ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Ocean Service (NOS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Land Acquisition and Construction Program for Fiscal Year 2015

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NOS-OCRM-2015-2004232

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.420, Coastal Zone Management Estuarine Research Reserves

Dates: Complete grant applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, January 16, 2015.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS or System) consists of estuarine areas of the United States and its territories designated and managed for research and educational purposes. Each reserve within the system is chosen to represent a different bio-geographic region and to include a variety of ecosystem types in accordance with the classification scheme of the national program as presented in 15 CFR § 921. By funding designated reserve agencies and universities to conduct land acquisition and construction projects that support the NERRS purpose, NOAA will strengthen protection of key land and water areas, enhance long-term protection of the habitats for research and education, and provide for facility and exhibit construction that meet the highest sustainable design standards possible.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

NOAA provides funding to designated reserve agencies for acquiring additional property interests and for construction projects that serve to strengthen protection of reserve key land and water habitats; to enhance long-term protection of the habitats for research and education; and provide for facility and exhibit construction. Each reserve supports a wide range of beneficial uses beneficial to ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic values which are dependent upon the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. The sites provide habitats for a wide range of ecologically and commercially important species of fish, shellfish, birds, and other aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. Each reserve has been designed to ensure its effectiveness as a conservation unit and as a site for long-term research and monitoring. In maintaining their effectiveness, the reserves may find it necessary to expand their boundaries through strategically planned land acquisitions and/or to develop or enhance their reserve facilities to meet the demands of research, monitoring, and education program objectives.

B. Program Priorities

Projects eligible for funding must be identified in construction and/or acquisition plans within current NOAA approved Reserve management plans in compliance with 15 CFR § 921.13. Acquisition projects that involve the potential to invoke eminent domain are not eligible for funding. Construction projects must occur on land under adequate state control either through direct state ownership or pursuant to a long-term lease between the reserve and the land owner. See also the clarification on the meaning of adequate state control set out at 15 CFR § 921.30(d). Construction and/or acquisition plans require the following information:

1. A construction plan must include general descriptions of proposed projects and general cost estimates. Sufficient information should be provided for both major and minor proposed construction projects to clearly articulate requirements in the initial phase of the project. See 15 CFR § 921.13(a)(6).

2. An acquisition plan must identify the ecologically key land and water areas of the Reserve, ranks these areas according to their relative importance, describes the methods of acquisition, and includes a strategy for establishing adequate long-term state control over these areas sufficient to provide protection for Reserve resources to ensure a stable environment for research.

With the exception of lands to be acquired for reserve facility construction, priority will be given to projects that increase ecosystem resiliency and factor anticipated climate change effects. With regard to acquisition, priority will be given to those projects that address the following adaptation principles: (i) connecting habitats to facilitate for habitat and species migrations; (ii) reducing existing stressors that hinder the ability of species or ecosystems to withstand climatic events; (iii) protecting key ecosystem features, e.g. keystone species or habitats; and (iv) maintaining ecosystem diversity. With regard to construction projects, priority will be given to core facilities (National Estuarine Research Reserve Standard Reserve 2004) that are proposed in already disturbed areas outside of the 100 year flood zone and minimally disrupt the environment, conserve and protect water resources, incorporate sustainable design principles (National Estuarine Research Reserve Sustainable Design Guidelines), optimize energy performance and reduce the Reserve's overall carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions. Core facilities are those facilities that support the primary mission and goals of the reserve and should be located near, and/or within, the Reserve boundary, preferably in the designated buffer area of the Reserve.

Eligible costs associated with the priorities above include funds for administrative purposes related to acquisition and/or facility construction per 15 CFR § 921.81. Facility and acquisition planning alone may not constitute a proposal, but planning and administrative tasks may constitute up to 20% of facility and/or acquisition costs within the proposal. These planning efforts may address, among other things, evaluation of sustainable features appropriate for Reserve future facility needs and associated maintenance.

