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 Program Project Grants under the U.S. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in Areas of Concern

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2012-2003232

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 EST on February 16, 2012. Use of U.S. mail or another 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. 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 protected resources; improve the quality of our water; 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 habitat restoration in U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern (http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/) under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative as anticipated in the President's FY2012 Budget. Applications should be submitted for any project that is to be considered for this funding, even for those projects already submitted as applications to other NOAA competitions. Competition will ensure that the most beneficial restoration projects are selected to realize significant ecological gains and ensure that projects are "shovel-ready." Applications selected for funding through this solicitation will be implemented through a grant or cooperative agreement, with awards dependent upon the amount of funds made available to NOAA for this purpose by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. NOAA anticipates up to $5 million may be available for Great Lakes coastal habitat restoration; typical awards are expected to range between $1 million to $4 million. NOAA will also accept proposals for engineering and design of habitat restoration projects; typical awards are expected to range between $75,000 and $350,000. Funds will be administered by the Great Lakes Region of NOAA's Restoration Center (RC).

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of these NOAA RC Project Grants is to provide federal financial and technical assistance to "ready-to-go" (shovel-ready) projects in U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern that meet NOAA's mission to restore coastal habitats and that support the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy (http://glrc.us/strategy.html).

Successful applications will be those that (1) contribute to the delisting of fish and wildlife related beneficial use impairments in Great Lakes Areas of Concern; (2) yield significant ecological benefits especially benefits that will be robust to potential climate change impacts to the region; (3) are shovel-ready; (4) document community benefits such as improved opportunities for recreation, park use, or other tangible community benefits; and (5) demonstrate collaboration among entities such as public and nonprofit organizations, citizen and watershed groups, industry, corporations and businesses, youth conservation corps, students, landowners, academia, and local government, state, and federal agencies to cooperatively implement coastal habitat restoration projects.

B. Program Priorities

NOAA seeks to support projects that will result in on-the-ground restoration of Great Lakes coastal habitat. The program priorities for this opportunity support NOAA's "Ecosystems" mission goal of "Protect, Restore, and Manage Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources through Ecosystem-Based Management." Projects must be within an U.S. Great Lakes Area of Concern 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). NOAA will accept one proposal per Area of Concern for on the ground restoration. If an Area of Concern is located in multiple states, each state can submit one proposal for that AOC. In addition, the project must be endorsed by the Remedial Action Plan (RAP) implementation group (defined as the state agency responsible for implementing the Area of Concern program or the local public stakeholder group working with the state agency on implementing the RAP) to achieve delisting of an Areas of Concern.

Project should be shovel-ready and are expected to be those where feasibility studies and/or other baseline information required for a design are available, where required consultations and permits, if not in-hand, are either in progress or there is reasonable assurance provided that they can be attained quickly, and where NEPA analysis and other environmental permits and authorizations are finished or can be expeditiously completed, so that a project can be implemented shortly after funding

is made available (see NEPA details below, Section VI. B.2).

NOAA also recognizes the need to continue to have shovel-ready projects ready in future years and anticipates dedicating a small portion of funds to engineering and design of high quality projects that is necessary to achieve an Areas of Concern's delisting targets. NOAA will accept one proposal per Area of Concern for engineering and design. If an Area of Concern is located in multiple states, each state can submit one proposal for that AOC. The proposal must also be endorsed by a RAP implementation group (if more than one proposal is endorsed by the RAP implementation group in an Area of Concern the first proposal received will receive priority); typical awards are expected to range between $75,000 and $350,000. NOAA will fund between one and five engineering and design projects. Projects seeking funds for engineering and design should demonstrate their priority in achieving measurable gains in identified delisting targets, document how this project will lead toward the delisting of fish and wildlife habitat related beneficial use impairments in Great Lakes Areas of Concern, and lead to project implementation within 6 to 18 months.

