

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Funding Opportunity

F26AS00071 Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grants

Funding Opportunity Number

F26AS00071

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BASIC INFORMATION

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: F26AS00071

Assistance Listing Number(s): 15.615

Estimated Total Program Funding: \$26,000,000

Expected Number of Awards: 10

Award Ceiling: \$26,000,000

Award Floor: \$10,000

Cost Sharing Required?

Yes

Closing Date Explanation

10/30/2026

Electronically submitted applications must be submitted no later than 11:59 PM, ET, on the listed application due date.

This program requires the submission of applications online through GrantSolutions.gov as applicants will receive an acknowledgment of application receipt. GrantSolutions automatically generates an electronic date and time stamp in the system upon application receipt. Applicants are encouraged to verify the completeness of their application package before submission using the checklist provided in this Funding Opportunity.

U.S. states and local governments may be required under [Executive Order 12372](#), [Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs](#) to submit their application to their State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for review. For more information, see the [Intergovernmental Review SPOC List](#).

OMB Control Number: [1018-0100](#)

Have Questions?

For additional information about this Funding Opportunity, please contact the appropriate Regional coordinator listed below.

Regional Points of Contact

Region 1	Hawaii, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	USFWS Eastside Federal Complex 911 N.E. 11th Avenue Portland, Oregon 97232-4181	Sole Diaz (503) 231-2349 Jimenaines_Diaz@fws.gov
Region 2	Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas	USFWS 500 Gold Avenue SW, Room 6018 Albuquerque, New Mexico	Angela Anders (505) 248-7953 Angela_Anders@fws.gov

		87102	
Region 3	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin	USFWS Ecological Services 5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990 Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458	Erik Olson (612) 713-5488 Laura Ragan (612) 713-5194 R3FedAid@fws.gov
Region 4	Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands	USFWS 1875 Century Boulevard, Suite 200 Atlanta, Georgia 30345	Victoria Davis (404) 679-4176 Victoria_Davis@fws.gov
Region 5	Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia	USFWS 300 Westgate Center Drive Hadley, Massachusetts 01035-9589	Kyle Welsh (413) 253-8709 Kyle_Welsh@fws.gov
Region 6	Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming	USFWS Ecological Services 134 Union Blvd., Suite 645 Lakewood, Colorado 80228	Angela Burgess (303) 236-4263 Angela_Burgess@fws.gov
Region 7	Alaska	USFWS 1011 East Tudor Road	Nichole Bjornlie (907) 786-3523 Nichole_Bjornlie@fws.gov

		Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199	
Region 8	California and Nevada	USFWS 2800 Cottage Way Room W- 2606 Sacramento, California 95825-1846	Marissa Reed (916) 414-6593 Marissa_Reed@fws.gov

Executive Summary

Established by Congress in fiscal year (FY) 1997, the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Land Acquisition Grant program was designed to reduce conflicts between the conservation of listed species and competing land uses on specific parcels of land associated with approved and permitted HCPs. Under this program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provides matching grants to State agencies in support of land acquisition projects that will conserve species habitat in perpetuity through fee simple acquisition or the acquisition of permanent conservation easements. FWS considers the use of Federal acquisition dollars by States for habitat protection associated with HCPs to be an important and effective mechanism to promote species recovery, prevent extinction, and preclude the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the future. All land acquired through these grants complements, but does not replace, the mitigation, minimization, and/or monitoring commitments of the HCP. Thus, this work is additive to the conservation commitments entered into when HCPs are permitted and serves as a meaningful way to leverage non-Federal investment in species recovery and connect conservation lands across the landscape.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible Applicants

State governments

Additional Information on Eligibility

Only State and Territorial (hereafter, “State”) agencies that have entered into a cooperative agreement pursuant to section 6(c) of the ESA and have provided the information necessary for the annual renewal (reconfirmation) of their cooperative agreement are eligible to apply for funding. While funding may only be awarded to States, groups such as counties or conservation organizations may work with a State agency that has a cooperative agreement on conservation efforts that are mutually beneficial, as a subgrantee.

To be considered for funding, the land proposed for acquisition must benefit at least one Federally listed included on an active section 10(a)(1)(B) permit.

The specific parcel(s) of land proposed for acquisition with grant funds, or as non-Federal cost share, must be identified and sufficiently described to facilitate merit review based on the evaluation criteria listed in this Funding Opportunity. Parcels must be individually identified on

the SF-429 and SF-429-B b in order to be eligible for funding but can be grouped and described for evaluation purposes at the property or transaction level. If specific properties are not yet identified, applicants may identify an area of land comprised of similar habitat type(s) and supporting a similar suite of species in which an estimated number of acres will be acquired. Applicants must include information on what procedure will be used to ensure that high-quality habitat is targeted for acquisition should funds be awarded.

A property may not be submitted for funding consideration under both the HCP Land Acquisition Grant and Recovery Land Acquisition Grant Programs in the same fiscal year.