Construction or acquisition projects identified in the approved management plan, and small scale habitat restoration activities associated with construction and acquisition, are eligible for funding per 15 CFR § 921.31. Per this announcement, funding may be proposed for preserving historic or culturally significant structures, preparing a site for facility construction or acquisition, installing an ecological demonstration project, restoring habitat impacted by construction activities, or for minor restoration or enhancement activities to improve properties being acquired (e.g., clearing of invasive species or hydrologic obstructions). No more than 10% of the total budget of the project (federal and matching share combined) may be applied to restoration activities associated with construction or acquisition projects.

C. Program Authority

Statutory authority for the NERRS Land Acquisition and Construction Program is set out under Section 1461(e)(1)(A) of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) (16 U.S.C. 1461(e)(1)(A)).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

This funding opportunity announces that NOAA anticipates approximately $1.9 million will be available to designated reserve agencies or universities for construction and acquisition projects in fiscal year 2015, contingent upon appropriations from Congress. Depending on the availability of funds, NOAA anticipates funding approximately 2-10 projects. It is anticipated that the awards will run for up to three years and that projects will range between $20,000 and $1 million.

B. Project/Award Period

The performance period for FY 2015-funded projects cannot exceed 36 months.

Applicants may submit applications covering a 12 to 36- month project period with an anticipated start date(s) as early as July 1, 2015 or as late as November 1, 2015. Start dates must begin on the first of the month.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

The funding instrument is a grant to the individual applicant.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are NERRS lead state agencies or universities in coastal states. Eligible applicants should meet all requirements as stated in the NERRS regulations 15 C.F.R. Part 921, which are available online at http://www.nerrs.noaa.gov/BGDefault.aspx?ID=64.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

The amount of federal funds requested must be matched by the applicant as follows: 30 percent total project match for construction awards and 50 percent total project match for land acquisition awards. Cash or in-kind contributions directly benefiting the project may be used to satisfy the matching requirements. If using Reserve land acquisition banked match, a list of the banked match, indicating when the land was banked, must be included with the application. Applicants must identify all match sources and amounts equal to that requested above. Projects without match or with highly speculative match will not be considered. (See Section V.A of this federal funding opportunity (FFO)

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Eligible projects are those indicated in approved management plans per 15 CFR§ 921.31. Construction projects must be proposed on land under adequate state control.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available online at www.grants.gov (Grants.gov). If an applicant does not have Internet access, application packages or program information shall be requested from

the competition manager:

Nina Garfield, Office for Coastal Management, NOAA National Ocean Services, 1305 East West highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or via telephone number 301-563-1171, or fax 301-713-4012, or via email at Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application

All application packages must contain the following components:

1. Federal forms

Applicants must complete all necessary federal financial assistance forms:

- (Form SF-424 (for all projects),
- Forms SF-424A and SF-424B (for non-construction projects),
- Forms SF-424C and SF-424D (for construction projects), and
- Form CD-511 (for all projects).

Forms may be accessed through the Grants.gov website. In addition and as applicable, applicants must submit an Indirect Cost Rate Agreement.

2. Title page (Proposal Cover Sheet)

a. Project Title

b. Complete contact information for the Principal Investigator and Financial Representative

c. Start and end dates of proposed project

d. Identify the following aspects of the project including the i) region and specific area where the project will take place, ii) partners or technical networks that will be leveraged or created, if applicable; and iii) identification of the programmatic priority or priorities identified in the NERR management plan and/or NERRS strategic plan applicable to the project

e. Funding type (grant)

f. Amount of funding requested

3. Project summary. Provide a one to two-page summary of the proposed project. The summary must contain the following sections:

a. Project name/title

b. Funding requested

c. Primary contact (name, title, address, phone, fax, email)

d. Recipient institution

e. Principal and other investigators (names, affiliated institutions or agencies)

f. Brief project summary including objectives, intended benefits, and, if applicable, a short description of partners and professional or technical networks that will be leveraged or created.

