ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: NOAA Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership Grants

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2016-2004742

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.463, Habitat Conservation

Dates: Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 PM ET on February 2, 2016. Use of a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. Please Note: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application, and a free annual registration process in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM) is necessary to use Grants.gov, which may take between three and five business days or as long as several weeks (see Section IV.F. of this announcement). Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: NOAA delivers funding and technical expertise to restore Great Lakes coastal habitats. These habitats support valuable fisheries and other resources; improve water quality; provide recreational opportunities for the public's use and enjoyment; and buffer our coastal communities from the impacts of changing lake levels. Projects funded through NOAA have strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that provide social and economic benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological habitat improvements.

Through this solicitation, NOAA seeks to openly compete funding available for multi-year Great Lakes regional habitat restoration partnerships (Partnerships). Partnerships will result in implementation of a wide-range of individual habitat restoration projects focused in U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs) (http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/) with funds provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Priority projects in AOCs have been identified and continue to be identified for GLRI funding each fiscal year. The Partnership should be flexible related to which AOCs they may work in, and be able to work with NOAA and other federal and state agencies to continue to identify and implement priority projects in targeted AOCs. The Partnership will also need to be able to implement a variety of project types that will contribute

to the removal of habitat related Beneficial Use Impairments contributing to delisting of targeted AOCs.

This document describes the types of habitat restoration Partnerships that NOAA envisions establishing, explains the qualities that NOAA deems desirable in such Partnerships, and describes criteria under which applications will be evaluated for funding consideration. Partnership applications selected through this announcement will be implemented through a multi-year cooperative agreement, and will ultimately involve joint selection of habitat restoration projects. Awards will be dependent upon the amount of funds made available to NOAA for this purpose by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). See http://greatlakesrestoration.us/. Funding of approximately $5,000,000 is expected to be available to establish habitat restoration Partnerships in 2016, with annual funding anticipated to maintain them for up to three years. Individual awards are anticipated to range between $1,000,000 and $40,000,000 in federal funds for the entire three-year partnership. Typical Partnership awards are expected to range from $1,000,000 to $5,000,000 per year. Voluntary cost sharing will be considered in project evaluation as described in Section V.A.4. Funding will support both engineering and design projects and on the ground implementation projects. Funds will be administered by NOAA's Restoration Center (RC) Great Lakes Region. This is not a request for individual habitat restoration project proposals.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of this NOAA Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnerships is to provide federal financial and technical assistance to organizations that have the capacity and expertise to identify, evaluate, fund, and administer coastal habitat restoration projects in U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern. These projects must meet NOAA's mission to restore coastal habitats and must also support the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan ((http://greatlakesrestoration.us/actionplan/index.html).

NOAA's primary goal in establishing these Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership Grants are to meet multiple priorities through the desirable capabilities stated below (see Section I.B.). NOAA intends to select one or more Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership to target priority restoration in AOCs with funds provided by the GLRI. The Partnership should be flexible related to which AOCs they may work in, and be able to work with NOAA and other federal and state partners to continue to identify priority projects in targeted AOCs. The Partner will also need to be able to implement a variety of project types that will contribute to the removal of habitat related Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) and the delisting of AOCs. NOAA intends to select the fewest applicants necessary to fulfill the program priorities described in this Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO), and funding amounts may vary if multiple applicants are selected. Proposals for Partnerships that are narrowly focused or that will benefit limited resources or few user groups, that lack a comprehensive restoration planning element for identifying and selecting projects, or that request funding solely to support or increase general organizational activities, are discouraged.

NOAA recognizes that accomplishing restoration is a multi-faceted effort involving project design, engineering services, permitting, construction, oversight and monitoring. Therefore, to allow maximum flexibility under a Partnership, applicants should avoid restricting proposed activities to specific restoration phases or categories of cost. However, a Partnership application may provide previous examples of restoring specific habitats, using certain restoration techniques, or focusing within certain AOCs with habitat related BUIs. In addition to having strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components, or engineering and design components that once implemented will contribute to the removal of habitat related BUIs in AOCs, projects funded under a Partnership will be expected to provide educational

and social benefits for communities and long-term ecological habitat improvements.

B. Program Priorities

NOAA seeks to support Partnerships that will implement on-the-ground projects to restore Great Lakes coastal habitat in US Great Lakes AOCs. The program priorities for this opportunity support NOAA's "Ecosystems" mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources through Ecosystem-Based Management." Projects supported by the Partnership must be within an U.S. Great Lakes AOC and contribute to the removal of either project-based delisting targets or numeric delisting targets for fish and wildlife habitat related beneficial use impairments (degradation of fish and wildlife population, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and degradation of benthos).