NOTE: This solicitation will accept two proposals per Area of Concern (each with an endorsement letter from a RAP implementation group): one for an on the ground restoration project and one for an engineering and design project. In cases where an Area of Concern crosses state boundaries, each state can submit one on the ground restoration project and one engineering and design project. An endorsement letter from a RAP implementation group is still required.

Priority consideration will be provided to those project proposals that:

- Work towards achieving measurable gains in identified delisting targets and that document how the project activities will lead to delisting fish and wildlife habitat-related beneficial use impairments (including loss of fish and wildlife habitat, degradation of fish and wildlife populations, and degradation of benthos) in Areas of Concern (http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/). Projects should include a description of the quantifiable targets that have been set and how the proposed project will contribute to those targets;

- Restore coastal wetlands, through shoreline restoration or hydrological reconnection;

- Seek to address the problem of marine debris accumulation in coastal habitats;

- Benefit native diadromous 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, and other challenges that climate change may present;

- Identify the project as an Area of Concern priority based on specific

restoration planning goals, publicly vetted plans, or other priority setting planning documents(e.g. Stage II RAP documents) with appropriate ecological performance metrics and measures;

- Can be completed within 18-24 months as evidenced by having appropriate permitting and environmental compliance documentation (e.g., letters from the State Historic Preservation Office, Army Corps 404 permits, etc);

- Propose sufficient, cost-effective monitoring appropriate to the scope and scale of the project to evaluate a project's benefits; and

- Request funds primarily to implement physical, on-the-ground coastal habitat restoration (as opposed to funds for land acquisition, general program support, overhead and travel).

While the primary objective of the RC is to provide funding and technical expertise to support on-the-ground implementation of coastal habitat restoration projects, NOAA recognizes that accomplishing habitat restoration is a multi-faceted effort involving feasibility studies, project design, engineering services, permitting, construction, legal considerations, oversight, pre- and post-removal monitoring, and education and outreach. Applicants may therefore apply for funding to support a combination of these activities; however, priority will be given to project proposals that feature on-the-ground implementation activities. Habitat restoration engineering and design project proposals should provide information on the project's likelihood to move forward to implementation and the significance of the ecological benefits that would be ultimately achieved as they relate to the program priorities as described above.

Safety is a critical consideration for restoration project implementation. If an application is selected, the grantee must have a written safety plan for all project related activities, including management of volunteers (if applicable). The safety plan should consider safety at the site during and after project construction, and take into account potential safety concerns with regard to the current and future use of the site.

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;

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

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

NOAA anticipates that up to $5 million may be available for Great Lakes coastal habitat restoration. Typical awards for habitat restoration are expected to range between $1 million and $4 million and NOAA will not accept applications requesting less than $1 million or more than $4 million of federal funds under this solicitation for project implementation. Typical awards for engineering and design are expected to range between $75,000 and $350,000 and NOAA will not accept applications requesting less than $75,000 or more than $350,000. The majority of projects selected for funding will be for on the ground restoration projects in Areas of Concern, in addition, a small number (between one and five) of engineering and design projects will also be funded. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all applications. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested for habitat restoration projects by the applicants, the merit and ranking of the applications, and the amount of funds made available.

The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Publication of this document does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or obligate all or any parts of any available funds.

B. Project/Award Period

The earliest anticipated start date for project awards will be July 1, 2012; applicants should consider this date when developing plans for initiating proposed activities. Applicants should plan their projects so that the restoration activities proposed for this funding will be implemented within 24 months of the award start date. Project proposals should include a timeline with discrete benchmarks for completing the project within this award period. NOAA will evaluate project readiness and feasibility for completion within this timeframe. If an application is selected for funding, NOAA has no obligation to provide any additional prospective funding in connection with that award in subsequent years. Any subsequent proposal to continue work on an existing project must be submitted to a competitive process for consideration. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond the approved award period is at the discretion of NOAA and must be requested through NOAA's web-based grants system, Grants Online, at least 60 days in advance of an award's expiration date. In order to qualify for an extension, grant recipients must be in good standing (i.e., up-to-date on all progress and financial reports), demonstrate

progress during the initial award period, and be able to demonstrate that additional time is likely to result in successful completion of the project.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will primarily be funded through a cooperative agreement, as NOAA staff will be substantially involved in aspects of the project. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to: hands-on technical assistance; 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-profits, and commercial (for profit) organizations, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, international 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