4. Project Description.

All project descriptions (proposals) must be between 3 and 15 pages with one inch margins and 12 point font. Schematics such as maps, surveys, floor plans, etc. may be included as appendices that do not count against the 15 page limit. Applicants must complete all necessary federal financial assistance forms (SF-424, SF-424A (for non-construction), SF-424B (for non-construction), SF-424C (for construction), SF-424D (for construction), CD-511, and if applicable, Indirect Cost Rate Agreement). Forms must be accessed through the Grants.gov website. The proposals must include the following sections:

a. Goal and Objective(s). Describe in the narrative the specific project goals and objectives to be achieved. Goals and objectives must be specific for each year of the work plan presented. Recipients will be required to submit semi-annual progress reports in which progress against these goals and objectives will be reported.

b. Background. Provide sufficient background information for NOAA and non-NOAA reviewers to independently assess the significance of the proposed project. Summarize the problem, gap or need that the proposal addresses, the relationship of the proposed work to other regional efforts, the importance of the project to the Reserve including specific reference and page number(s) within the current NOAA approved reserve management plan, and any reference to the project in a CZMA Section 312 evaluation. In addition, identify NOAA/NERRS funds provided for construction or acquisition from FY08-FY14 with a summary of progress.

c. Approach. Provide a work plan that: identifies specific tasks to be accomplished; explains the technical approach (including quality assurance) needed to accomplish the tasks; identifies the roles of partners and cooperators; and identifies potential obstacles to successful completion of the goals and objectives. The description should align with budget categories and fully explain the scope of work including preparatory work, planning, design elements, sustainable features, etc. The description should address how the project will be resilient to climate change and/or reflect climate change related outreach. For facility retrofits, a description of the cost savings and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of the sustainable design features should be included. See Section B. Program Priorities of this FFO. The work plan must clearly address data management requirements, and the steps to be taken to achieve efficient and effective data access and archive that is compliant with federal regulations. If the project includes federal partners, the roles and responsibilities of the federal partners must be clearly identified.

Provide detailed information on environmental concerns related to the activities to be conducted and locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected during and after the construction process (e.g., a description of the construction footprint and associated short and long-term impacts, the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). Note that as part of the National Environmental Policy Act, this information will be reviewed to determine whether a Categorical Exclusion or

Environmental Assessment is required. If an assessment is required, applicants will be required to support development of the assessment and cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of the proposal

d. Milestone Schedule. Display time lines for major tasks, target milestones for important intermediate and final products, and key project outcomes.

e. Project Budget. Provide a budget description including federal and non-federal costs per object class category identified in the NOAA grants package (Forms SF 424-A and/or C) and a brief narrative justification of the budget including the source of match (50% for acquisition and 30% for construction). Administrative and/or planning costs up to 20% of the federal portion of the budget are allowable. Restoration costs up to 10% of the proposed project are allowed for restoration or enhancement associated with the project (See Section I.B of this FFO). Cost categories for construction include: project planning and design; administrative and legal expenses; architectural and engineering costs; project inspection fees; site work; demolition and removal costs; equipment costs; and other construction tasks breakdown such as structural (i.e., windows, doors, roofing, flooring), carpentry, plumbing, heating, electrical. For acquisition costs: personnel involved in the project; land acquisition fees; travel, equipment, supplies, and contractual. A detailed budget narrative that includes additional information regarding the use of funds for budget categories found in Form SF-424 must be included in an appendix. In this appendix, the budget narrative also shall clearly identify the cost of separable elements of the proposed work and shall identify the elements of the project that the cooperator would recommend for revision or elimination if sufficient funding is not available for all proposed activities. For any equipment, a description of the item and associated costs is required, including a description of how it will be used in the project.

The budget narrative must also provide, to the extent possible, detailed information on travel, including costs, a description of anticipated travel, destinations, the number of travelers, and a justification of how the requested travel is directly relevant to the successful completion of the project. If actual trip details are unknown, applicants must state the basis

for the proposed travel charges. Applicants must allocate travel funds for any coordination meetings at regional or national levels.

