

STATE WILDLIFE GRANT COMPETITIVE CRITERIA

August 18, 2008

INTRODUCTION

On November 5, 2001, President Bush signed the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2002, which created the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program. As indicated in this legislation, these grants were established, "...for the development and implementation of programs for the benefit of wildlife and their habitat, including species that are not hunted or fished..." To participate in the SWG program, Congress required each State, Commonwealth, territory, and the District of Columbia (States) to submit a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan (CWCP) by October 1, 2005.

All CWCPs (also known as the State Wildlife Action Plans or the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies) were completed and approved by the Service Director. Each CWCP identifies the species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) that occur in a particular State and the habitats necessary to conserve them. In addition, the CWCPs provide detailed information about the issues affecting these species and their habitats and specify conservation actions to address them.

Since Fiscal Year 2002, the SWG program has received annual Congressional appropriations that are administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR). These funds support implementation of all 56 CWCPs. The Service apportions these funds to fish and wildlife agencies within the States using a formula based on population and geographic area.

In the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-161), Congress also authorized additional funds in the amount of \$4,922,000 for a SWG competitive program. This competitive program is for States that have Service approved CWCPs.

Competitive funds will be awarded to the highest-ranking cooperative conservation grant proposals that are identified in the CWCPs using the ranking evaluation criteria included in this announcement. Grant proposals must address SGCN and actions to conserve them and their habitats as described in the CWCPs. Priority will be given to cooperative conservation projects with an emphasis on performance results and outcomes.

The following criteria address the SWG competitive program for FY 2008 and FY 2009. As noted above, SWG is an annual appropriation; there is no assurance that this competitive portion will be authorized in subsequent years. If funding for this competitive program is authorized for FY 2009, the ranked grant proposals submitted under this announcement, but not selected for a FY 2008 award, will be considered for FY 2009 awards based on the ranking. The funding level for FY 2009 is unknown at this time.

This document provides information to eligible applicants on how to prepare grant proposals for the SWG competitive program. It is organized into three categories: general information, mandatory application requirements, and evaluation criteria.

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The general information involves eligibility, match requirements, project categories, and project funding amounts. The application requirements are mandatory and must be satisfactorily addressed for a grant proposal to be ranked. The evaluation criteria provide information on organizational capacity and technical ranking factors.

The DOI has established six conservation priorities and asked bureaus to cooperatively work with each other, along with partners, to address these priorities using established Federal financial assistance programs (to the degree allowable under policy, regulations, or law). DOI bureaus have embraced these priorities and to the degree partners see opportunities to address their own conservation priorities, additional funding sources, and synergistic support might be available using several DOI Federal financial assistance programs managed by the different bureaus. More information on the six DOI conservation goals and support opportunities for intra-bureau/partner initiatives is available at <http://www.doi.gov/ppa/>. Whenever feasible, priority will be given to grant proposals that integrate principles of cooperation among Federal agencies, State agencies, other public and private entities, and private landowners and that emphasize performance results and definable outcomes.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Eligible applicants include the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealths of the Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico with Service approved CWCPs. For the purpose of this guidance, the word "State" is used (as defined in 43 CFR 12.43) to include the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, and the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealths of the Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico, unless otherwise noted.
- B. Successful applicants will be awarded a minimum Federal share of \$300,000 up to a maximum Federal share of \$1,000,000. Successful applicants (with the exception of the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) must provide a minimum 25% non-Federal share of total grant costs for each grant proposal submitted for this competitive program.
- C. Grant proposals must implement actions identified in the State's CWCP or address emerging issue(s) documented in the grant proposal to improve the status of SGCN and their habitats. Applicants must provide site locations and describe any ground or habitat disturbance in enough detail to allow a preliminary determination or determinations pursuant to Federal compliance requirements (see Application Requirements 2d and 2e) for grant proposals which address land acquisition, conservation easements, construction, or ground disturbing habitat work.

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- D. If applicants have any questions, please contact Steve Jose, Programs Branch Chief, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arlington, VA at (703) 358-2156.

II. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for consideration, all grant proposals must satisfactorily address or include the following requirements listed below. Failure to address any application requirements will disqualify the grant proposal from further consideration. Each grant proposal must provide clear and sufficient detail in describing the State's use of awarded funds to implement the State's CWCP.

- A. Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424) and Standard Assurances for Non-Construction Projects (SF 424B) or Standard Assurances – Construction Projects (SF 424D).
- B. Executive Summary: The grant proposal must include an executive summary, one page or less in length, that includes: title of the grant; applicant information; goals and objectives; proposed grant time period; amount of funding requested; funding sources; State(s) and other partners actively involved in the work; State(s) benefitting from the work; SGCN and key habitats addressed; and a summary statement or abstract of the proposed work. Type must be no smaller than 12-point font.
- C. A ranking criteria summary sheet must be included with the grant proposal, which provides a short explanation of how and where (page numbers and section) the grant proposal specifically addresses each ranking criterion.
- D. The grant proposal must contain discrete sections as described in the Service Policy Manual, Chapter [522 FW 1.3C](#): Need; Objectives; Expected Results and Benefits; Approach; Location; Project Leader(s); and Budget (see Section B).
- E. The Approach section must contain sufficient detail to make a preliminary determination regarding Federal compliance for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable Federal compliances.
- F. Locations of project site work (i.e., land acquisition, conservation easements, habitat management, and construction) must be clearly identified in sufficient detail to assist in NEPA, section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act compliance review with map(s) provided.
- G. The Budget section must provide a detailed narrative that describes costs for individual projects, provides a justification for each budget category, clearly identifies sources and amounts of non-Federal match, and identifies cost sharing by individual States (when multiple States are participating) or partners.

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- H. The grant proposal must demonstrate that the grantee has adequate management systems for fiscal and contractual accountability.
- I. The grant proposal must clearly describe how each State will comply with reporting requirements ([U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “Interim Guidance for Financial Status and Performance Reporting,” January 28, 2008](#)), what schedule will be used to submit reports, the performance measurements that will be used to describe how the objectives (described in category III. B.) were met, and individual(s) responsible for submitting reports.

III. EVALUATION CRITERIA

A. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY CRITERIA

This set of criteria assesses the ability or readiness of the applicant(s) and partners to accomplish the work proposed. The grant proposal must demonstrate that the State(s) can complete the proposed actions which are likely to succeed in improving the status of SGCN or their habitats (26 points total).

- 1. Grant proposal includes coordination and cooperation between two or more partners including the State and identifies the actions that are priorities in the State’s CWCP (0-3 points).
- 2. Grant proposal describes how the applicant will coordinate all aspects of work, including use of common procedures, data sharing, monitoring, and reporting with other partners including other State fish and wildlife agencies (0-3 points).
- 3. Grant proposal identifies dedicated staff or contractors currently in place to implement work (0-3 points).
- 4. Grant proposal identifies existing processes or protocols that will be used to implement actions and monitor outcomes (0-3 points).
- 5. Grant proposal describes how Federal compliance requirements can be addressed in a reasonable time and provide an estimated timeline (0-3 points).
- 6. Non-Federal Match
 - a. **Overall:** For the total amount of match identified in the Budget and the Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424), identify the percentage of non-Federal match (4 points total).
 - i. 0 point if non-Federal match is 25 % (0% for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands);

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- ii. 1 point if non-Federal match is > 25 to 30 % (>0 to 5 % for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands);
 - iii. 2 points if non-Federal match is > 30 to 40 % (>5 to 15 % for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands); or
 - iv. 4 points if non-Federal match is > 40% (>15 % for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).
- b. **Source:** At least 40% of the minimum 25% non-Federal match requirement comes from an entity or entities other than a State fish and wildlife agency and the match is well-documented through a commitment letter from those entities describing the nature (i.e., cash, waived cost, and/or in-kind), the source, and the value of the match. "Other entities" can include another State agency, Tribes, organization, business, or individual (3 points).
- c. **Type:** At least 51% of the total non-Federal match comes in one of the following forms (1-4 points total):
- i. Cash provided by a State agency or other non-Federal entity (4 points);
 - ii. Waived costs from contractors or other third parties (3 points);
 - iii. Donated equipment or services from a third party (in-kind) (2 points); or
 - iv. Donated volunteer time (in-kind) (1 point).