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 in-kind goods and services and volunteer labor. 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, but can be described in the budget narrative to demonstrate additional leverage. Applicants are also permitted to apply federally negotiated indirect costs in excess of federal share limits as described in Section IV.E. "Funding Restrictions."

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 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

Projects must be within the Great Lakes basin, within U.S. Great Lakes Area of Concerns, and a support letter from the RAP implementation group must be received with the proposal submitted to grants.gov. Projects outside of U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern will not be considered.

NOAA recognizes that water quality issues can impact habitat restoration efforts. However, this initiative is intended to fund on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that will have significant and tangible ecological impacts. Projects dealing only with water quality improvement measures are not eligible. Ineligible projects include, but are not limited to, 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 stormwater management projects. Projects seeking funds for land acquisition and conservation will also not be considered under this solicitation. However, NOAA anticipates a separate solicitation for projects requesting funds for land acquisition and conservation in the Great Lakes through the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program.

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

Projects must be within the Great Lakes basin, within U.S. Great Lakes Area of Concerns, and a support letter from the RAP implementation group must be received with the proposal submitted to grants.gov. Projects outside of U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern will not be considered.

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B. Content and Form of Application

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:

- Required federal application forms:

    o Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424 (7/03 version or newer)

    o Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: SF-424A

    o Assurances for Non-construction Programs: SF-424B

    o Certification Regarding Lobbying: CD-511

    o Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable);

- Project summary (described below, limit 2 pages);

- Project narrative (described below, limit 10 pages);

- A detailed, narrative budget justification (described below, limit 4 pages);

- A letter of endorsement from the RAP implementation group (defined as the state agency responsible for implementing the Area of Concern program or the local public stakeholder group working with the state agency on implementing the RAP) included with the application (as required to be considered for review);

- Project design plans; and

- Any other relevant supporting documents (limit 20 pages) including:

    o Site photos;

    o Letters of support, especially documenting private landowner or public land manager support;

    o A site location map such as a USGS topographic quadrangle map with site location(s) highlighted;

    o Brief curriculum vitae or resume of primary project personnel (maximum of 1 page per person);

    o A copy of the current, approved, negotiated indirect cost agreement with the federal government, if applicable.

Applications submitted through the Grants.gov website should include a maximum of five (5) files (PDF files only) in addition to the federal application forms:

1) Project summary and narrative (2 pages and 10 pages);

2) Budget justification (4 pages);

3) Letter of endorsement from the RAP implementation group

4) Design plans (pages as needed); and

5) 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."

1. Project Summary (2 pages):

- Applicant Organization

- Project Title

- Site Location: nearest town or watershed and geographic coordinates

- Land Owner: name and address if privately owned, resource agency contact if public land

- On-the-Ground Implementation Start Date (if different from award start date)

- Project Time Line

- Coastal Habitats to Benefit from the Project: habitat(s), organism(s) (species) currently using the project area or expected to return

- Project Scope: briefly list specific tasks to be accomplished with requested funds, and proposed techniques that will be used to implement and monitor the restoration

- Project Outputs/Outcomes - measurement of contribution to achieve habitat-related beneficial use impairment delisting targets including measures such as number of acres restored or stream miles to be made accessible to diadromous fish, tonnage of marine debris removed, and other anticipated long-term ecological outcomes.