Applications must include a statement of commitment to funding for, and implementation of, management of the habitat in perpetuity consistent with the conservation needs of the species.

Projects must involve voluntary conservation efforts within the United States.

An application cannot include FWS Full-Time Equivalent costs.

Neither funding awarded through this opportunity, nor the associated non-Federal cost share, may be used to satisfy regulatory requirements of the ESA, including complying with a biological opinion under section 7, fulfilling Federal mitigation, minimization, and/or monitoring requirements of an HCP permitted under section 10, or any other Federal regulatory mitigation requirement (e.g., mitigation for Clean Water Act permits).

State administrative costs must either be assumed by the State or included in the application in accordance with Federal requirements. Applications may not be submitted to cover administrative costs alone.

Generally, only expenses incurred and budgeted during the period of performance are reimbursable; the period of performance begins with the effective date established at the time the grant is approved. However, a State may request reimbursement of pre-award costs for certain necessary expenses detailed in the grant application. Pre-award costs are those incurred prior to the approval of the grant where such costs are necessary to comply with the proposed period of performance. Such costs are allowable only if the grant is awarded, only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the award, and only with the written approval of the awarding agency (2 CFR 200.458).

Cost Sharing Requirement

Cost Sharing Required?

Yes

In accordance with section 6(d) of the ESA, the minimum non-Federal cost share is 25 percent of the total project cost, *i.e.*, the amount requested from the program plus the amount of non-Federal cost share. Other funds that are related to the project or are part of a larger project but are not designated as cost share should not be included in the total project costs when calculating minimum non-Federal cost share.

If a proposal involves the collaboration of two or more States, the minimum non-Federal cost share decreases to 10 percent of the total project cost. The project proposal and budget must reflect the work and responsibilities to be carried out by each of the cooperating States. The

source(s) of the non-Federal cost share is up to the applicants and may come from more than one source. Each cooperating State is responsible for submitting performance and financial reports related to the joint project. Incomplete work by any one of the cooperating States may result in recovery of Federal funds from all States, if it is determined that the joint cooperative objective will not be accomplished.

In accordance with [48 United States Code \(U.S.C.\) 1469\(a\), Amendment of Subsection \(d\)](#), the required match is waived for each grant awarded to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Non-Federal cost share requirements are detailed in 50 CFR 81.8(b) and allow the cost share to be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, including real property, in accordance with the regulations at 2 CFR 200.306. The amount of non-Federal cost share will be considered in the evaluation and ranking of applications.

GET READY TO APPLY

Required System Registrations

Unique Entity Identifier and SAM.gov Registration

Before applying, all **applicants** except individuals applying as a natural person **must be registered in SAM.gov**. During the SAM.gov registration the entity will obtain their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

The SAM.gov registration process can take several months. If your organization is not already registered in SAM.gov, begin the registration process as soon as possible.

To register in SAM.gov, go to the [SAM.gov website](#) and use the available resources to complete registration.

- **Financial assistance registrants** must review and certify compliance with the SAM.gov “Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications”.
- **Already registered?** You already have a Unique Entity ID. Before applying, check that your “Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications” on SAM.gov is complete. Remember to renew your registration every year to keep it active while you have an award or application in progress. You can update your registration whenever you need, including during renewal.
- **Need help?** For additional information and contact information on the [SAM.gov Help page](#).

GRANTSOLUTIONS

This program accepts applications through GrantSolutions.gov. You must register with GrantSolutions. See [Submission Instructions](#).

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Program Goals

- The primary goal of this program is to promote Federally listed and at-risk species conservation through the acquisition of habitat associated with approved and permitted

HCPs. All land acquired through these grants complements, but does not replace, the mitigation, minimization, and/or monitoring commitments of the HCP. Thus, this work is additive to the conservation commitments entered into when HCPs are permitted and serves as a meaningful way to leverage non-Federal investment in species recovery and connect conservation lands across the landscape.

Program Description

As many species listed as endangered or threatened under the ESA spend at least part of their life cycle on non-Federal lands, FWS recognizes success in conserving and recovering these species depends largely on working cooperatively with States.

Section 6 of the ESA authorizes FWS to provide Federal financial assistance to eligible State agencies to support the development and implementation of conservation programs for the benefit of resident listed species. This financial assistance, provided in the form of competitive grants, is made available through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF) Grant Programs. This Notice of Funding Opportunity Announcement (NOFO) applies specifically to CESCF HCP Land Acquisition Grants.

This NOFO fully describes application eligibility, evaluation, and selection. It should be read in its entirety as much of the information has changed from previous years. Given the significant investment of time and money associated with projects funded through this program, we also recommend you coordinate with the appropriate FWS Regional contact provided above before starting work on a project or application.