Priority consideration will be provided to those Partnership proposals that:

- Propose activities within targeted AOCs including: Milwaukee Estuary, Lower Green Bay and Fox River, Cuyahoga River, Maumee River, St. Lawrence River at Massena, Eighteen Mile Creek, Niagara River, Torch Lake, Rouge River, Kalamazoo River, Saginaw River and Bay, St. Louis River, Detroit River, Grand Calumet River, Manistique River, and Muskegon Lake.

- Address habitat related issues within a NOAA Habitat Focus Area (St. Louis River Estuary or Muskegon Lake)
http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/habitatblueprint/greatlakes.html

- Propose projects that restore coastal wetlands, through shoreline restoration or hydrological reconnection;

- Benefit native Great Lakes fish and their habitat, particularly projects that remove in-stream migration barriers or create/restore habitats limiting productivity;

- Are designed to be robust to projected climatic change impacts, including reduction of potential climatic change effects;

- Propose sufficient, cost-effective monitoring appropriate to the scope and scale of the projects that are funded under the Partnership;

- Request funds primarily to implement physical, on-the-ground coastal habitat restoration or designs that lead to on the ground restoration (as opposed to funds for land

acquisition, general program support, overhead and travel); and

- Provide letters of support from AOC implementation groups (state or local advisory council) for projects anticipated to be funded through the proposed Partnership.

NOAA will emphasize the selection of Partnership applications that, collectively, provide a range of restoration benefits in Great Lakes AOCs; that can implement large-scale restoration projects that yield significant ecological benefits with emphasis on the removal of habitat related BUIs. NOAA recognizes the need to continue to have habitat restoration projects ready to implement in future years and anticipates dedicating portions of funding awarded to Partners for the engineering and design of high quality projects that are necessary to achieve an AOC's delisting targets.

Desirable Partnership Qualities

Partnerships selected through this federal funding opportunity will be those capable of implementing priority restoration projects that meet specific restoration goals determined by shared restoration interests and priority areas of NOAA and the applicant. Selected Partnerships are expected to be well-rounded with respect to restoration benefits, sound science, accountability, cost effectiveness and other qualities. Projects selected may be implemented through a subaward or contract to a specified organization, or may be directly implemented by the award recipient. Partnership applications that incorporate a combination of the factors identified below will be high priority for funding consideration.

NOAA is looking to support Partnerships that:

(1) Offer significant ecological and societal benefits –

• Are focused on the engineering and design and/or implementation of on-the-ground restoration of Great Lakes coastal habitats in U.S. AOCs, to remove habitat related BUIs, support fisheries and protected species, and restore ecosystem processes that create and maintain habitats;

• Have the greatest potential to develop restoration that will provide lasting benefits of regional significance;

• Have the greatest potential to achieve ecological benefits, and in so doing, also advance socio-economic benefits such as jobs creation, recreational opportunities, and similar effects attributable to restoration;

(2) Can demonstrate sound science support for restoration-

• Can describe the technical and scientific merit of the restoration techniques and strategies that have been previously implemented by the organization;

• Propose a plan for ensuring sufficient, cost-effective monitoring is associated with restoration as appropriate to evaluate the benefits of individual projects;

• Through monitoring of multiple restoration projects or collaboration with other organizations, can help to answer some of the questions surrounding restoration science;

• Rely on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan and other AOC specific planning efforts to identify priority projects so that restoration conducted under sub-awards is more strategic and less opportunistic;

(3) Demonstrate effective ability to manage funds and provide accountability-

• Organizational history of working with NOAA and/or other federal agencies to implement Great Lakes habitat restoration projects highlighting AOC related projects;

• Identify specific goals and outcomes, with appropriate ecological and economic performance metrics;

• Focus on developing sub-award projects that will have clearly defined goals and specific measurable objectives, that will involve monitoring during the project period of structural parameters, and provide discrete and measureable outputs and long-term outcomes;

• Manage multiple restoration projects (2-5 new projects per year) at a variety of scales including both engineering and design projects as well as large scale on the ground implementation projects;

• Existing staff with federal funds management experience;

• Effective management of administrative costs so that the bulk of funding goes to support on-the-ground project implementation (this includes technical staff with restoration experience that are integral to the on-the-ground activities);

• Organizational ability, through history or equivalent demonstration, to manage federal funds and to effectively address any audit findings;

• Ability to maintain an administrative record to document expenditures of federally awarded funds; and

• Complete reporting requirements in a timely fashion, as well as comply with other award conditions.