All travel must comply with the requirements of the Fly America Act and foreign travel must receive prior written approval, and therefore, must be included in the proposal to avoid having to request prior approval after the project starts. Applicants may factor in travel costs for participation in an annual NOAA Grants Management Division workshop for recipients.

5. Appendices

The following information should be included as appendices to the project description. Only material that is submitted as a single package will be reviewed. Appendices must be limited to materials that directly support the main body of the proposal (for example, detailed budget information, letters of collaboration, resumes, references, lists of data sources, and maps).

a. Mandatory detailed budget information, for example separate Forms SF-424As for each sub-award and contract. Information must include the name and location (city, state, and Congressional district) of the entity receiving the funds and the location of the primary place of performance under the contract or sub-award.

b. Resumes. Provide resumes of the Principal Investigator for the project and other key personnel critical to the success of the project that address qualifications relevant to conducting the proposed work. Please limit resumes to a maximum of two pages for each key investigator.

c. Data Sharing Plan. 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 years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or by security requirements.

1. A Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the project narrative. A typical plan may include the types of environmental data and information to be created during the course of the project; 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, data, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criteria, Item 1 -- Importance and/or Relevance and Applicability of Proposed Project to the Mission Goals.

2. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) will be made publicly available at time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data.

3. 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.

PIs must indicate how and when they have made their data accessible and usable by the community in the past.

NOAA's Administrative Order on the Management of Environmental Data Management and Information is available under:
http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_212/212-15.html

4. If no environmental data and information will be collected and or created under

this grant, indicate this within the Project Narrative to satisfy the data sharing requirement.

d. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) -- Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts of projects or proposals seeking funding from NOAA.

After the application is submitted, NOAA may require additional information to fulfill NEPA and other compliance requirements. If NOAA determines that an environmental assessment is required, applicants may also be requested to assist in drafting the assessment. Applicants may also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

The applicants selected for funding must complete sections A, B, C, D, E, and F of the Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Federal Financial Assistance Applicants (OMB Approval No.: 0648-0538) http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf to provide detailed information on the activities

to be conducted, 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, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems).Sections G, and H are not required with the initial application because NOAA anticipates that most projects funded through this competition would not have impacts related to damage assessment and restoration or fisheries sampling and analysis.

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, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/ceq_regulations/regulations.html or http://www.csc.noaa.gov/funding/_pdf/CEQ%20Regulations%20for%20Implementing%20the%20Procedural%20Provisions%20of%20NEPA.pdf

e. Paperwork Reduction Act -- This collection of information contains requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Forms SF-424, SF-424A, 424B, and SF-LLL and CD-346 has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under control numbers 0348-0040, 0348-0044, 0348-0043, 0348-0046 and 0605-0001. The NEPA Questionnaire is approved by OMB control number: 0648-0538.

This collection is further approved by OMB under control number:

NERRS – 0648-0121

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 requirements of the PRA unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Complete grant applications packages must be received and validated by Grants.gov, postmarked, or provided to a delivery service on or before 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard

Time, January 16, 2015 . For application packages submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication by Grants.gov will be the basis of determining timeliness.. Application packages received after the submission deadline will not be reviewed or considered.

Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to two business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected/returned to the sender without further consideration. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Funding applications under this program are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Applicants should contact their State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the State's processes under EO 12372. To assist the applicant, the names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's website.
http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

E. Funding Restrictions

Awards will contain special award conditions that recipients must meet as a term of accepting the grant. If an applicant incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, they do so at their own risk of these costs not being included under the award. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation or other project costs if this program fails to receive funding or is cancelled because of other agency priorities.

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are limited to costs necessary and reasonable to achieve the approved goals and objectives and are determined by reference to relevant Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements. Please note that by December 26, 2014, DOC anticipates adopting the OMB Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (OMB Uniform Requirements), which is codified at 2 C.F.R. Part 200. The OMB Uniform Guidance supersedes and streamlines requirements from previous OMB circulars, including OMB Circulars A-122, "Cost Principles for Nonprofit Organizations"; A-21, "Cost Principles for Education Institutions"; and A-87, "Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments." Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable."