- Permits and Approvals: identify permits or regulatory approvals necessary for this project and current status of permits secured, or applications and/or consultations pending

- Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Anticipated

- Overall Project Cost

2. Project Narrative (10 pages):

The project narrative should closely follow the organization of the evaluation criteria (see Section V. A. Evaluation Criteria) for the application to receive a consistent review against competing applications. The body of this narrative description should be no more than 10 pages long (12-point font with 1" margins; reviewers generally prefer 1.5 line spacing), and should give a clear presentation of the proposed work. In general, applications should indicate how the proposed work helps achieve measurable gains in meeting the habitat related beneficial use impairment delisting targets in U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern and how the proposed habitat restoration activities will yield ecological benefits.

Where applicable, the narrative should describe the historic condition of the restoration site and, if applicable, the processes which resulted in degradation of the area and how these processes have been abated to allow for successful restoration. It should list the species currently found in the project site, identify the problems the project will address, describe how the project fits into existing restoration plans, describe short- and long-term objectives and goals, detail the methods for carrying out and monitoring the project, and describe how the project will be managed and maintained in the long-term. Detailed information about the objectives, implementation plan, techniques, anticipated results, and management and monitoring of the project should be included. For example:

- All projects should address beneficial use impairments to loss of fish and wildlife habitat, degradation of fish and wildlife populations, or degradation of benthos in Areas of Concern. Specifically, projects should include information describing how the project will advance the delisting of the Area of Concern or lead to removing the beneficial use impairment. Specifically projects should also include a description of the quantifiable targets that have been set and how the proposed project will contribute to those targets.

- Hydrologic reconnection: Projects may include berm breaching, culvert removal/replacement to allow natural flooding of wetlands, complete removal of levees and dikes or other impediments to historic/natural flow or hydrology, floodplain reconnection, or creation/restoration of off-channel habitats.

- Marine debris removal: Projects proposing to remove debris (solid, man-made items) from the coastal environment may include removal of derelict fishing gear, and other persistent mid- or large- size debris from coastal habitats, Great Lakes tributaries and open lake waters. Proposals should describe the source of the debris and the likelihood of re-accumulation. Applications should also include expected weight of debris removed, in metric tons; and should include the expected footprint of the debris proposed to be removed, in acres or square-feet.

- Fish passage: Fish passage projects include, but are not limited to, fish ladders, by-pass channels, nature-like fishways, dam removals, and culvert removal

and replacement with bottomless arch culverts or bridges. Fish passage project applications should describe the significance of the project to migratory fish populations and historical fish runs in the river, identify the river length that will be restored, the distance to the next upstream blockage, any downstream blockages or seasonal impediments to fish passage, state how the project will meet fish passage guidelines for the area, and identify and provide documentation of support for the project from the landowner/dam owner. Applications should highlight any synergies with other fish passage efforts in the watershed, including fish passage improvements at hydropower dams. Fish passage projects proposing to install fish passage devices or movable control structures should submit a summary management plan that briefly describes who will be in charge of the operation and maintenance of such structures, how they will be operated, and similar details (plan should be included as another attachment not in the "Supplemental Information" attachment). All types of fish passage projects should address any issues and potential control strategies regarding aquatic invasive species (e.g., sea lamprey).

- Diadromous fish habitat: Projects proposing to support native diadromous fish recovery may address land-based sources of pollution (however, see limitations in Section III. C. Other Eligibility Requirements, above), recovery from disturbance, the restoration of natural systems, or seek to control invasive species or otherwise prevent loss of habitat. Projects proposing point source pollution abatement to reduce sediment or nutrient input should have an obvious and direct resource connection, and discuss how impacts to diadromous fish habitat will be quantified and improved and attributed to restoration through reduction of land-based sources of pollution.

- Invasive Species: Projects proposing planting and/or invasive species removal should include information on site preparation and invasive eradication or control methods, the basis for determining species and planting density, a brief discussion about genetic integrity and how that will be addressed, and detail planned maintenance activities including duration of maintenance. Overall activities should be consistent with the Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment document used by the Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program (http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/partners/granteeresources.html).