C. Program Authority

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the following statutes to provide grants

and cooperative agreements for habitat restoration:

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. 661, as amended by the Reorganization Plan No. 4 of 1970; and

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006, 16 U.S.C. 1891a.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Funding is expected to be provided on an as available basis for up to three years in duration, and is dependent upon the level of funding made available by congressional appropriations to the GLRI. NOAA anticipates supporting applications requesting between $1,000,000 and $40,000,000 of federal funds for the entire three-year partnership. NOAA anticipates that typical awards will range from $1,000,000 to $5,000,000 for the first year and it is anticipated that award levels will be similar in out years. This range is to accommodate Partnerships activities including both engineering and design and large scale restoration in AOCs. Any funds provided to successful applicants will be at the discretion of NOAA and based on the process described in this announcement.

There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for Partnership applications. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the areas of expertise proposed by the applicants, the merit and ranking of the applications, and the amount of GLRI funds made available by Congress. NOAA intends to select the fewest applicants necessary to fulfill the program priorities, and funding amounts may vary if multiple applicants are selected.

The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award

negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives, and multi-year funding requests are expected to be funded on an as-available basis. Publication of this document does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or obligate all or any portion of any available funds.

B. Project/Award Period

Applications for Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnerships should generally cover a project period of 3 years. The earliest start date for Partnership awards is anticipated to be May 1, 2016; applicants should consider this date when developing plans for initiating proposed Partnership activities. When an application for a multi-year project is approved, full federal funding of the entire period of performance is not usually provided at the outset. Partnerships are authorized to continue through the duration of the approved period of performance, however, Partnerships will not need to compete for funding in subsequent time periods. Continued federal funding subsequent to the initial obligation of funds is at the sole discretion of NOAA and will be contingent upon satisfactory performance, continued relevance to the mission and priorities of NOAA, and the availability of funds. NOAA has no obligation to provide additional funding in connection with a Partnership in subsequent time periods. In addition, permission to extend the period of performance beyond that stated in award documentation is also at the discretion of NOAA and should be requested in writing.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will primarily be funded through a cooperative agreement since NOAA staff will be substantially involved in many aspects of the Partnership. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to: hands-on technical assistance; joint selection of restoration projects; support in development of appropriate monitoring protocols to ensure project performance can be evaluated; tracking the progression of the restoration through site visits and progress report evaluation; and involvement in public meetings and events to highlight restoration activities.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, for profit organizations, foreign public entities and foreign organizations, and state, local and Indian tribal governments. Applications from federal agencies or employees of federal agencies will not be considered. Federal agencies are strongly encouraged to work with

states, non-governmental organizations, municipal and county governments, conservation corps organizations and others that are eligible to apply.

The Department of Commerce/ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (DOC/NOAA) is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in under-served areas. The RC encourages applications involving any of the above institutions.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

While there is no statutory matching requirement for this funding, NOAA typically leverages its federal funding with matching contributions and/or partnerships from a broad range of sources in the public and private sector to implement locally important coastal habitat restoration. To this end, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a 1:1 non-federal match for RC funds requested to conduct the proposed project. Applicants with less than 1:1 match will not be disqualified, however, applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered in Evaluation Criterion #4 "Project Costs" (Section V.A.4.).

Match to NOAA funds can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include third party in-kind goods and services and volunteer labor. Refer to 2 C.F.R. 200.306, available at http://go.usa.gov/ca5j5, for cost sharing or matching policies. Applicants are permitted to combine contributions from non-federal partners, as long as such contributions are not being used to match any other federal funds and are available within the project period stated in the application. Federal sources cannot be considered for matching funds unless authorized by law, but can be described in the budget narrative to demonstrate additional leverage. Applicants with approved indirect cost rates planning to provide cost sharing may find it convenient to propose a portion or all of their indirect costs as match, since the valuation of such costs has already been Federally-approved and documentation is readily available. Refer to Section IV.F. "Funding Restrictions" for information on indirect costs.

Applicants whose proposals are selected for funding will be bound by the percentage of cost sharing reflected in the award document signed by NOAA's Grants Management

Division, unless amended based on extenuating circumstances. NOAA is under no obligation to amend the matching contributions once agreed to by the recipient. Successful applicants should be prepared to carefully document matching contributions, including the overall number of volunteers and third party in-kind participation hours devoted to habitat restoration projects. Letters of commitment for any secured resources that will be used as match for an award under this solicitation should be submitted as an attachment to the application, see Section IV.B.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