Applicants requesting indirect costs are required to submit a copy of their current and signed indirect cost rate agreement with their application package.

If an award recipient has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a Federal agency, the negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions require that recipients within 90 days of the award start date, submit to the address listed below documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review.

Lamar Revis, Grants Officer

NOAA Grants Management Division

1325 East West Highway

9th Floor

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

F. Other Submission Requirements

The standard NOAA funding application package is available at www.grants.gov (Grants.gov) and application packages, including all letters of collaboration, shall be submitted through the apply function on Grants.gov. Applicants must register with Grants.gov before any application materials can be submitted. To use Grants.gov, applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and be registered in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR). Allow a minimum of five days to complete the CCR registration. (Note: Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form.). An organization's one time registration process may take up to three weeks to complete so allow sufficient time to ensure applications are submitted before the closing date. The Grants.gov site contains the application package (forms) and submission directions, and is also where the completed application is submitted.

The Grants.gov site contains directions for submitting an application, the application package (forms), and is also where the completed application is submitted. Applicants using Grants.gov must locate the downloadable application package for this solicitation by the Funding Opportunity Number or the CFDA number (11.420). Applicants will be able to download a copy of the application package, complete it offline, and then upload and submit the application via the Grants.gov site.

After electronic submission of the application through Grants.gov, the person submitting the application will receive within the next 24 to 48 hours two email messages from Grants.gov updating them on the progress of their application. The first email will confirm receipt of the application by the Grants.gov system, and the second will indicate that the application has either been successfully validated by the system before transmission to the grantor agency or has been rejected because of errors. After the application has been validated, this same person will receive a third email when the application has been downloaded by the Federal agency.

If an applicant does not have Internet access, one set of originals (signed) and an electronic copy (on CD or DVD) of the proposals and related forms shall be mailed to the attention of Nina Garfield, Office for Coastal Management, NOAA National Ocean Service, 1305 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

No email or fax copies will be accepted. Proposal application packages, including all letters of collaborations and any letters of support, shall be submitted together in one package.

Application packages, including any letters of collaboration, shall be submitted through the apply function on Grants.gov. The standard NOAA funding application package is available at www.grants.gov. Potential funding applicants must register with Grants.gov before any application materials can be submitted. An organization's one time registration process may take up to three weeks to complete so allow sufficient time to ensure applications are submitted before the closing date. The Grants.gov site contains directions for submitting an application, the application package (forms), and is also where the completed application is submitted.

If an applicant does not have Internet access, one set of originals (signed) and an electronic copy (on CD or DVD) of the proposals and related forms shall be mailed to the attention:. NOS/OCM

Nina Garfield

1305 East West Highway, room 10650

Silver Spring, MD 20910

If possible submit applications electronically via Grants.gov.

No email or fax copies will be accepted. Application packages, including all letters of collaborations and any letters of support, shall be submitted together in one package.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to proposals ranging from 0-100 points based on the following evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below. Applications that address the issues contained in these criteria are likely to be more competitive.

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the program goals (30 percent): This criterion is used to ascertain whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this competition, this includes whether this project is identified as a priority in the approved reserve management plan or the last CZMA Section 312 evaluation of the reserve. Planned core facilities projects are given a higher score than those facilities not deemed as core. This criterion is used to evaluate whether the project is appropriate under the definition of acquisition (as described in Section 1461 (e)(A)(i) of Section 315 of the CZMA (16 U.S.C. § 1461(e)(A)(i)), which states that funding will be provided for purposes of acquiring such lands and waters, and any property interests therein, as are necessary to ensure the appropriate long-term management of an area as a national estuarine reserve) and/or construction (construction or enhancement of facilities or exhibits, or associated infrastructure (as defined in Section I of this FFO). A higher score will be given to projects clearly within the definitions. Those projects outside of the definition will rank lower (e.g., projects for routine structural maintenance, vessels used as floating classrooms, and boats capable of being routinely transported from land to water are outside the definition and would rate lower).