Habitat Conservation Plans

Prior to 1982, section 9 of the ESA prohibited “take” of threatened or endangered wildlife, but provided no mechanism to authorize take for non-Federal projects. In the 1982 amendments to the ESA, Congress established an incidental take permit under section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA that allows FWS to authorize incidental take of endangered and threatened wildlife when carrying out the project. An applicant is required to develop a conservation plan (HCP) as part of the application for an incidental take permit. The HCP demonstrates how the applicant intends to meet the permit issuance criteria under section 10(a)(2)(B) of the ESA. The commitments made by the applicant in the HCP become part of the permit.

In some States, HCPs have become a broad-based, landscape-level planning tool. In addition to conserving listed species, HCPs often include conservation measures for candidate or at-risk species, as well as other rare species in the plan area. By including these species in the HCP, developers and landowners can also help prevent their decline or need for future listing under the ESA. Should a non-listed species that is covered under the HCP become listed during the permit term, the HCP can provide a seamless process to authorize the take of the newly listed species and eliminate the need to amend the permit. Thus, landowners have an incentive to conserve both listed and unlisted species that may become listed in the future.

HCP Land Acquisition Grants

Established by Congress in FY 1997, the HCP Land Acquisition Grant program was designed to reduce conflicts between the conservation of listed species and competing land uses on specific parcels of land associated with approved and permitted HCPs. Under this program, FWS provides matching grants to States in support of land acquisition projects that will conserve

species habitat in perpetuity through fee simple acquisition or the acquisition of permanent conservation easements. All land acquired through these grants complements, but does not replace, the mitigation, minimization, and/or monitoring commitments of the HCP.

The following species are eligible for consideration under this Funding Opportunity if included on the section 10(a)(1)(B) permit, hereafter “eligible covered species.”.

Federally listed species: Species listed as threatened or endangered through section 4 of the ESA. To be considered for funding, the land proposed for acquisition must benefit at least one listed included on an active section 10(a)(1)(B) permit.

Candidate species: Species for which the Service has sufficient information on biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the ESA, but for which development of a proposed listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The current list of candidate species is available at:
<http://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/table/candidate-species.html>.

At-risk species: For the purposes of this Funding Opportunity, at-risk species are those that are the subject of a positive 90-day finding, species that are the subject of a positive 12-month finding but not yet the subject of a proposed rule, species that are the subject of a proposed listing rule but not a final rule, and species included on the National Listing Workplan as of this NOFO's postdate. An at-risk species' appropriate conservation document may include State Wildlife Action Plan, State recovery plan, proposed listing rule (if proposed for listing under the ESA), or similar conservation document.

These grants support the acquisition of land associated with both single-species and multiple-species HCPs. As in previous years, at least 10 percent of the funding available will be used to support the acquisition of land associated with single-species HCPs.

FWS recognizes that, in the exercise of their general governmental powers, States possess broad trustee and police powers over fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats within their borders. Unless preempted by Federal authority, States possess primary authority and responsibility for protection and management of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. The section 6 cooperative agreements entered into by the States and FWS reflect a common commitment to actively advance the purpose and policies of the ESA, including providing a means to foster relationships with partners, reduce conflicts between listed species and economic development, and promote the long-term conservation of listed species and the ecosystems on which they depend. These grants encourage the cooperative implementation of the ESA by leveraging Federal investment in species recovery and demonstrate FWS' commitment to cooperative conservation at the local level.

Recipients are encouraged to prioritize projects in support of the celebration of America's 250th birthday (America250). This may include, but is not limited to, projects that recognize and honor the nation's founding, history, and cultural heritage.

Legislative Authority

16 U.S.C. §1535

Type of Award

Projects will be funded through G (Grant).

PREPARE YOUR APPLICATION

Application Content and Format

Pre-Application Requirements

Prior to applying, applicants should review presidential actions found at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/> and DOI Secretary's Orders found at: <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order>. By applying in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity, the applicant certifies awareness and compliance with all currently effective and applicable executive orders and secretary's orders, including, but not limited to the Executive Order titled Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing as well as the Executive Order and Secretary's order titled Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History. Applicants are responsible for ensuring their proposed activities are consistent with the intent and requirements of these directives.

Application Documents

Applicants must submit the following forms with their application as specified below. Instructions for accessing and submitting application forms are provided in the [Submission Instructions](#) section of this document below. For instructions on completing form fields, see the form instructions on the [Grants.gov Forms Repository](#).

Forms/Assurances/Certifications	Submission Requirement
SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance Note: For applicants requesting more than \$100,000 in Federal funds, the Authorized Representative's signature (or electronic equivalent) on the Application for Federal Assistance form also represents their certification of the statements in Appendix A to 43 CFR 18-Certification Regarding Lobbying	Required from all applicants
SF-424C: Budget Information – Construction Programs	Required for construction projects
SF-429 (Cover Page & Attachment B), Request to Acquire, Improve, or Furnish Real Property Note: The SF-429 forms are only available in the Grants.gov Forms Repository . Applicants must download the form and include the completed form as an application attachment.	Required if requesting to acquire, improve, or furnish real property.
SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities	Required if requesting more than \$100,000 in Federal funds <u>and</u> the applicant has used or plans to use funds other than Federal appropriated funds for lobbying related to the proposed project.