This solicitation is intended to ultimately result in on-the-ground habitat restoration projects administered by Partnerships that will have significant and tangible ecological impacts in Great Lakes AOCs. Proposals that are not in a U.S. Area of Concern are not responsive and will not be reviewed. In addition, NOAA recognizes that water quality issues can impact habitat restoration efforts. However, Partnerships to support projects dealing only with water quality improvement measures are not eligible. Partnership applications that propose the following would be ineligible: wastewater treatment plant upgrades, combined sewer outfalls, and non-point source pollution projects such as replacement of failing septic systems, implementation of farm waste management plans, and storm water management projects

Applicants should also note that the following activities will not be considered: (1) activities that constitute legally required mitigation for the adverse effects of an activity regulated or otherwise governed by local, state or federal law; (2) activities that constitute restoration for natural resource damages under federal, state or local law; and (3) activities that are required by a separate consent decree, court order, statute or regulation.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Complete application packages, including required Federal forms and instructions, and Supplemental Guidance for Prospective Applicants can be found on www.grants.gov. If a

prospective applicant is having difficulty downloading the application forms from Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. If the application forms and instructions cannot be downloaded from www.grants.gov, please contact Jessica Berrio (Jessica.Berrio@noaa.gov) at 301-427-8654.

B. Content and Form of Application

Partnership projects must be within U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Applicants should apply through the Grants.gov website (www.grants.gov), the clearinghouse for Federal financial assistance. A complete standard NOAA grant application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document.

Each application should include:

Federal application forms:

- Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424 (7/03 version or newer)
- Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: SF-424A (three in total for the applicant, which is one for each 12-month funding period of the three-year award
- Assurances for Non-construction Programs: SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)

NOAA recommends the following as part of a complete application package:

- Partnership summary (described below, 2 pages);
- Partnership narrative (described below, 10 pages);
- A detailed, narrative budget justification (described below, no page limit);
- A data sharing plan (described below, 2 pages)
- Brief curriculum vitae or resume of primary Partnership personnel (maximum of

1 page per person); and

- Any other relevant supporting material, such as letters of support, restoration planning or prioritization documents, etc.

To summarize, applications submitted through the Grants.gov website should include a maximum of three (3) files (PDF files only) in addition to the Federal application forms:

1) Partnership summary, narrative and data sharing plan;

2) Budget justification; and

3) Supplemental Information - all other attachments combined into one, indexed file, such as maps, resumes, and support letters, not to exceed 20 pages. Information about converting documents to PDF files is available on the grants.gov website under "Download Software" under "Applicant Resources."

Application materials that exceed the page limits stated above will not be reviewed. Applicants that do not comply with the page limit guidance do so at their own risk.

1. Partnership Summary (2 pages):

- Applicant Organization

- Partnership Title

- Geographic Scope – state which AOCs in the Great Lakes basin it will cover.

- Planning Framework - briefly describe any planning or prioritization framework the Partnership may use to determine funding priorities.

- Project Identification - briefly describe the process that will be used to identify high quality projects, including a proposed timeline for selecting projects, putting sub-awards in place, and initiation of on-the-ground implementation.

- Coastal and habitats to benefit from the Partnership - briefly describe the Partnership resource focus, any restrictions expected such as only certain habitat types,

specific applicant/user groups, specific resource/habitat targets, etc.

- Partnership Outputs/Outcomes – briefly describe the anticipated outputs and outcomes the Partnership may be expected to produce (contributions to the removal of habitat related BUIs and AOC delisting, acres restored or stream miles to be made accessible to diadromous fish, ecological and socioeconomic outcomes, etc).

- Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Anticipated.

- Letters of Support - list those included with the application, particularly those from members of Congress, and from various AOC implementation groups (defined as the state agency responsible for implementing the AOC program or the local public stakeholder group working with the state agency on implementing the actions necessary to achieve delisting of an AOC) that generally support your involvement in implementing their priority projects.

2. Partnership Narrative (10 pages):

The Partnership narrative should closely follow the organization of the evaluation criteria (see Section V. A. Evaluation Criteria) for the application to receive a consistent review, and should include:

- A narrative description no more than 10 pages long (in 12-point font with 1" margins) that clearly describes how the Partnership would work to carry out restoration activities that will yield ecological, social and economic benefits. Specifically, describe the relevance and significance of the proposed Partnership to addressing habitat related BUIs in AOCs;

- Specific problems the Partnership plans to address and potential AOCs the Partnership would like to focus on;

- A description of short- and long-term objectives and goals, methods for identifying potential projects, a process for collaborating with NOAA staff to identify and select restoration projects and reach funding decisions, and the criteria that will be used for determining the success of projects implemented under the Partnership;

- A discussion of how the Partnership plans to work with sub awardees to develop appropriate evaluation parameters for both the socioeconomic and ecological aspects of sub award projects, and work with NOAA to ensure that the proposed parameters are adequate

and meaningful to ensure a basic level of project success;