- Engineering and Design: Projects that wish to be considered for funding related to engineering and design and should include a Project Description (including project location, project justification, project objective(s), project feature(s) and benefits) and a Project Budget justification with cost estimates and an explanation of the engineering and design phase. The engineering and design phase description should include a schedule for a project initiation meeting, submission of a feasibility report and periodic design reviews (e.g., 30%, 95% and final review). Projects seeking funds for engineering and design should demonstrate their priority in achieving measurable gains in identified delisting targets, document how this project will lead toward the delisting of fish and wildlife habitat related beneficial use impairments in Areas of Concern, and lead to project implementation within 6 to 18 months.

Other coastal restoration project types within an Area of Concern and with an

endorsement letter from a RAP implementation group will also be considered, particularly those that most strongly support NOAA's mission and goals. If known, the applicant should state the level of NOAA involvement in, and/or support for the project and include contact information of relevant NOAA staff.

To ensure a basic level of success, all projects must propose evaluation parameters for ecological aspects of the project, and work with NOAA during project negotiation to ensure that the proposed parameters are adequate and meaningful. Evaluation parameters should include targets for those parameters within the award period, and a plan to measure the parameters after project implementation. To evaluate a basic level of ecological success, NOAA expects the minimum level of short term evaluation parameters to include one or more of the following: acres restored; stream miles opened for fish passage; tonnage of marine debris removed; or another, similar measure that describes the significance of the proposed actions.

Because climate change is anticipated to have significant effects on the Great Lakes, project goals and strategies should also be designed to be viable despite climate change and its potential impacts. Projects should demonstrate that climate change information has been or will be considered in the project design. Examples of vulnerabilities that may need to be addressed in project design include: is the project area expected to remain suitable for the species/ habitats of interest; if replanting is to be done, will the species/cultivars used be appropriate for future as well as current conditions; do engineering designs account for plausible changes in temperature, precipitation (type, intensity, and timing), water level, flooding, ice cover, and sedimentation as a result of climate change; or will the proposed connectivity design still work in a changed climate.

Priority will be given to projects that can measure their impact on the environment in both the short and long-term. Examples of long-term performance evaluation include, but are not limited to: percentage of habitat-related beneficial use impairment delisting target met; improved fish habitat quality; increased abundance of target species; impact on status of listed species and species of concern; changes in recreational angling and/or property value. Those projects that identify specific quantifiable targets, achievable during the award period, are likely to score higher. Applicants who propose sufficient, cost-effective monitoring appropriate to the scope and scale of the project to evaluate a project's benefits are also likely to score higher, as will those that have funding in place to support long-term monitoring beyond the award period. NOAA may choose to add additional funds to an award, or increase the period of performance for successful applicants whose projects are identified as suitable for conducting more in-depth, long-term monitoring. In addition, NOAA may add additional funds to design and engineering projects that have developed components of a monitoring plan that will be implemented in the next phase of activities of the project.

To protect the federal investment, a letter of commitment from the landowner should be provided for projects on private land, or from relevant resource agency personnel for projects on public, permanently protected land. This letter should provide assurance that the project will be maintained for its intended purpose.

Documentation of plans for long-term project maintenance should also be included.

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicants that are seeking NOAA federal funding. Applications should provide enough detail for NOAA to make a NEPA determination (see NEPA details below, Section VI. B. 2). For projects with NEPA documents completed or under development, please indicate the status and level of NEPA review (CE, EA, EIS), lead federal agency, contact at the agency, and where public drafts of the document are available.

3. Budget Justification (4 pages):

The narrative budget justification must include a detailed breakdown by category of cost (object class) separated into federal and non-federal shares 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 on the SF-424A. Applicants are encouraged to include a budget table to further clarify the cost breakdown. Applications will be evaluated for cost-effectiveness by examining the proportion of funds directed to on-the-ground restoration/monitoring activities compared with that to be used for general program support. Requests for equipment (any single piece of equipment costing $5,000 or more) should be strongly tied to achieving on-the-ground habitat restoration and a comparison with rental costs must be included to justify the need to purchase.