Forms/Assurances/Certifications	Submission Requirement
Project Abstract Summary (OMB 4040-0019). Must include, in plain language: • Award purpose, • Activities to be performed, • Expected deliverables or outcomes, • Intended beneficiaries, Subrecipient activities (if known or specified at time of award)	Required from all applicants

Project Narrative

Project narratives should be complete but concise, including only the information necessary to address all stated eligibility and evaluation criteria. Information must be provided for each property (or area of land) proposed for acquisition, whether with grant funds or non-Federal cost share. Because lands used for cost share purposes are part of the total project, reviewers must consider both when evaluating and scoring applications.

The project narrative must contain each of the elements described below to prompt applicants to address relevant eligibility and evaluation criteria. Although not required, applicants may consider including response tables to summarize information as it relates to a specific criterion. Descriptions of eligibility and evaluation criteria, as well as example response tables, are provided below and in the Merit Review section. Applicants may also consider alternate methods of identifying responses to evaluation criteria within the project narrative, such as inserting “(Criterion 2)” or “(C2)” at the end of the sentence or paragraph containing the information necessary to evaluate the project under criterion 2. Narratives that clearly address all criteria in an organized manner will facilitate application review and scoring.

- **Project Title**
- **Description of entity(ies) undertaking the project**
 - Identify any entity that will act as a subrecipient and describe their role in meeting project objectives.
- **Statement of Need**
 - Describe the need for the proposed project relative to the purposes of the HCP program. Include the full title of the subject HCP and incidental take permit number associated with the HCP. Describe how the proposed acquisition complements, but does not replace, the mitigation, minimization, and/or monitoring commitments of the HCP. Identify the species to benefit from each proposed acquisition (criteria 1 & 2) and provide evidence to demonstrate the need for the acquisition such as results from surveys, research, or other data. Identify the negative results of taking no action (criterion 6).
- **Purpose**
 - The purpose describes the desired future state to addresses the need. For example, providing permanent habitat protection to promote listed species

recovery while providing regulatory assurances to landowners.

- ***Objectives***

- Objectives reference specific outcomes to be accomplished during the project period pursuant to the stated need. For example, acquiring real property interest (fee title) in 200 acres of occupied habitat by December 20, 2028. Objectives should be specific, measurable, attainable within the period of performance (PoP), realistic, and time-bound. The requested PoP will be considered under evaluation criterion 7.

- ***Methods/Approach***

- This section of the narrative should describe the specific conservation actions necessary to accomplish the project objective(s). Include the following information for each property/area proposed for acquisition.
 - Property (or area) name/identifier and APNS (if applicable)
 - Acreage
 - The type of ownership interest (e.g., fee-simple, easement, combination)
 - Entity to hold title
 - Entity to manage, if different
 - Occupancy status/ amount of restoration required to benefit covered species (criterion 4)

- ***Anticipated Outcomes/ Expected Benefits***

- This section should address evaluation criterion 3 by describing how the proposed acquisition will benefit species conservation. Describe the acquisition's potential contribution to recovering listed species, precluding the need to list candidate species, or reducing threats to at-risk species. Applicants may also provide information on how the proposed acquisition will further Regional and/or National priorities outlined in the Review and Selection Process section.

- ***Timetable***

- The project timetable describes significant milestones in successfully completing the project. Timetables will be used to assess project readiness (criterion 7) and should clearly demonstrate how the project is likely to be accomplished within the period of performance. Include a description of any due diligence completed to date. This section of the project narrative must describe current negotiations regarding the potential sale of the property to assess the likelihood of project success. Applicants must include a statement acknowledging an understanding that the Service will not consider period of performance extensions or parcel amendment for projects that receive additional consideration under this criterion.

- ***Project Location/ Maps***

- This section of the narrative should address evaluation criterion 5 by providing a brief description of where the acquisition will occur in relation to existing conservation areas. Attach maps of the properties/area proposed for acquisition to assist reviewers in evaluating habitat connectivity. Photographs that characterize the existing state of the project area are highly recommended although not required.

- ***Information to support environmental compliance review requirements***

- The Service has the responsibility for making the final determination regarding compliance with Federal laws.
 - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with NEPA.
 - Endangered Species Act (ESA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with the ESA.
 - National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with NHPA, such as locations of historic or cultural properties.
 - Other Permits – list and provide the current status of any other required Federal permits

Budget Narrative

Applicants must describe and justify items and costs listed in their budget. The budget narrative must identify the following cost items: total estimated costs, non-Federal cost share, third-party contributions, and any pre-award costs. Total project cost is the sum of all allowable costs, including required and voluntary cost share and third-party contributions.