- A discussion of how the Partnership will ensure that all necessary environmental permits and consultations will be secured prior to the use of Federal funds for implementing individual projects that may require permits and consultations and how the necessary information would be provided to NOAA staff to enable them to make a NEPA determination for all projects;

- A description of how the Partnership will be advanced or promoted through outreach;

- A description of the organizational structure of the applicant, proposed Partnership staff, and their qualifications. Identify additional project partners, their intent to participate documented, and their expected contributions and involvement outlined;

- All supplementary materials including letters of support should be combined and submitted as one single file separate from the narrative, limited to 20 pages. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NOAA as to the relative merits of the Partnership described in the application.

3. Data sharing plan (2 page limit):

The data sharing plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information created during the course of the Partnership; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The plan is required as part of NOAA's data sharing policy described in Section VI.B.3 below, and will be reviewed as part of the Evaluation Criteria under V.A.1.

4. Budget Justification:

The narrative budget justification must include a detailed breakdown by cost categories (object classes on the SF-424A) as they relate to specific aspects of the project, with appropriate narrative justification for both the Federal and non-Federal (if applicable) shares. The object classes should match those found in the SF-424A. While an SF-424A for each of the anticipated three years of work is required, NOAA does not expect the description of

expenditures to change significantly between funding years, and recommends a full narrative for the first year, accompanied by a table that shows how costs might increase in future years (e.g., annual salary and benefits increases).

NOAA Restoration Center and Grants Management Division staff will review budget information for recommended applications to determine if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and realistic. The narrative budget justification should be sufficiently detailed to enable a clear understanding of the cost breakdown and calculations used to derive the line item subtotals in each object class of the 424A budget form. See http://go.usa.gov/ca92B.

5. Other Application Submission Information

Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NOAA as to the relative merits of the partnership projects described in the application. Inclusion of supplementary materials such as photographs, diagrams, copies of secured permits, etc. are strongly encouraged, and should be submitted in the grants.gov application as a single PDF file not to exceed 20 pages (Sec. IV. B Content and Form of Application Submission). For general questions about this competition, please contact Jessica Berrio (Jessica.Berrio@noaa.gov) or call 301-427-8654 for assistance.

C. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

To the extent applicable, any applicant awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), formerly Central Contractor Registration (CCR), to enable the use of a universal identifier and to build the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6106. SAM may be accessed online at https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/.?

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Even if an applicant has registered with Grants.gov previously, the applicant's password may have expired or their SAM registration may need to be renewed or updated prior to submitting to Grants.gov. (Note that your CCR username will not work in SAM; you must create a new SAM User Account to renew or update your registration.) Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect.

Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days or even weeks to establish or re-establish. Please plan accordingly to avoid late submissions. For further information please visit the SAM web portal (https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/).?

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Applicants are also required to use the Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and will be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Part 25, which may be accessed online at: http://go.usa.gov/3SNae.?

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 PM ET on February 2, 2016. Use of a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

Please Note: It may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. If use of Grants.gov is not feasible, a hard copy application with the SF-424 form must be postmarked or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by 11:59 PM EST on January 28, 2016. Applications postmarked or provided to a delivery service after that time will not be considered for funding. Applications submitted via the U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. Applicants are responsible for tracking their own applications. In any event, applications received later than five business days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted for review. See Section IV. G Other Submission Requirements for complete mailing information.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.” Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of E.O. 12372. To find out about and comply with a State’s process under E.O. 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOC’s are listed in the Office of Management and Budget’s home page at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html.

E. Funding Restrictions

NOAA generally does not approve pre-award costs in this program. Incurring pre-award costs before the NOAA Grants Management Division provides an award document is at the applicant's own risk that it will not receive an award or the costs will not be approved. The earliest anticipated date for receipt of awards is expected to be May 1, 2016.

The budget may include an amount for indirect costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, and insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. Applicants with approved indirect cost rates planning to provide cost sharing may find it convenient to propose a portion or all of their indirect costs as match, since the valuation of such costs has already been Federally-approved and documentation is readily available.

A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect cost agreement with the Federal government should be included with the application. If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a Federal agency, then they may request all costs as direct costs, elect to charge a de minimus rate of 10% of modified total direct costs as described in 2 C.F.R. 200.414 and 200.68, available at http://go.usa.gov/ca5j5, or submit a request to establish a rate. If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate, documentation necessary to establish a rate (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation plan, etc.) must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award to Lamar Revis, Grants Officer, NOAA Grants Management Division, 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants should submit applications electronically through www.grants.gov. Users of Grants.gov will be able to download a copy of the application package, complete it off line, and then upload and submit the application via the Grants.gov site. If an applicant has problems downloading the application forms from Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. ?