B. TECHNICAL RANKING CRITERIA

This set of criteria assesses the grant proposal on its benefit to the SGCN, their habitats, and the overall technical merit of the proposed work. The grant proposal must provide a clear description of how the proposed actions will implement the applicant's CWCP(s). The ranking criteria listed below are organized by sections of the grant proposal (68 points total).

NEED - describes the reason or unique opportunity for completing the proposed actions. State(s) should describe how the proposed actions are part of a broader-scale conservation effort at the State or regional level (22 points total).

1. Grant proposal implements actions identified in CWCPs by multiple States:
 - a. 1 State (0 points);
 - b. 2-4 States (3 points); or
 - c. 5 or more States (5 points).
2. Grant proposal implements priority conservation actions, which are documented in the State(s) CWCP(s) or are documented as an emerging issue(s) in the grant proposal (0-2 points).

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3. Grant proposal clearly describes conservation needs that directly link to objectives and conservation actions described in each participating State's CWCP (reference page number is needed) or is documented as an emerging issue in the grant proposal to address a critical need or unanticipated event, e.g., a wildlife health/disease issue (0-3 points).
4. Grant proposal is a substantial effort to improve the status of SGCN (0-5 points total).
 - a. Improves status of 1 SGCN (0 points);
 - b. Improves status of 2-5 SGCN (1 point);
 - c. Improves status of 6-10 SGCN (3 points); or
 - d. Improves status of more than 10 SGCN (5 points).
5. Grant proposal is a substantial effort to improve the habitat status of a SGCN (0-7 points total).
 - a. Proposal activities improve the status of SGCN habitat in less than 10 percent of the species range (0 points);
 - b. Proposal activities improve the status of SGCN habitat in more than 10 percent, but less than 25 percent of the species range (3 points);
 - c. Proposal activities improve the status of SGCN habitat in more than 25 percent but less than 50 percent of the species range (5 points); or
 - d. Proposal activities improve the status of SGCN habitat in more than 50 percent of the species range (7 points).

OBJECTIVES – describes the activities that will improve the status of SGCN or their habitats (10 points total).

1. Describe distinct, obtainable, and quantifiable or verifiable outputs to be accomplished for habitats used by SGCN (for example, but not limited to, the proposal identifies the number of stream miles or the number of acres of wetlands or other types of habitat to be restored, or the increase in available habitat for SGCN) (0-5 points).
2. Describe distinct, obtainable, and quantifiable or verifiable outcomes to be accomplished for SGCN (for example, but not limited to, the grant proposal identifies the percentage increase in a population of one or more species of greatest conservation need on project sites; the long-term sustainability of one or more SGCN on project sites) (0-5 points).

EXPECTED RESULTS AND BENEFITS - describes how the activities will benefit targeted SGCN or their habitats (10 points total).

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1. Grant proposal describes the short-term benefits for SGCN or their habitats to be achieved within a ten-year period and it makes clear connections between the proposed conservation actions and expected benefits for species and their habitats (0-5 points).
2. Grant proposal describes the long-term benefits for SGCN or their habitats to be achieved beyond ten years and makes clear connections between the proposed conservation actions and expected benefits for species and their habitats (0-5 points).

APPROACH - describes how the State(s) will accomplish and monitor program objectives (26 points total).