Budget items must be:

- Reasonable, allowable, allocable, and necessary
- Compliant with [2 CFR §200 Subpart E](#) cost principles

Indirect Costs: Applicants must indicate in their budget narrative how they will charge indirect costs, including the rate to be applied:

- De Minimis Rate: If eligible, state if your organization is opting to use the de minimis rate of up to 15% of total modified direct costs. Entities that do not have a current Federal negotiated indirect cost rate (including provisional rate) may propose to use the de minimis rate. For more information, refer to [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#).
- Negotiated Rate: State if you will negotiate with your cognizant agency. If your organization has previously negotiated a rate, attach a copy of the most recently negotiated rate agreement (active or expired).

Data and Evaluation Costs: Applicant budgets may include costs related to data and evaluation as relevant per 2 CFR §200.455.

The costs related to data and evaluation are allowable. Data costs include the expenditures needed to gather, store, track, manage, analyze, disaggregate, secure, share, publish, or otherwise

use data to administer or improve the program, such as data systems, personnel, data dashboards, cybersecurity, and related items. Data costs may also include direct or indirect costs associated with building integrated data systems—data systems that link individual-level data from multiple State and local government agencies for purposes of management, research, and evaluation. Evaluation costs include evidence reviews, evaluation planning and feasibility assessment, conducting evaluations, sharing evaluation results, and other personnel or materials costs related to the effective building and use of evidence and evaluation for program design, administration, or improvement.

Budget narratives must be sufficiently detailed to show that the project is cost-effective, and that costs are both necessary and reasonable for accomplishing the purposes of the proposed project. Indicate whether partial funding of the project is practicable and, if so, what specific portion(s) of the project could be implemented with what level of funding. The budget narrative should provide sufficient detail for reviewers to understand how costs were estimated. Reviewers must be able to clearly see that costs are realistic and are commensurate with the project needs and time frame. Applications will be disqualified if reviewers cannot determine that applications meet this threshold.

Conflict of Interest and Unresolved Matters Disclosures:

If any actual or potential conflict of interest exists related to this project at the time of application, the applicant must provide sufficient information to support a program determination of significance per [2 CFR 1402.112](#). Refer to [2 CFR 200.112](#) Conflict of Interest and [2 CFR 200.113](#).

Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement:

Applicants must state in their application if the activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel proposed in this application overlap with those in any other Federal proposal or award or not. If no overlap exists, include a statement to that effect. If any overlap exists, provide:

- Activities: Description any overlapping activities.
- Costs: Description of any overlapping costs.
- Time: Description of any overlapping key personnel time.
- A copy of any overlapping or duplicative proposal submitted to any other potential funding entity.
- Details on when any overlapping proposal was submitted, to whom, and the expected date of the funding decision.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

Address to Request Application Package

Applicants can request application packages through the appropriate Regional contact listed in this Funding Opportunity but must apply through GrantSolutions.gov. The full Funding Opportunity will be posted on grants.gov and GrantSolutions.gov. Information on CESCFC grants is also available from the Division of Budget & Technical Support, Ecological Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 5275 Leesburg Pike, MS:ES Falls Church, VA 22041-3803, or electronically at <https://www.fws.gov/program/cooperative-endangered-species-conservation-fund>.

Submission Dates and Times

Closing Date for Applications: 10/30/2026

Closing Date Explanation

10/30/2026

Electronically submitted applications must be submitted no later than 11:59 PM, ET, on the listed application due date.

This program requires the submission of applications online through GrantSolutions.gov as applicants will receive an acknowledgment of application receipt. GrantSolutions automatically generates an electronic date and time stamp in the system upon application receipt. Applicants are encouraged to verify the completeness of their application package before submission using the checklist provided in this Funding Opportunity.

Submission Instructions

Apply Through GrantSolutions

To apply through [GrantSolutions](#), follow these steps:

1. **Register your organization.** Send an e-mail to help@grantsolutions.gov with:
 - Subject: New Organization Request
 - Entity name (organization or individual applying as a natural person)
 - Entity type
 - SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (not required for individuals)
 - Employer Identification Number (individuals, do not include your SSN)
 - Address
 - Contact details (First and last name, e-mail, phone)This information should be the same as entered on the entity's SAM.gov profile.
2. **Assign system user roles.** Follow the [GrantSolutions "Recipient user" registration instructions](#). Submit a separate Recipient User Account Request form for each official to be assigned a system role. At minimum, the Authorizing Official (ADO) and Principal Investigator/Program Director (PI/PD) must be assigned.
3. **Log in.** GrantSolutions requires users to log in through Login.gov. Each user must create a [Login.gov](#) account. For instructions, see the [GrantSolutions Training Resources web page](#).
4. **Find and apply to this Funding Opportunity.** After logging in, click on either the "Begin an application" link (first time applicants) or the "Funding Opportunity" link to go to the "Competing Announcements-Application Kits" list screen. Search the list for this Funding Opportunity's title and number. Click on the associated "Apply" link. Follow the prompts from there. Required applications forms are provided with the Funding Opportunity in GrantSolutions unless otherwise indicated on the Required Forms table above.
5. For detailed instructions, see the [GrantSolutions Training Resources web page](#).
6. **Need help?** Find help topics and contact information on the [GrantSolutions Contact Us page](#).

APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Eligibility Review

During the eligibility review, the application is checked for timely submission, completed packages (see [Application Documents](#) above) and alignment with the requirements of this announcement. The Federal agency may remove an application if it does not pass the eligibility review.

Prior to conducting the comprehensive merit review, an initial review will be performed to determine whether: (1) the applicant is eligible for an award; (2) the information required by the NOFO has been submitted; (3) all mandatory requirements of the NOFO are satisfied; (4) the proposed project is responsive to the program objectives of the NOFO (program determination); and (5) the proposed project is in compliance with all applicable executive and secretary orders, including the President's executive order on Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing as well as the executive order and Secretary order on Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History. If an applicant fails to meet the requirements or objectives of the NOFO, or does not provide sufficient information for review, the applicant will be considered nonresponsive and eliminated from further review.

Applications submitted for consideration will be reviewed by representatives from FWS staff with appropriate subject-matter expertise (e.g., species recovery, ESA policy and programs, Federal financial assistance) and compete at the national level.

Initial Screening for Completeness and Eligibility

A. Status of Cooperative Agreement: Only State agencies that have entered into a cooperative agreement with FWS pursuant to section 6(c) of the ESA are eligible to apply under this Funding Opportunity

B. Completeness and Eligibility: Applications will be screened to ensure that application packages have all required forms, application elements, and meet all eligibility criteria stated in this Funding Opportunity. FWS will review the SAM.gov exclusion database, status of applicants' administration of other grants, including Single Audit submissions, past performance, financial strength and management capabilities, and procedures and methods for monitoring subrecipients or vendors. Applicants in poor standing may not be considered for funding. If there are any questions about the ability of the project to be completed in compliance with Federal laws and regulations, additional information may be requested from the applicant. A project may be disqualified if FWS staff determine the project cannot meet Federal requirements. Incomplete applications may be returned for corrections. Corrections must be submitted within two weeks of the returned application. Applicants that do not respond within two weeks with corrected materials will be disqualified. FWS, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured.

If an applicant selected for funding hasn't finished their SAM.gov registration (see [2 CFR 25.200](#) and [2 CFR 25.110](#)) when the federal agency is ready to make an award, we may decide that the applicant is ineligible for the award and choose to grant it to someone else. Please refer [2 CFR 25.205](#) for more information.

Prior to making an award, the DOI checks the anticipated recipient and their key project personnel against the current list of prohibited or restricted persons or entities in the System for

Award Management (SAM.gov) Exclusions database. We are prohibited from making an award if a recipient or any key personnel are found ineligible, prohibited, restricted, or otherwise excluded from receiving or participating in an award, as their ineligibility condition applies to this program.

If removed from consideration for ineligibility, the Federal agency will notify the applicant in writing.

Merit Review

After initial screening, applications meeting the basic eligibility requirements will undergo merit review by members of the National Merit Review panel based on the criteria outlined below. Applicants must provide the information necessary for reviewers to score the proposed project against all evaluation criteria as no outside information will be considered. Missing or unclear information will result in lower scores. Each application will be reviewed, evaluated, and scored independently by National Merit Review panel members. Reviewers may discuss individual applications, but all scoring will be non-consensus. The reviewers' scores will be averaged and used to produce a rank order of the applications for consideration by the FWS Director. Following ranking, due to limited funding or for other reasons, FWS may ask applicants to revise the project scope, timeline, and/or budget. In this event, applicants will have to submit revised SF-424 forms and project/budget narratives prior to award.

1. Number of federally listed species benefited (Maximum Points: 15)

Reviewers will evaluate the number of federally listed species included on the section (10)(a)(1)(B) permit to benefit from the proposed acquisition.

Score: Number of federally listed species benefited by the proposed acquisition.

- 6 + species (15 pts)
- 4-5 species (10 pts)
- 2-3 species (6 pts)
- 1 species (3 pts)

Example Response Table to Evaluation Criterion 1

Property	Listed Species Benefited
Property A: Proposed for acquisition with grant funds	Vernal pool fairy shrimp (T)
Property B: Proposed for acquisition as cost share	Vernal pool fairy shrimp (T)

2. Number of candidate & at-risk species benefited (Maximum Points: 10)

Reviewers will consider the number of candidate and at-risk species included on the section (10)(a)(1)(B) permit to benefit from the proposed acquisition.