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Do not wait until the application deadline to begin the application process through Grants.gov. To use Grants.gov, applicants must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and register in the System for Award Management. Applicants should allow a minimum of five days to complete the System for Award Management registration; registration is required only once but must be periodically renewed. Applicants can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or online at http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform. Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form. After electronic submission of the application, applicants will receive an automatic acknowledgment from Grants.gov that contains a Grants.gov tracking number. ?

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Applications submitted through Grants.gov will be accompanied by three automated receipts of the date and time of submission (the first confirms receipt; the next two confirm that there are no errors with an application submission and that the application has been forwarded to NOAA for further processing). If all notifications are not received, an applicant needs to follow up with both the Grants.gov helpdesk and the NOAA Restoration Center to confirm receipt of submission. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. Applicants should allow themselves sufficient time to submit their application to Grants.gov in advance of the deadline to ensure applications have been submitted successfully. Late applications will not be accepted. ?

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Applications postmarked or provided to a delivery service after 11:59 PM EST January 28, 2015 will not be considered for funding. Applications submitted via the U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. In any event, applications received later than five business days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. Paper applications should be printed on 8.5" x 11" paper (12-point font with 1" margins; reviewers generally prefer 1.5 line spacing) and should not be bound in any manner. ?

If use of Grants.gov is not feasible, a hard copy application must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by January 28, 2016 and sent to: ?

NOAA Restoration Center (F/HC3)
NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation
1315 East West Highway, Rm. 14717
Silver Spring, MD 20910 ?

ATTN: Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Project Applications. ?

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to applications ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below. Applications that best address these criteria will be most competitive.

1. Importance and Applicability (35 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state or local activities. For the NOAA Great Lakes Restoration Regional Partnership Grants competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

- The potential of a proposed Partnership to implement significant Great Lakes habitat restoration projects that offer long-term ecological habitat improvements, and improve the short- and long-term economic condition of an area (e.g., increased fisheries benefits, increased tourism and recreation, etc.) based on the anticipated outcomes of sub awarded projects. This includes the extent to which the Partnership will deliver tangible, specific results that are measurable and relevant to NOAA performance measures and GLRI measures of progress such as acres restored, stream miles opened for fish passage, removal of habitat related BUIs in AOCs, and similar outputs that directly result from on-the-ground restoration. (14 points)

- The potential of the Partnership to provide sustainable, long-lasting benefits of regional significance for coastal habitats, including realistic goals for monitoring and maintenance to ensure longevity of restoration actions. (10 points)

- The extent to which the Partnerships involve multiple partner groups within or outside the applicant group including letters of support from AOC implementation groups (state or local advisory council) for projects anticipated to be funded through the proposed Partnership, focus on ecologically and regionally significant ecosystems, and meet program priorities listed in Section I.B. (10 points)

- Has the proposal included a Data/Information Sharing Plan including descriptions of the types of environmental data and information that will be created over the course of the Partnership; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. (1 point)

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (30 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. In this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the extent to which the applicant has described a realistic and thorough Partnership implementation plan, including:

- The adequacy of proposed strategies for coordination with NOAA throughout all phases of project selection, design, implementation and monitoring, including a plan for the timely submission of project specific progress reports and outputs; (5 points)

- Thorough description of past coastal restoration and conservation project successes, including how your organization represents the capabilities described in section I.B.1, including funds management, project tracking and reporting for multiple simultaneous efforts, project solicitation, and technical expertise; (10 points)

- Thorough description of the process that will be used to identify high-quality projects in AOCs including a process for coordinating with NOAA technical staff on project identification, a proposed time line for implementing sub-awards, initiation of on-the-ground implementation, and post-project evaluation; (10 points)

- The ability to directly conduct and/or oversee project implementation, evaluation, and/or monitoring. (5 points)

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicants (15 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to support the proposed Partnership. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following (5 points each):

- Organization employs staff with administrative skills to manage contracts and financial aspects of a project, and is prepared to adhere to requirements including financial management system requirements at 2 C.F.R. 220.302 (see http://go.usa.gov/caR7V), and reporting under 2 C.F.R. 200.327-.329 (see http://go.usa.gov/caRuj) and the Federal Financial Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6106 Note (see Section VI.C. of this announcement);

- Organization can demonstrate to reviewers experience managing federal and nonfederal funds through a history as a recipient, including limited findings or effective responses to any past audit findings, or demonstrates how it has or will obtain equivalent expertise;

- Organization outlines resources available to the applicant to support and successfully manage overall award requirements, including efficiently managing a significant number of projects simultaneously and the financial and administrative management of sub-awards.