If funding will be used to complete part of a larger project, a budget overview for the entire project should be provided to allow the Selecting Official (SO) to make an informed determination of a project's readiness. A narrative budget justification should indicate if the project has been submitted for funding consideration elsewhere, what amount has been requested or secured from other sources, and whether the funds requested/secured are federal or non-federal. The NOAA Grants Management Division will review budget information for recommended applications to determine if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and realistic.

4. A letter from the RAP implementation group indicating their endorsement of the project in the particular Area of Concern.

5. Other Application Submission Information

Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NOAA as to the relative merits of the project 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 or contact Julie Sims (Julie.Sims@noaa.gov) or call 734-741-2385 for assistance.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 PM EST on February 16, 2012. Use of U.S. mail or another 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. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. If an applicant does not have internet access, 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 February 16, 2012 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. In any event, applications received later than 5 business days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted for review. See Section IV. F 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 19 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html.

E. Funding Restrictions

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable. Incurring pre-award costs before the NOAA Grants Management Division provides an award document is at the applicant's own risk. Typically, the earliest date for receipt of awards is expected to be July 1, 2012.

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. For this solicitation, the federal share of the indirect costs should not exceed the lesser of either the indirect costs the applicant would be entitled to if the negotiated federal indirect cost rate were used or 25 percent of the federal direct costs proposed. For those situations in which the use

of the applicant's indirect cost rate would result in indirect costs greater than 25 percent of the federal direct costs, the difference may be counted as the non-federal share.

A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect cost agreement with the federal government should be included with the application as part of the Supplemental Information (Sec. IV. B Content and Form of Application Submission). If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate and plans to seek reimbursement for indirect costs, documentation necessary to establish a rate must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award.

F. Other Submission Requirements

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.

Do not wait until the application deadline to begin the application process through Grants.gov. To use Grants.gov, applicants must have a DUNS number and register in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR). Applicants should allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration; registration is required only once. After electronic submission of the application, applicants will receive an automatic acknowledgment from Grants.gov that contains a Grants.gov tracking number.

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 RC 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, as the deadline for submission cannot be extended. NOAA may request that you provide original signatures on forms at a later date.

If an applicant does not have internet access, a hard copy application must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by 11:59 PM EST on February 16, 2012 and sent to:

NOAA Restoration Center (F/HC3)
NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation
1315 East West Highway, Rm. 15829B
Silver Spring, MD 20910
ATTN: Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Project Applications.

Applications postmarked or provided to a delivery service after 11:59 PM EST February 16, 2012 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 5 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. V. Application Review Information

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. Engineering and design project proposals should address the evaluation criteria below to the best of their ability including anticipated outcomes once restoration work is complete.

1. Importance and Applicability (30 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 RC Project Grants competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

-The potential of the project to restore, protect, conserve or enhance coastal habitat resulting in direct ecological benefits or otherwise maximizing benefits for coastal resources. This includes making measurable gain towards achieving delisting of fish and wildlife habitat-related beneficial use impairments (including loss of fish and wildlife habitat, degradation of fish and wildlife populations, and degradation of

benthos) in Areas of Concern (http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/) as indicated in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan. Projects should include a description of the quantifiable targets that have been set and how the proposed project will contribute to those targets. (10 points)

-The significance of the project in its area of impact or amount of restored habitat in context with the local environment, i.e. small projects in urban areas could score the same or more points than larger projects in more intact areas.(6 points)

-The extent to which the project is expected to deliver specific, tangible results that tie back to relevant NOAA performance measures (e.g. acres, stream miles, tonnage, etc.).(6 points)