Score: Number of candidate and at-risk species benefited by the proposed acquisition.

- 6 + species (10 pts)
- 4-5 species (6 pts)

- 2-3 species (4 pts)
- 1 species (2 pts)
- 0 species (0 pts)

Example Response Table to Evaluation Criterion 2

Property	Candidate & At-risk Species Benefited
Property A	None.
Property B	Western pond turtle

3. Magnitude of Benefit: Contribution to Conservation (Maximum Points: 15)

Reviewers will consider the proposed acquisition's potential benefit to species conservation, including the acquisition's contribution to recovering listed species, precluding the need to list candidate species, or reducing threats to at-risk species.

Score: Projects with the greatest potential contribution to species conservation will be prioritized.

- Acquisition will implement a priority recovery action (as identified in a FWS recovery planning document), implement a conservation measure or action identified in a candidate species assessment, or implement an action that ameliorates or reduces an identified threat for an at-risk species identified in a State Wildlife Action Plan, State recovery plan, or similar conservation document. (5 pts for each action or measure per species)

Example Response Table to Evaluation Criterion 3

Covered Species	Applicable Priority Recovery Action/ Conservation Measure/ Other Action
Vernal pool ecosystem species	1.4.1.1 Protect species occurrences and suitable vernal pool habitat in Zone 1 core areas. (Priority 1) (Recovery Plan for Vernal Pool Ecosystems of California and Southern Oregon. USFWS. 2005)
Western Pond Turtle	3.2.3. Evaluate and, if possible, obtain easements or title to lands through purchase, land exchange, or charitable donation. (Washington State Recovery Plan for the Western Pond Turtle. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 1999)

4. Ecosystem Functionality (Maximum Points: 20)

Under this criterion, reviewers will consider each species' occupancy status on the lands proposed for acquisition. Greater consideration will be given to lands with fully functioning ecosystems requiring little or no restoration to benefit species.

Score: Occupancy status and restoration requirements of lands proposed for acquisition. Additive, up to 20 points.

- Occupied habitat: no restoration required. Currently supports viable population (20 pts for each species)
- Occupied habitat: some restoration required to contribute to the viability of an existing population (10 pts for each species)
- Suitable unoccupied habitat: active reintroduction plan in place (5 pts for each species)
- Suitable unoccupied habitat: no restoration required (4 pts for each species)
- Suitable unoccupied habitat: restoration required (3 pts for each species)
- Land proposed for acquisition contains no suitable habitat. (0 pts)

Example Response Table to Evaluation Criterion 4

Species	Occupancy/Restoration Requirements Property A	Occupancy/Restoration Requirements Property B
Vernal pool fairy shrimp	Occupied habitat with no restoration required.	Occupied habitat with no restoration required.
Western pond turtle	N/A	Occupied habitat: some restoration required to contribute to the viability of an existing population

5. Habitat Connectivity (Maximum Points: 15)

Reviewers will reference project location information included in the project narrative and attached maps to assess how the proposed acquisition improves connectivity among existing conservation lands. Land that links two existing conservation areas together or is adjacent to an existing conservation area to reduce habitat fragmentation is preferred over isolated acquisitions.

Score: Reviewers will refer to applicant-supplied maps when evaluating this criterion.

- Proposed acquisition directly expands, connects, enhances, or consolidates the conservation lands specifically protected through the HCP to improve the management of covered species. (15 pts)
- Proposed acquisition links existing conservation areas together. (10 pts)
- Proposed acquisition lies adjacent to existing conservation areas to reduce habitat fragmentation. (5 pts)
- Proposed acquisition is isolated from existing conservation lands but is necessary for species conservation. (0 pts)

6. Timeliness: Threat of Conversion (Maximum Points: 10)

For each property (or area) proposed for acquisition, reviewers will consider the nature, extent, and level of severity of the threat of conversion to uses inconsistent with species conservation. Project narratives should include sufficient information to allow reviewers to assess the consequences of not acquiring the property for conservation.

Score: Greater consideration will be given to the acquisition of lands under imminent threat of conversion to uses inconsistent with species recovery.

- Demonstrated threat of conversion is imminent. (10 pts)
- Demonstrated threat is probable. (6 pts)
- Demonstrated threat is possible within foreseeable future. (2 pts)
- No demonstrated threat of conversion (0 pts)

Example Response Table to Evaluation Criterion 6

Property	Threat Designation	Justification
Property A	Imminent	Competing buyer, development plan in place
Property B	Probable	Property zoned for development.

7. Timeliness: Readiness of State to Proceed (Maximum Points: 10)

Reviewers will evaluate the project timetable and supporting documentation submitted at time of application to assess project readiness. Timetables should clearly demonstrate how the scope of work is highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance as well as any due diligence completed to date. Reviewers will also consider the past performance of applicants and subrecipients, if applicable.

