ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2013-2003590

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 EDT on January 15, 2013. Use of a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. Please Note: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.

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

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

This document describes the types of habitat restoration Partnerships that NOAA envisions establishing, explains the qualities that NOAA deems desirable in such Partnerships, and

describes criteria under which applications will be evaluated for funding consideration. Partnership applications selected through this announcement will be implemented through a multi-year cooperative agreement, and will ultimately involve joint selection of habitat restoration projects. Awards will be dependent upon the amount of funds made available to NOAA for this purpose by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through GLRI. Funding of approximately $10 million is expected to be available to establish habitat restoration Partnerships in 2013, with annual funding anticipated to maintain them for up to three years. Typical Partnership awards are expected to range from $500,000 to $5,000,000 per year. Funding will support both engineering and design projects and on the ground implementation projects. Funds will be administered by NOAA's Restoration Center (RC) Great Lakes Region. This is not a request for individual habitat restoration project proposals.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

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

B. Program Priorities

NOAA seeks to support Partnerships that will implement on-the-ground projects to restore Great Lakes coastal habitat in US AOCs. 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 supported by the Partnership must be within an U.S. AOC and contribute to the removal of either project-based delisting targets or numeric delisting targets for fish and wildlife habitat related beneficial use impairments (degradation of fish and wildlife population, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and degradation of benthos). NOAA also recognizes the need to continue to have shovel-ready projects ready in future years and anticipates dedicating portions of funding awarded to Partners for engineering and design of high quality projects that are necessary to achieve an AOC's delisting targets. NOAA will emphasize the selection of Partnership applications that, collectively, provide a range of restoration benefits in Great Lakes AOCs; that can implement large-scale restoration projects that yield significant ecological benefits with emphasis on the removal of habitat related BUIs.

1. Desirable Partnership Qualities

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

NOAA is looking to support Partnerships that:

A) Offer significant ecological and societal benefits -

"Are focused on the engineering and design and/or implementation of on-the-ground restoration of Great Lakes coastal habitats in US AOCs, to remove habitat related Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs), support fisheries and protected species, and restore ecosystem processes that create and maintain habitats;

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

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

B) Can demonstrate sound science support for restoration-

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

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

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

"Rely on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan and other AOC specific planning framework for identifying priority projects so that restoration conducted under sub-awards is more strategic and less opportunistic;

C) Demonstrate effective ability to manage funds and provide accountability-

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

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

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

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

"Existing staff with federal funds management experience

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

"Organizational history of federal funds management and clean audits

"Ability to maintain an administrative record to document expenditures of federally awarded funds

"Complete reporting requirements in a timely fashion, as well as other award conditions.

2. Great Lakes Restoration Partnership Goals

NOAA's primary goals in establishing these Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership Grants are to meet multiple priorities through the desirable capabilities stated above (see Section I.1.) NOAA intends to select one or more Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership to target priority restoration in AOCs with funds provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The Partnership should be flexible related to which AOC they may work in, and be able to work with NOAA and other federal and state partners to continue to identify priority projects in targeted AOCs. The Partner will also need to be able to implement a variety of project types that will contribute to the removal of habitat related Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) and the delisting of AOCs. NOAA intends to select the fewest applicants necessary to fulfill the program priorities described in the Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) to best ensure administrative costs are minimized. Once applications are approved by NOAA's Grants Management Division, NOAA will distribute funds for specific projects based on the grantees expertise and capacity. Consequently, funds may not be distributed equally among award recipients.

The primary goal of NOAA in establishing these Partnerships is to meet the program priorities (see Section I.B) stated above through the Partner-led implementation of habitat restoration projects in AOCs. Proposals for Partnerships that are narrowly focused or that will benefit limited resources or few user groups, that lack a comprehensive restoration planning element for identifying and selecting projects, or that request funding solely to support or increase general organizational activities, are discouraged. Similarly, applications for Partnerships that would have limited NOAA involvement, or that seek to primarily support administration, salaries, overhead and non-essential travel are not considered ideal for the Partnership development goals of the NOAA Restoration Center, and will be less likely to be selected for restoration Partnership agreements with NOAA.