-The extent to which the project is an Area of Concern priority based on specific restoration planning goals, publicly vetted plans, or other priority setting planning documents (e.g. State II RAP documents) with appropriate ecological performance metrics and measures.(8 points)

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (35 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. For the NOAA RC Project Grants competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

-The extent to which the proposal completely describes the restoration objective and provides sufficiently detailed project information so that NOAA's NEPA analysis can be completed and on-the-ground activities can begin soon after the start date. (6 points)

-The extent to which the applicant has described a realistic implementation plan that is likely to be fully achievable within 18-24 months, including the ability to yield minimum monitoring data.(6 points)

-The overall technical feasibility of the project from an ecological and engineering perspective, including whether the proposed approach is technically sound, safe, and uses appropriate methods and personnel. This includes the likelihood that a project is able to achieve stated project goals and objectives.(6 points)

-The extent to which the project can measure progress towards broad project goals and evaluate success across clearly identified, measurable objectives using adequate and meaningful pre- and post-monitoring of suggested parameters within the award period.(6 points)

-The degree to which the project features self-sustaining restoration techniques or, if necessary, includes long-term management of the restored resource. (6 points)

-The degree to which the landowner has provided assurance of support and

dedication to protecting the project for its useful life (letter of support, conservation easement, or significant financial investment).(5 points)

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicants(10 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the proposed work. For the NOAA RC Project Grants competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

-The capacity/knowledge of the applicant and associated project personnel to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as indicated by the qualifications and past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in designing, implementing and effectively managing and overseeing projects that restore coastal habitats. Projects that require engineering decision making should highlight the qualifications and experience of the designer/engineer. Examples of projects similar in scope and nature that have been successfully completed by the implementation team are encouraged.(5 points)

-The facilities/equipment and/or administrative resources and capabilities available to the applicant, or that will be secured to support and successfully manage the restoration work and grant responsibilities.(5 points)

4. Project Costs(20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the NOAA RC Project Grants competition, applications will be evaluated on the following:

-The extent to which funds will be dedicated to project implementation compared to the percentage for general program support such as administration, salaries, overhead and travel. Proposals should contain a detailed breakdown of personnel hours/costs and contractual hours/costs by task so the extent to which costs are directly related to on-the-ground restoration activities can be assessed.(5 points)

-Whether the proposed budget is sufficiently detailed, with appropriate budget breakdown and justification of federal and any non-federal shares 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.(5 points)

-The ability of the applicant to demonstrate that a significant benefit will be generated for a reasonable cost. If funding will be used to complete part of a larger project, a budget overview for the entire project should be provided to allow the Selecting Official to make an informed determination of a project's readiness, need for funding, and cost-benefit ratio.(5 points)

-The overall leverage of NOAA funds anticipated, including any other federal

funding anticipated or awarded and the amount and type (e.g. cash, in-kind) of the official non-federal match commitment to the requested NOAA funding. NOAA encourages a non-federal cost-sharing at a 1:1 level to leverage funding or other resources, improve cost-effectiveness, and encourage partnerships. The extent to which applicants provide documentation that confirms acceptable secured non-federal match available within the proposed project period will be considered.(5 points)

5. Outreach and Education(5 points)

NOAA assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NOAA RC Project Grants competition, applications will be evaluated on the following:

-Public outreach as it relates to the proposed project, including plans to disseminate information on project goals, results, and project partners; sources of funding and other support provided, such as the involvement of project partners; and the potential for the proposed project to encourage future restoration and protection of coastal habitats or complement other local restoration or conservation activities.(5 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will undergo an initial administrative review to determine if they are eligible and complete. Proposals that are not in a U.S. Area of Concern, and do not have a letter of endorsement from a RAP implementation group will not be reviewed. Eligible applications will then undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process to determine how well they meet the stated aims of this solicitation and the mission and goals of NOAA.