2. Technical/scientific merit (30 percent): This criterion is used to assess whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For this competition, this criterion is used to assess the opportunity gained by funding this project now and/or lost by not funding it now (e.g., availability of match or additional construction or land acquisition funds; option on a

parcel of land; protection of a critical resource). Projects of greater immediacy are given a higher score. This criterion relates to whether the applicant is able to undertake the project. This criterion is used to determine how far along the recipient is in the acquisition process (e.g., contact with landowners, negotiations, title options) or the planning process for facilities construction (plans, design, etc.). Projects that can reasonably be expected to be completed during the proposed project award period will score higher. For acquisition projects, the type of acquisition being proposed (fee-simple, easement, etc.) should provide adequate state control of the property to be included in the reserve and increase the resiliency of the reserve ecosystem. Construction projects must demonstrate minimal impact to sensitive resources and incorporate sustainable features and/or construction techniques in core facilities. These include efforts to: optimize energy performance; protect and conserve water; enhance indoor environmental quality; or reduce the environmental impacts of materials. Examples of sustainable efforts:

Optimize Energy Performance

The proposed project (a) improves energy efficiency and reduces greenhouse gas emissions of current or proposed structures, through reduction of energy intensity or through the use of renewable energy and (b) to the extent feasible, implements renewable energy generation projects on its property.

Protect and Conserve Water

The project reduces indoor or outdoor water consumption.

Enhance Indoor Environmental Quality

The project employs low-emitting materials (such as materials and products with low pollutant emissions).

Reduce the Environmental Impact of Materials

The project (a) uses materials with recycled content or bio-based content; (b) minimizes construction waste; (c) uses paper of at least 30 percent post-consumer fiber content; (d) reduces the quantity of hazardous chemicals and materials acquired, used, or disposed of by the facility, (e) increases diversion of solid waste as appropriate, and (f) maintains cost effective waste prevention and recycling programs at the facility.

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (25 percent): This criterion is used to ascertain whether the applicant possesses the necessary experience, training, administrative resources, and record of past performance on similar projects, to accomplish the project. This criterion is used to access how the individual reserve performed in general (based on performance

reports, CZMA Section 312 evaluations, previous or ongoing projects, etc.) and if they can support the project and have done so in the past by supplying the required match amounts (50/50 for acquisition projects and 70/30 for construction projects) Reserves with solid operating performance and a full complement of core staff (manager, education coordinator, and research coordinator) will generally be given a higher score than those without those items. Performance in completing past construction and acquisition projects will be considered. An exception may be where a particular construction or acquisition project is necessary to conduct core program activities. New reserves need to demonstrate that they have, or have access to, the necessary capabilities and capacities to complete the project. An applicant is only qualified to submit a proposal if they have an approved current management plan and adhere to eligibility requirements.

4. Project costs (15 percent): The budget is evaluated to determine if it is realistic based on market research and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. This criterion is used to determine whether the cost estimates and budget are reasonable, realistic, and cost-effective for the proposed project. Higher evaluation scores will be given to projects that have realistic budgets and demonstrate cost-sharing by the project proponent. Projects without or with highly speculative match will receive lower scores. Applicants must identify necessary match (50/50 for acquisition; 70/30 for construction) and its source and that it will be available at the time the award will be made.

5. Outreach and education (0 percent): NOAA assesses whether this project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources.

B. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in three steps: 1) an initial screening by competition program staff within NOAA's Office for Coastal Management; 2) a merit review; and 3) final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., Director of the Office for Coastal Management or the Director's designee). The merit review step will involve at least three reviewers per application. The Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based on the numerical ranking of the applications, the evaluations by the merit reviewers, and the selection factors set in V.C., below.

1. Initial Screening. The initial screening will ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements and meet all of the eligibility criteria. Applications that pass this initial screening will be submitted for merit review.