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

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

Funding is expected to be provided on an as available basis for up to three years in duration, and is dependent upon the level of funding made available by congressional appropriations to the GLRI. NOAA anticipates that typical awards will range from $500,000 to $5,000,000 for the first year and it is anticipated that award levels will be similar out years. This range is to accommodate Partnerships activities including both engineering and design and large scale restoration in AOCs. Any funds provided to successful applicants will be at the discretion of the NOAA Restoration Center Selecting Official. The Selecting Official will make funding determinations for each Grantee, in consultation with NOAA technical staff and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), based on past performance, capacity of the Grantee organization to generate quality projects, and their highlighted areas of expertise

There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for Partnership applications. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the areas of expertise proposed by the applicants, the merit and ranking of the applications, and the amount of GLRI funds made available by Congress.

The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives, and multi-year funding requests are expected to be funded on an as-available basis. Publication of this document does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or obligate all or any portion of any available funds.

B. Project/Award Period

Applications for Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnerships should cover a project period of 3 years. The earliest start date for Partnership awards is anticipated to be June 1, 2013; applicants should consider this date when developing plans for initiating proposed Partnership activities. Once Partnership funds are awarded in FY2013, Partners will not need to compete for funding in subsequent years, Partnerships established in FY2013 are expected to continue through the duration of the award period. However, if an application is recommended and approved for funding under a Partnership, NOAA has no obligation to provide additional funding in connection with this Partnership in subsequent years. A recommendation to the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) to continue an award for a Partnership in subsequent years or to extend the period of performance, and to determine annual Partnership funding levels, is at the discretion of the Selecting Official. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond that stated in award documentation is at the discretion of NOAA and should be requested in writing at least 60 days in advance of an award?s expiration date.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will primarily be funded through a cooperative agreement since NOAA staff will be substantially involved in many aspects of the Partnership. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to: hands-on technical assistance; joint selection of restoration projects with clear benefits to NOAA trust resources; 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, commercial (for profit) 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, and others that are eligible to apply.

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 portion of non-federal match for RC funds requested to conduct the proposed project. Applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered in Evaluation Criterion #4 "Project Costs" (Section V.A.4.).

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

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

Applicants should also note that the following activities will not be considered under Partnerships: (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; (3) activities that are required by a separate consent decree, court order, statute or regulation; and (4) activities that don?t have a central focus on restoration for its habitat conservation value.

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.

All applications MUST contain ALL required forms; if these forms are not signed via the Grants.gov application process, they MUST be signed in ink. Paper applications should also be accompanied by an electronic copy (CD, DVD, etc) with the entire application as one Adobe PDF file. Paper applications without signed forms will be ineligible and will not be reviewed. Application forms are available on Grants.gov. NOAA will not accept proposals with a first year budget less than $200,000 or more than $10,000,000 under this solicitation.

If the application forms and instructions cannot be downloaded from www.grants.gov, please contact Jessica Berrio (Jessica.Berrio@noaa.gov) at 301-427-8654.

B. Content and Form of Application

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

"Federal application forms:

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

- Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: SF-424A (three in total, one for each 12-month funding period of the three-year award)
- Assurances for Non-construction Programs: SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)

"Partnership summary (described below, 2 pages);

"Partnership narrative (described below, 10 pages);

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

"A data sharing plan (described below, 2 pages)

"Brief curriculum vitae or resume of primary Partnership personnel (maximum of 1 page per person); and

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

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

1) Partnership summary and narrative;

2) Budget justification; and

3) Supplemental Information - all other attachments combined into one, indexed file, such as maps, resumes, and support letters, not to exceed 20 pages.

Information about converting documents to PDF files is available on the grants.gov website under "Download Software" under "Applicant Resources."

Applications that exceed the page limits stated above may not be sent forward for review. Applicants that do not comply with the page limit guidance do so at their own risk.

1. Partnership Summary (2 pages):

"Applicant Organization

"Partnership Title

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

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

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

"Coastal and habitats to benefit from the Partnership - briefly describe the Partnership resource focus, any restrictions expected such as only certain habitat types, specific applicant/user groups, specific resource/habitat targets, etc.

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

"Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Anticipated

"Letters of Support - list those included with the application, particularly those from members of Congress, and from various Remedial Action Plan (RAP) implementation groups (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) that generally support your involvement in implementing their priority projects.