Eligible applications for habitat restoration projects will be evaluated by at least three individual technical reviewers according to the criteria and weights described in this solicitation. Each reviewer will independently evaluate each project and provide an individual score. No consensus advice will be provided by these reviewers. Applications will likely be subject to a subsequent panel review. If a panel review is not convened, the application ranking, technical review comments and scores will be provided to the Selecting Official (SO). If a panel is convened, the FFO, application ranking, top ranked applications, and technical review comments and scores will be provided to a panel whose members will not have participated as technical reviewers. The panel will be comprised of federal employees, and may convene in person or by teleconference, video conference or other electronic means to discuss applications and consider technical reviewer comments. Prior to the panel discussion, each member of the panel will independently assign a numerical rating between 1 and 4 for each application according to the following scale:

1 - Marginal; application partially meets some of the evaluation criteria

(Section V.A) but does not address program priorities outlined in the FFO.

2 - Fair; application adequately meets some of the evaluation criteria (Section V.A) and sufficiently addresses a program priority outlined in the FFO.

3 - Good; application thoroughly meets much of the evaluation criteria (Section V.A) and addresses program priorities outlined in the FFO.

4 - Excellent; application fully meets most of the evaluation criteria (Section V.A) and exceptionally addresses program priorities outlined in the FFO.

Panel member scores will be averaged and an interim ranking will result which will be presented to the panel for discussion, with the goal of reaching consensus on the applications to be recommended for funding. After discussing the applications, panelists will again assign a numerical rating between 1 and 4 (as described above) for each application, scores will be averaged, and a final project ranking developed. The final ranking from the panel will be presented to the SO and should be the primary consideration by the SO in deciding which applications will be recommended to NOAA's Grants Management Division.

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. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies;

4. Program priorities and policy factors set out in section I.A. and I.B.;

5. An applicant's prior award performance;

6. Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups; and

7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to NOAA's Grants Management Division.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest scored applications. 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 the selection process has been validated and approved by the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Law Division and then destroyed.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Successful applicants generally will be identified 90-120 days after the close of this solicitation. The earliest anticipated start date for projects will be July 1, 2012, dependent on the completion of all NOAA/applicant negotiations, NEPA analysis, and documentation supporting cooperative agreement activities.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants may be asked to modify work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, NOAA's Grants Management Division, and NOAA staff that will administer these restoration grants. Projects should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until a notice of award document is received electronically from the NOAA Grants Management Division in Grants Online, NOAA's online grants management system.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2010), http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl, http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Administrative Requirements.

Successful applicants that accept a NOAA award under this solicitation will be bound by Department of Commerce standard terms and conditions. This document will be provided in the award package in Grants Online, NOAA's online grants management system.

In addition, award documents provided by NOAA's Grants Management Division in the Grants Online award package may contain special award conditions limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements to fulfill, and/or stating other compliance requirements for

the award as applicable, such as requirements for submitting progress reports.

2. NEPA Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applications that are seeking NOAA funding for projects. 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. 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 Assessment (PEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Supplemental PEA and FONSI 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 PEA and FONSI can be found at http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/partners/granteeresources.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.

C. Reporting

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/partners/granteeresources.html. In addition, grantees 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 of 2006 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.

New Reporting Requirement: 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 on the World Wide Web at http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/restoration/index.html

VIII. Other Information

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696) are applicable to this solicitation.

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for preparation costs if programs fail to receive funding or are canceled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

Prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are not required by the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553 (a) (2)) or by any other law for this document concerning grants, benefits, and contracts. Because notice and opportunity for comment are not required pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553 or any other law, the analytical requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) are not applicable. Therefore, a regulatory flexibility analysis has not been prepared. This action has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866 (Regulatory Impact Review). The use of the standard NOAA grant application package referred to in this notice involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Forms 424, 424A, 424B, SF-LLL, and CD-346 have been approved by OMB under the respective control numbers 0348-0043, 0348-0044, 0348-0040, 0348-0046, and 0605-0001. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act, unless that collection displays a currently valid OMB control number.

END