1. Grant proposal describes the specific types of conservation projects/actions that each State will conduct to address these projects/actions and provides adequate detail to understand how each State will implement them (0-5 points).
 - a. Methods/procedures used in conservation action;
 - b. Who will implement the practices;
 - c. Credentials and training of key project personnel;
 - d. Any local, State, or Federal permits needed to undertake the work; and
 - e. Schedule of work.
2. Projects/actions are accomplished, in part, on private lands. Points are awarded on the percentage of the total acres affected (0-5 points).
 - a. 1 point for private land component up to 10 % of the total acreage affected;
 - b. 2 points for private land component > 10% and up to 20% of the total acreage affected;
 - c. 3 points for private land component > 20% and up to 30% of the total acreage affected;
 - d. 4 points for private land component > 30% and up to 40% of the total acreage affected; or
 - e. 5 points for private land component > 40% of the total acreage affected.
3. Projects/actions involve other State agencies, Tribes, private landowners, non-governmental organizations, or Federal agencies other than the Service and/or lands owned or managed by these entities (0-4 points).
 - a. 1 point for simple involvement by partner in completing proposed actions;
 - b. 2 points for partner engaged and substantively committed to completing proposed actions; or
 - c. 4 points for complex and dedicated role of partner in completing proposed actions.

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4. Grant proposal includes activities that use the same methodologies and share data between States and other partners (0-3 points).
5. The grant proposal describes a monitoring plan that each participating State or partner will use to ensure SGCN need and/or habitats are adequately monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of conservation actions and provide for adaptive management for future efforts. The monitoring plan may include identifying appropriate monitoring protocols and establishing baselines, developing monitoring standards, timeframes for conducting monitoring activities, and expectations for monitoring (0-5 points).
6. The grant proposal describes how performance reports will clearly document monitoring results and how they will be used for adaptive management for future improved efforts (0-4 points).

Total Score Possible = 94 points

Total Score = _____

IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1. Will grant proposals from a single State be considered for funding?

- A. Yes, a single State fish and wildlife agency may apply for these competitive funds, provided they have one or more partners identified in the application. Partners may include another State agency, Tribes, Federal agencies other than the Service, organizations, businesses, or individuals (e.g., private landowners).

Q2. Is there a minimum or maximum Federal share for a proposal?

- A. The SWG competitive program will promote greater cooperation among States and other partners to address the needs of SGCN and their habitats over a larger landscape. To encourage cooperative ventures, the minimum Federal share of grant proposals is \$300,000 with a maximum Federal share up to \$1,000,000.

Q3. If Federal funds remain after awarding competitive grants, how will the Service make them available to the States?

- A. Remaining funds will be added to monies appropriated the following fiscal year, if applicable, and used in the next cycle of awards through this competitive program. If subsequent competitive program funds are not authorized, the Service will use the funds as approved by Congress.

Q4. Will the SWG competitive program continue in future years?

- A. There is no assurance that the SWG competitive program will be authorized in subsequent years. If funding for this competitive program is authorized for FY 2009,

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the ranked grant proposals submitted under this request for proposals, but not selected for a FY 2008 award, will be considered for FY 2009 awards based on the FY 2008 ranking. The funding level for FY 2009 is unknown at this time.

Q5. How long are funds available for obligation?

- A. Funds awarded to a selected grant must be obligated with an approved Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) within six months of the notice of selection. Unobligated funds and unused balances on awarded grants will revert to the Service and be added to available funds for the next cycle of awards through this competitive program. The funds will be used for other purposes approved by Congress if competitive program funds are not authorized for the subsequent fiscal year(s).

Q6. Is there a maximum grant period?

- A. Yes. The maximum period for grant proposals is three years from the effective date of grant award obligation. If approved by the WSFR Programs Branch Chief, an extension may be approved through an amendment, but may only be extended no more than an additional two years.

Q7. What are the cost-sharing percentages for this competitive program?

- A. The Federal share for competitive SWG grants must not exceed 75 percent of the total cost. Matching requirements are waived for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (48 U.S.C. 1469a. (d)). The non-Federal share may not include Federal funds or Federal in-kind match unless specifically allowed by law.

Q8. What constitutes an emerging issue?

- A. An emerging issue is an issue that was not identified in an approved CWCP, which addresses a critical need or unanticipated opportunity, e.g., shifts in species range that may be caused or exacerbated by climate change. For additional guidance, see the "Guidance for Wildlife Action Plans (Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy) Review and Revisions", July 2007. This information may be found at:

<http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/subpages/toolkitfiles/swg2007.pdf>

Q9. For multi-state grant proposals, should one State be the project lead?