2. Merit Review. Eligible applications for this competition will be evaluated in accordance with the criteria and weights described in this solicitation by at least three independent peer reviewers through an independent peer mail review and/or an independent peer panel. Each reviewer will independently evaluate each project and provide an individual score. Both Federal and non-Federal experts may be used in this process. No consensus advice will be given by the independent peer reviewers through mail reviews or on the review panels. If a panel is convened, the panel will be comprised of subject matter experts and may convene in person or by teleconference, video conference or electron electronic means. The merit reviewer's ratings are used to produce a rank order of the proposals.

3. Final Selection. The competition program staff will create a ranking of the proposals to be recommended for funding using the average merit review or panel review scores, if a panel review is conducted. The reviewer comments, composite project scores, rank order, and a summary of the concerns (if any) identified through the mail and/or panel review process along with information pertaining to selection factors (see below) will be presented to the Selecting Official.

Based on the numerical ranking, merit review written evaluations, and the additional selection factors described below, the Selecting Official will develop a list of projects recommended for funding. Please note that not all activities submitted under a single proposal may be deemed appropriate for funding, and the Selecting Official may recommend alternate activities as appropriate or only partial funding, based on the selection factors and the merit and/or panel review written evaluations. For a proposal to be selected for funding, the applicant may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, and budgets, and to provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. When a decision has been made (whether an award or declination), anonymous copies of mail merit review comments or summaries of panel deliberations, can be made available to the applicant upon request.

C. Selection Factors

A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon the following factors:

1. Availability of funding

2. Balance/distribution of funds:

a. Geographically

b. By type of institutions

c. By type of partners

d. 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 as described in section I.B of this federal funding opportunity .

5. Applicant s prior award performance: Unsatisfactory performance by a recipient under prior Federal awards may result in an application not being considered for funding.

6. Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups

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

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

The anticipated start date(s) may begin as early as July 1, 2015 but no later than November 1, 2015 for awards made under this competition.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Applications recommended for funding by the Selecting Official will be forwarded to the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) by the Program Office. The applicant will be notified by the program office by email that their application was recommended for funding. The applicant must be aware that the notification by the program office is not the official award notice. Official notification happens only when the applicant receives an award notice from the Grants Officer electronically.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by email that their application was not recommended for funding within 10 business days after the final program office recommendations have been approved by the NOAA GMD. Unsuccessful applications will be retained at the Office for Coastal Management.

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 applicant awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), which may be accessed electronically at

https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/

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 electronically at

http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 17, 2012 (77 FR 74634) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed on line at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-17/pdf/2012-30228.pdf#page=1.

2. Please note that on December 26, 2013, OMB published final guidance titled Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements (OMB Uniform Guidance) (https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/12/26/2013-30465/uniform-administrative-requirements-cost-principles-and-audit-requirements-for-federal-awards), which streamlines the language from eight existing OMB circulars, including Cost Principles (OMB Circulars A-21, A-87, A 122) and administrative requirements (OMB Circulars A-102 and A 110), into one consolidated set of guidance applicable to federal assistance awards. Once adopted, the OMB Uniform Guidance will supersede DOC's uniform administrative requirements set out at 15 C.F.R. § 14 and 24. The DOC expects to adopt the OMB Uniform Guidance by December 26, 2014, meaning that the OMB Uniform Guidance

will apply to all new awards and to additional funding to existing awards made after December 26, 2014. In addition, the audit requirements of the OMB Uniform Guidance will apply to audits of non-Federal entities beginning on or after December 26, 2014. Therefore, applicants should familiarize themselves with the OMB Uniform Guidance. Additional information on the substance of and transition to the OMB Uniform Guidance may be found at https://cfo.gov/cofar/.