2. Partnership Narrative (10 pages):

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

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

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

"A description of short- and long-term objectives and goals, methods for identifying potential projects, a process for collaborating with NOAA staff to to identify and select

restoration projects and reach funding decisions, and the criteria that will be used for determining the success of projects implemented under the Partnership;

"A discussion of how the Partnership plans to work with sub awardees to develop appropriate evaluation parameters for both the socioeconomic and ecological aspects of sub award projects, and work with NOAA to ensure that the proposed parameters are adequate and meaningful to ensure a basic level of project success;

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

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

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

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

3. Budget Justification (4 pages):

The narrative budget justification must include a detailed breakdown by cost categories (object classes on the SF-424A) 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 in the SF-424A. While an SF-424A for each of the anticipated three years of work is required, NOAA does not expect the description of expenditures to change significantly between funding years, and recommends a full narrative for the first year, accompanied by a table that shows how costs might increase in future years (e.g., annual salary and benefits increases).

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

4. Data sharing plan (2 page limit)

The data sharing plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information created during the course of the 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, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The plan is required as part of NOAA's data sharing policy described in Section VI.B.3 below, and will be reviewed as part of the Evaluation Criteria under V.A.1.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 PM EDT on January 15, 2013. Use of a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

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

E. Funding Restrictions

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. The earliest anticipated date for receipt of awards is expected to be June 1, 2013.

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 must 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. 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

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

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 two automated receipts of the date and time of submission (the first confirms receipt; the second confirms that there are no errors with an application submission and that the application has been forwarded to NOAA for further processing). If both notifications are not received, an applicant needs to follow up with both the Grants.gov helpdesk and the NOAA Restoration Center to confirm receipt of submission.

PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. Applicants should allow themselves sufficient time to submit their application to Grants.gov in advance of the deadline to ensure applications have been submitted successfully, 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 January 15, 2013 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 Regional Partnership Applications.

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 7 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 one side only, on 8.5" x 11" paper, and should not be bound in any manner. Applicants submitting paper applications must also include a full copy of the application as a single PDF file, including Federal forms, as an electronic copy (CD, DVD, etc).

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

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

1. Importance and Applicability (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 Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership Grants competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

"The potential of a proposed Partnership to implement significant Great Lakes habitat restoration projects that offer long-term ecological habitat improvements, and improve the short- and long-term economic condition of an area (e.g., increased fisheries benefits, increased tourism and recreation, etc.) based on the anticipated outcomes of sub awarded projects. This includes the extent to which the Partnership will deliver tangible, specific results that are measurable and relevant to NOAA performance measures and GLRI measures of progress such as acres restored, stream miles opened for fish passage, removal of habitat related BUIs in AOCs, and similar outputs that directly result from on-the-ground restoration. (12 points)

"The potential of the Partnership to provide sustainable, long-lasting benefits of regional significance for coastal habitats, including realistic goals for monitoring and maintenance to ensure longevity of restoration actions. (6 points)

"The extent to which Partnerships involve multiple partner groups within or outside the applicant's organization; focus on ecologically and regionally significant ecosystems; and meet program priorities listed in Section I.B. (10 points)

"Has the proposal included a Data/Information Sharing Plan including descriptions of the types of environmental data and information that will be created over the course of the Partnership; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. (2 points)

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (30 points)

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

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

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

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

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

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicants (20 points)

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

"Organization employs staff with administrative skills to manage contracts and financial aspects, and is prepared to adhere to requirements including reporting award conditions for invoicing and the Federal Financial Accountability and Transparency Act;

"Organization has a history as a recipient of Federal funds, and can demonstrate to reviewers their experience managing Federal funds including a clean audit history;

"Organization has the ability to effectively identify, develop, select, manage, and oversee all phases of coastal conservation and restoration activities with minimal need for guidance from NOAA; and

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

4. Project Costs (15 points)

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

"Whether the applicant proposes a cost-effective strategy to limit administrative costs. For instance, an applicant may propose to reduce the percent of administrative or indirect costs for a large, sub-awarded project, as compared to a small project for which they have direct oversight. Applications will also be evaluated for cost-effectiveness by examining the proportion of funds directed to implementing project sub-awards, as compared with that to be used for organizational support;

"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.