- A. Yes. One State should be the lead in submitting the grant proposal and coordinating most aspects of the grant proposal including: writing a single project narrative; coordinating work; coordinating monitoring; and writing a performance report that summarizes overall results with specific data from all participating States. Each participating State must submit an Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) to

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obligate their portion of the awarded funds. In addition, each State must prepare and submit individual financial status and performance reports.

Q10. What activities are eligible for funding under this program?

- A. Conservation actions such as research, surveys, species and habitat management, land acquisition, facilities development, and monitoring.

Development of habitat mapping, data management systems, and monitoring protocols.

Education and law enforcement activities, but only when each comprises a minor portion of a grant's project, is critical to the project's success, and specifically addresses a threat or issue identified within the State's CWCP. "Minor" is considered no more than 10 percent of a grant proposal's total cost or no more than 10% of an individual project's cost for grant proposals which contain more than one project.

Q11. What are the compliance requirements for activities funded under this program?

- A. States must comply with all applicable Federal laws and regulations as a condition of acceptance of Federal funds. In addition to the authorizing legislation specific to the grant program, there are numerous other compliance requirements for Federal grant programs including 43 CFR Part 12, 2 CFR 225, OMB Circulars (A-87, A-102, and A-133), the National Environmental Policy Act, section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and other applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies. Applicants must provide assurance that they will comply with applicable provisions. [Appendix 2, 522 FW 1](#) of the Service Manual, provide an assurances checklist for a construction (SF 424D) grant and for a nonconstruction (SF 424B) grant that States may use to develop a grant proposal (Service Manual [522 FW 1.3B and C](#) and [523 FW 1](#)).

Q12. Are there additional formatting criteria?

- A. No, unless an applicant applies for a grant using Grant.gov. Formatting requirements for submitting a grant proposal via Grants.gov can be found at <http://www.grants.gov/>.

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Q13. Where should an applicant send competitive grant proposals?

- A. Applicants may submit grant proposals to the Service (Application for Federal Assistance and the grant proposal package) via the U.S. Postal Service or a commercial delivery service to:

State Wildlife Grants Competitive Program
Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive – WSFR 4020
Arlington, VA; 22203-1610; or

Electronically to: <http://grants.gov>; or

By e-mail to: WSFR_CompetitiveSWG_Program@fws.gov.

Q14. Who recommends grant proposals for funding, and who announces the upcoming awards?

- A. A national review team will rank the proposals and provide recommendations to the Service Director based on the criteria. The awards will be approved by the Service Director. The Service will notify all applicants of the selections.

Q15. Once a competitive proposal is selected for funding, what additional documents must the applicant submit and to whom?

- A. The Service, in cooperation with grantees, must address Federal compliance issues, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Endangered Species Act prior to obligating awarded grant funds. Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) staff can assist grantees in explaining the procedures and documentation necessary for meeting these Federal requirements. If needed, grantees must send this additional documentation to the WSFR Washington Office where staff will review it for adequacy and compliance prior to approval of the Application for Federal Assistance to obligate funds.

Q16. What must be done during the competitive State grant period if a change in objectives or approach is needed?

- A. Because this is a competitive program, each grant proposal is judged to be complete with all costs needed to accomplish the objectives of the proposal. The Service will have discretion, however, to determine if proposed changes can be accepted if the Service determines that the objectives will be met and the resulting benefits will be equivalent to those previously described. Otherwise, no changes to costs, objectives, benefits or approach will be allowed.

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If the State(s) cannot complete the grant as approved, the grant will be terminated; all remaining unexpended funds will revert to the Service; the State must submit a final report within 90 days of the termination date. The Service may require that the State(s) repay all expended funds if the final financial status report and the final performance report indicate that no substantive accomplishments were made. In addition, the Service will not allow the grantee to participate in the next two award cycles following the termination date.

Q17. Who has the authority to terminate a grant?

- A. Grants may be terminated by the Service Director or by mutual agreement between the State Director and the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Branch Chief. A termination decision by the Service Director is not subject to appeal.