4. Project Costs (15 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the NOAA Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Partnership Grants competition, applications will be evaluated on the following (5 points each):

- Applications will be evaluated for cost-effectiveness by examining the proportion of funds directed to implementing habitat restoration projects itself or through sub-awards and contracts;

- Whether the proposed budget is sufficiently detailed, with appropriate budget breakdown and justification by object class as listed on form SF-424A. Requests for equipment (any single piece of equipment costing $5,000 or more) will be evaluated on how strongly tied the equipment is to achieving on-the-ground habitat restoration and on the adequacy of lease versus buy comparisons in justifying the need for purchase.

- To what extent an applicant can leverage the Federal investment through matching contributions and/or Partnerships, including the amount of cash match available on the national/regional level specifically to support project implementation. NOAA desires cost sharing to leverage funding and to further encourage partnerships among government, industry, and academia. (Any Partnership proposing 1:1 match would receive the full 5 points for this criterion).

5. Outreach and Education (5 points)

NOAA assesses whether the Partnership provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. Community involvement may include: (a) hands-on training and restoration activities undertaken by volunteers; (b) sponsorship from local entities, either through third party in-kind goods and services (earth moving, technical expertise, conservation easements) or cash contributions; (c) public education and outreach associated with restoration activities (media interaction, public meetings, community workshops, etc.); (d) support from state and local governments; and (e) ability to achieve long-term stewardship for restored resources and to generate a community conservation ethic.

For the NOAA Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership Grants competition, applications will be evaluated on the following (2.5 points each):

- The extent to which a public education and outreach component will be part of the Partnership goals to disseminate information on habitat restoration and protection that will increase awareness and transfer knowledge on lessons learned, and to publicly advance the Partnership and its goals and objectives;

- The level of support for the Partnership as demonstrated by other contributing partners, letters of support from these partners, and/or from local entities, state, local or federal governments and/or members of Congress.

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will undergo an initial administrative review to determine if they are timely, eligible, complete, and responsive to this announcement. Proposals that are not in a U.S. Area of Concern are not responsive and will not be reviewed. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured. Next, applications that pass the initial administrative review will be evaluated by three or more merit reviewers with relevant expertise. Top applications will then be part of a panel review process.

The panel may convene in person or by teleconference, video conference, or other electronic means to discuss applications. Prior to the panel discussion, each member of the panel will independently assign a numerical score for each proposal based on the evaluation criteria above. The initial proposal scores will be used to create an interim ranking that will be presented to the panel for discussion. If non-Federal reviewers are used, reviewers may discuss the applications but ratings will be determined on an individual basis, not as a consensus. Based on the same evaluation criteria, panel members will re-evaluate the applications and categorize them as highly responsive, moderately responsive, or not responsive to the evaluation criteria, and the categorical ratings will be compiled. This rating will be presented to the Selecting Official (SO), who is the Restoration Center Division Chief or designee, for funding consideration and will be the primary consideration of the SO in deciding which applications will be recommended to the NOAA Grants Management Division for further processing, pending the application of selection factors below.

C. Selection Factors

The SO anticipates recommending applications for funding in rank order unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following selection factors:

(1) Availability of funding;

(2) Balance/distribution of funds: a) geographically, b) by type of institutions, c) by type

of partners, d) by research areas; e) by project types;

(3) Program priorities and policy factors set out in section I.A. and I.B.;

(4) An applicant's qualifications by demonstrating their experience managing Federal funds, and ability to effectively identify, develop, select, manage, and oversee all phases of coastal conservation and restoration activities with minimal need for guidance from NOAA; and

(5) Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the NOAA Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may consult with NOAA technical staff and the Environmental Protection Agency as appropriate (for example, when funding originated with EPA). NOAA intends to select the fewest applicants necessary to fulfill the program priorities, and funding amounts may vary if multiple applicants are selected.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest scored applications. NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future or to other programs, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized. A competitively reviewed but unfunded proposal may be considered for funding in another fiscal period without repeating the competitive process. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their application was not among those recommended for funding. Unsuccessful applications submitted in hard copy will be kept on file until funding is exhausted and then destroyed.

Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. In addition, the NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.205. In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA

may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities. Applicants should be in compliance with the terms of any existing NOAA grants or cooperative agreements and otherwise eligible to receive Federal awards, or make arrangements satisfactory to the Grants Officer, to be considered for funding under this competition. All reports due should be received and any concerns raised by the agency should be addressed in a timely fashion in order to receive a new award. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.207. In addition, NOAA reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final and there is no right of appeal.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Successful applicants generally will be identified by April 1, 2016. The earliest anticipated start date for projects will be May 1, 2016, dependent on the completion of all NOAA/applicant negotiations, NEPA analysis, and documentation supporting cooperative agreement activities.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the Partnership duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each Partnership will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA staff that will administer these restoration Partnership awards, as described above. Applicants that initiate Partnership activities in expectation of Federal funding do so at their own risk of not receiving funding, and are advised not to begin until a notice of award document is received electronically from the NOAA Grants Management Division in Grants Online, NOAA's online grants management system.

The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, issued by the NOAA Grants Officer electronically through NOAA's Grants Online system.

The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the appropriate business office of the recipient organization. It is available at http://go.usa.gov/SNMR. The Internet Explorer browser should be used with Grants Online.

The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. A current version of this document is available at http://go.usa.gov/hKbj. These terms will be provided in the award package in Grants Online at http://www.ago.noaa.gov.

In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis, and requirements for submitting progress reports.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register Notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf.

2. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, adopted by the Department of Commerce through 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, applies to awards in this program. Refer to http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4.

3. Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for application preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. If one incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, one would do so solely at one's own risk of these costs not being included under the award or of not receiving an award.

Recipients and subrecipients are subject to all applicable Federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to Federal financial assistance awards.

4. Felony and Tax Certifications for Corporations

In accordance with current Federal appropriations law, NOAA will provide a successful corporate applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representative making a certification regarding Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal law.

5. Access to Information

Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information which is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

6. NEPA Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts for individual habitat restoration projects as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/, including NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) implementation regulations. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, safety concerns, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, and impacts to endangered and threatened species.

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary federal, state, and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Applicants are expected to design their projects so that they minimize the potential for adverse impacts to the environment. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposed project(s). The failure to do so shall be grounds for not awarding a grant. Documentation of requests/completion of required environmental authorizations and permits, including Endangered Species Act authorizations, if applicable, should be included in the application package. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they contain sufficient information to allow NOAA staff to conduct a NEPA analysis so that appropriate NEPA documentation, required as part of the application package, can be submitted to the NOAA Grants Management Division along with the recommendation for funding for selected applications.

Applicants proposing restoration activities that cannot be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis or that are not covered by the NOAA Fisheries Community-based Restoration Program Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) will be informed after the peer review stage and may be requested to assist in the preparation of an EA prior to an award being made, or provide for NOAA review a copy of an EA that covers proposed activities if one exists. The CRP PEIS can be found at http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html. If additional information is required after an application is accepted, funds can be withheld by NOAA's Grants Management Division under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental law compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an

assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

7. NOAA’s Data Sharing Policy

Environmental data and information collected and/or created under NOAA grants/ cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security requirements. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) must be made publicly available at the time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions. http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/partners/toolkits/ffo/example_data_sharing_plans_noaa_rc.pdf

C. Reporting

Performance progress and financial reporting for awards in this program are described at 2 C.F.R. 200.327-.329, Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, as referenced in Section VI.B., and may be further described in additional award conditions. Performance progress reports are due semi-annually and cover 6-month periods. Progress reports may be required to be submitted using a specific format for narrative information. Progress reports are to be submitted to the Federal Program Officer via NOAA's Grants Online system and are due no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. A final report is due no later than 90 days after the expiration date of an award. Progress reports may be required to be submitted using a specific format for narrative information. Currently, a fill-form and format for project progress reports can be found on the NOAA Office of Habitat website at: http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html.

In addition, recipients will be required to comply with various EPA reporting measures which will be included in the Special Award Conditions associated with the award. Financial reports cover the periods from October 1 - March 31 (due by April 30) and April 1 - September 30 (due by October 30) throughout the award period and are submitted to the NOAA Grants Management Division via NOAA Grants Online System.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6106 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over $25,000. Complete details on reporting requirements, including those that might be new to applicants under the Federal Financial Assistance Transparency Act, will be provided to successful applicants in the award documentation provided by NOAA in the award package.

VII. Agency Contacts

For further information contact Julie Sims at 734-741-2385 or by email Julie.Sims@noaa.gov or contact Jessica Berrio at 301-427-8654 or by email Jessica.Berrio@noaa.gov. Prospective applicants are invited to contact NOAA staff before submitting an application to discuss whether their project ideas are within the scope of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's objectives and NOAA's mission and goals. Additional information on habitat restoration can be found at www.habitat.noaa.gov/restoration.

VIII. Other Information

The NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Habitat Restoration web site is found at http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/index.html.