tribes will then use these funds to provide technical or financial assistance to private landowners for the protection, restoration, and management of habitat to benefit federally listed or other species determined to be at risk. The Service is implementing the State, Territory and District of Columbia (collectively referred to as States) LIP through the Division of Federal Aid, while the Division of External Affairs, Native American Liaison Office is implementing the Tribal portion.

The PSGP will provide grants and other assistance on a competitive basis to individuals and groups engaged in voluntary conservation efforts on private lands that benefit federally listed, proposed or candidate species or other at-risk species. This program will allow private landowners and their partners to submit project proposals directly to the Service's Regional Offices. The Service's Endangered Species program will lead the Service's implementation of the PSGP.

On June 7, 2002, we published proposed implementation plans for each program. The Service received over 50 comment letters in total for both programs, and many of these came from your organizations or agencies. Almost all respondents expressed appreciation and support for PSGP and LIP. Many offered valuable suggestions for improving or clarifying specific sections of the final implementation guidelines. On October 1, 2002, we published in the *Federal Register* a final notice for each program that serves as the Request for Proposals and includes final implementation guidance, eligibility criteria, selection factors, a date for submission of proposals (December 2, 2002), and related information (copy enclosed).

We believe that the LIP and the PSGP offer complementary approaches to enhance relationships with our partners and address important habitat needs for imperiled species. Although State agencies are not eligible to apply directly for PSGP funding, we encourage State agencies to assist landowners in developing PSGP project proposals, to provide cost share when possible, or to participate in other ways during project implementation.

For the purposes of the PSGP, an “at-risk species” includes any species formally recognized as a species of conservation concern, such as species listed by a State or Territory. We encourage prospective applicants to contact their State wildlife or natural resources agency to determine which species are recognized as species of conservation concern by the State. We also ask applicants to identify other existing Federal, State, Tribal, or local government programs or activities that their project would affect. We encourage applicants to develop project proposals that contribute to community, State, or regional conservation planning efforts.

Your continued support will be essential to the success of these programs. We encourage you to spread the word to private landowners about these new opportunities available for assistance with their conservation stewardship efforts. We will also be working with U.S.D.A.’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop ways to efficiently implement these programs in concert with the conservation programs supported by the Farm Bill.

If you have questions on LIP, please contact Tim Hess, Biologist, Division of Federal Aid (703-358-1849), or the Region staff identified in the LIP Federal Register notice. For questions on PSGP, please contact Scott Hicks, Biologist, Branch of Recovery and State Grants (703/358-2061), or the Region staff identified in the PSGP *Federal Register* notice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DIRECTOR

Enclosures