3. Limitation of Liability:

There is no guarantee that funds will be available to make awards for this federal funding opportunity or that any proposal will be selected for funding. If an applicant incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, they do so at their own risk of these costs not being included in a subsequent award. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for any proposal preparation costs. Recipients and sub-recipients are subject to all federal laws and agency policies, regulations, and procedures applicable to federal financial assistance awards. Applicants must be in good standing with all existing NOAA grants and/or cooperative funding agreements in order to receive funds. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project, obligate any available funds, or provide special fishing privileges.

The NOAA program office reserves the right to immediately halt activity under the award if the recipient is not fulfilling the requirements of the project as outlined in the grant award. Non-compliance with a federally approved project may result in termination of the award.

4. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): See the NEPA information in Section IV, B, of this announcement.

5. Unpaid or delinquent tax liability.

In accordance with current Federal appropriations law, NOAA will provide a successful corporate applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representatives certifying that the corporation has no Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal law.

C. Reporting

Grant recipients are required to provide semi-annual financial and performance reports. Performance reports are required every six months from the time an award starts until it is closed. Performance reports are to be submitted to the NOAA program officer. The standard performance period is six months. Within 30 days of the conclusion of each six-month period, recipients must submit a report summarizing activities conducted in support of the project during the prior six months. Financial reports are to be submitted to the NOAA Grants Officer. NOAA's Grants Management Division will also provide guidance for its semi-annual financial reporting requirements. Each grant recipient will need to demonstrate, through performance and financial reports, that all award conditions have been met before an award can be closed. Financial and performance reporting, as well as all other grant management activities after a grant is awarded, are conducted electronically through NOAA's grants management system, NOAA Grants On-line, at: https://grantsonline.rdc.noaa.gov/.

The recipient will be requested to ensure that all interim progress reports indicate whether financial reports have been submitted to NOAA's GMD and are up to date. In their final progress report, recipients will be asked to a) clearly state the resulting impact of their project and products in the coastal management community; and b) certify that "Final financial reports have been submitted to NOAA's Grants Management Division and a final funding draw-down has been made through the Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP)."

If equipment or tangible personal property is purchased with grant funds, applicants shall submit an inventory in accordance with relevant OMB requirements, which shall be incorporated under the award. As noted above, DOC anticipates adopting the OMB Uniform Guidance, which is codified at 2 C.F.R. Part 200. The equipment requirements of the OMB Uniform Guidance are set out at 2 C.F.R. § 200.313. As applicable, the recipient must submit Form SF-428 (Tangible Personal Property Report) annually and in the final progress report. Form SF-428 may be attached as an appendix to progress reports. The program office recommends that if the equipment is no longer needed, recipients are encouraged to request disposition instructions for equipment approximately 150 days before the project period ends to allow sufficient time to have equipment disposition requests addressed before a project ends. Equipment disposition instructions typically require that recipients complete an "other"

award action request in Grants Online. NOAA will provide instructions for disposition in accordance with OMB requirements.

As applicable, the recipient must report on real property annually and at award closeout, by completing Form SF-429 (Real Property Status Report).

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.

VII. Agency Contacts

For administrative and technical questions regarding the program and application process, please contact Nina Garfield, program coordinator, at NOAA/Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East-West Highway, N/ORM5, SSMC4, Station 10505, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or via phone: 301-563-1171 ext. 171, email: contact Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov, or fax: 301-713-4363. The program website can be accessed at www.ocrm.nos.noaa.gov/nerr.html. Other questions should be directed to Nina Garfield at 301-563-1171 ext. 171, or fax 301-713-4012, or via Internet at Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov or Erica Seiden at (301) 713-3155 ext. 172, Erica.seiden@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

The Office for Coastal Management will not release the names of applicants submitting proposals unless ordered by a court or requested to do so by an appropriate NOAA official and administrative protocol. Applicants can use a NOAA public search feature to find out information about NOAA awards < https://grantsonline.rdc.noaa.gov/flows/publicSearch/begin.do > or go through the Freedom

of Information Act process to request more information about grant competitions. More information about the NOAA FOI process is online at

< www.rdc.noaa.gov/~foia/ >.

Department of Commerce regulations implementing 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 FFO 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.