"To what extent an applicant can leverage the Federal investment through matching contributions and/or Partnerships, including the amount of cash match available on the national/regional level specifically to support project implementation. NOAA desires cost sharing to leverage funding and to further encourage partnerships among government, industry, and academia.

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

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

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

Community involvement may include: (a) hands-on training and restoration activities undertaken by volunteers; (b) sponsorship from local entities, either through in-kind goods and services (earth moving, technical expertise, conservation easements) or cash contributions; (c) public education and outreach associated with restoration activities (media interaction, public meetings, community workshops, etc.); (d) support from state and local governments; and (e) ability to achieve long-term stewardship for restored resources and to generate a community conservation ethic.

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will undergo an initial administrative review to determine if they are eligible and complete, including verifying the completion of required A-133 audits, per Section III.A. Eligible applications will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process to determine how well they meet the program priorities and evaluation criteria of this solicitation and the mission and goals of NOAA.

Eligible applications will be evaluated by three or more merit reviewers as part of a panel review process. 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. Prior to the panel discussion, each member of the panel will independently assign a numerical score for each proposal based on the evaluation criteria above.

The initial proposal scores will be averaged and the interim ranking will be presented to the panel for discussion. The panel will reach consensus on the applications to be recommended for funding. The panel will rate all proposals as highly responsive, moderately responsive, or not responsive to the evaluation criteria. This rating will be presented to the

Selecting Official (SO) for funding consideration and will be the primary consideration of the SO in deciding which applications will be recommended to the NOAA Grants Management Division, pending the application of selection factors below.

C. Selection Factors

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

(1) Availability of funding;

(2) Balance/distribution of funds: a) geographically, b) by type of institutions, c) by type of partners, d) by research areas; e) by project types;

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

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

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

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 by June 1, 2013. The earliest anticipated start date for projects will be June 1, 2013, 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 Partnership duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each Partnership will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA staff that will administer these restoration Partnership grants. Applicants that initiate Partnership activities in expectation of Federal funding do so at their own risk, and are advised not to begin until a notice of award document is received electronically from the NOAA Grants Management Division in Grants Online, NOAA?s online grants management system.

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

It is the grantee's responsibility to ensure that sub-awardees obtain all necessary Federal, state, and local government permits and approvals whenever necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Sub-award projects should be designed so that they minimize the potential for adverse impacts to the environment. Grantees will be required to cooperate

with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposed sub award projects. The failure to agree to do so shall be grounds for not awarding a grant.

In most cases, applicants will not be aware of specific projects to be funded as sub-awards under the proposed Implementation Grants. Therefore, under each Implementation Grant awarded, NOAA staff will review individual project proposals considered for sub-award funding for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act on a project-by-project basis. Restoration activities that are not covered by the NOAA Fisheries Community-based Restoration Program Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be reviewed under NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NAO 216-6 is located at http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~nao/216-6.html. If a project cannot be categorically excluded, the sub-awardee will be informed after the technical review stage and may be requested to assist in the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document.

Successful applicants will need to ensure that project proposals considered for sub-award funding provide enough detail for NOAA to make a NEPA determination, and that funds will not be released until NOAA fulfills the requisite NEPA documentation. Successful applicants are encouraged to consult with NOAA as early as possible on projects considered for sub-awards to obtain guidance with respect to the level and scope of information needed by NOAA to comply with NEPA. A phased approach may be recommended and funds withheld by the 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 the Implementation Grant project may have on the environment.

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, or whose activities are not covered under another agency's NEPA compliance procedures that can be analyzed and adopted by NOAA, will be informed after the technical 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.

3. NOAA's Data Sharing Policy.

Environmental data and information collected and/or created under NOAA grants/ cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than

two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security requirements. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) must be made publicly available at the time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions.

C. Reporting

Progress reports for the overall management and administration of this award shall use the NOAA Restoration Center's progress report narrative format and form approved by OMB under control number 0648 0472. This form will be provided to awardees by the NOAA Federal Program Officer.

Narrative progress reports shall be due on the same fiscal year schedule as financial reports (Oct. 30 and April 30) covering April 1-September 30 and October 1-March 31, respectively. A comprehensive final report covering all activities during the award period is required and must be received by the NOAA Program Officer within 90 days after the end date of this award.

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

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