Score: Projects ready for implementation will be prioritized. Additive, up to 10 points.

- Applicant commits to completing work within the requested PoP (three-year max) with the understanding that no extensions or parcel amendments will be considered. (5 pts)
- Acquisition is ready for implementation. More points if the applicant can demonstrate due diligence work has begun or all parties have committed to begin work, less points if applicant cannot demonstrate that the project is poised for successful implementation. (5 pts)

8. Voluntary Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment (Maximum Points: 5)

Score: Applications that include greater than minimum non-Federal cost share will be prioritized. The non-Federal cost share must be at least one percent higher than the minimum required cost share (see section C2) to receive additional consideration under this criterion.

- Greater than minimum non-Federal cost share commitment (5 pts)
- Required minimum non-Federal cost share commitment (0 pts)

9. Regional Director's Discretion (Maximum Points: 25)

Each FWS Regional Director will have 25 points to distribute among all applications submitted by the States in their respective Region based on considerations outlined in the next section to reflect FWS and State priorities.

Review and Selection Process

This program reviews proposed budgets to ensure:

- figures are correct
- estimated costs are necessary and reasonable and clearly linked to project narratives

- avoid obviously unallowable costs
- identify costs requiring prior approval
- ensure indirect cost rates are applied correctly
- confirm cost sharing requirements are reflected in the budget.

This program reviews applications for potential overlap or duplication between the proposed project and any other funded or proposed project. Depending on the circumstances, DOI may choose to not make an award.

The National Merit Review panel will develop and recommend a ranked project list to the Assistant Director of Ecological Services, who will recommend a final list of projects to the FWS Director. Projects will be recommended for funding by rank order unless an application is justified by the Assistant Director to be selected out of rank order based upon the following considerations:

- National/ Regional priority: Proposed acquisition directly supports national priorities identified in the Program Description section above or provides significant benefit to rare or threatened habitat types or species facing pronounced threats to their existence.
- Applicant's ability to use partial funding
- Availability of funding
- Balance/distribution of funds geographically within a FWS Region
- Balance/distribution of funds geographically across FWS Regions
- Cost-effectiveness of project, maximized cost-share, and/or low administrative costs
- Whether this project duplicates other projects funded by FWS or other Department of the Interior agencies
- The applicant's prior award performance
- Partnerships with and/or participation of targeted groups

The FWS Director will decide which applications will be forwarded to the Department of Interior for final award approval.

Risk Review

Prior to making an award, the applicant will be assessed for their level of risk per [2 CFR 200.206](#). This assessment includes the applicant's financial management capabilities, project delivery experience, staffing resources, past award performance, administration and reporting compliance records, and overall project complexity and potential for challenges. If an award will be made, special conditions may be applied to the award corresponding to the assessed risk. For awards over the simplified acquisition threshold (currently \$350,000), a review of the applicant's eligibility and financial integrity information in the applicant's SAM.gov records will also be performed per [2 CFR 200.206](#).

AWARD NOTICES

Notices of Federal Award are sent electronically via GrantSolutions or e-mail. These notices outline the terms, conditions, and payment instructions per [2 CFR 200.211](#). The Notice of Federal Award signed by an authorized Grants Officer is the legal instrument obligating financial assistance to a recipient. Any other prior notice is not an authorization to begin work. If the

program allows pre-award costs per [2 CFR 200.458](#), beginning performance before receiving a Notice of Federal Award is at the applicant's own risk.

Anticipated Project Start Date: 04/30/2027

Anticipated Project End Date: 04/30/2030

FWS intends to make pre-award notifications prior to the close of the fiscal year and obligate funds within 120 days. Applicants will assist FWS in meeting the 120-day target by providing the documents necessary for grant issuance as soon as possible following pre-award notification. The maximum PoP for a grant awarded through this opportunity is three years, beginning on the effective date established at the time of grant approval or the date of award obligation, whichever is earlier.

Awarded funds must be expended in a timely manner or returned to FWS for reallocation through the next competitive grant cycle. If an approved project cannot be completed within the award's PoP, the State may request a one-time extension of up to 12 months with appropriate justification. However, FWS will not consider requests to amend the PoP for projects that received additional consideration under the project readiness evaluation criterion during merit review.

FWS will also consider a one-time parcel amendment for projects that did not receive additional consideration under the project readiness evaluation criterion during merit review if the alternative property proposed for acquisition has comparable species benefits and would have been selected for award when measured against the merit review criteria.

Such amendment requests will only be considered with Regional approval and will require elevated review and approval through Ecological Services' Headquarters Office. Any project awarded funding that will not be completed, and from which funds are deobligated, may be eligible for funding in a future competitive award cycle.

If an application is selected for an award, the appropriate FWS Regional Office will notify the applicant of the selection and outline the process for finalizing the award, including any additional information that may be required from the applicant for the satisfactory completion of compliance review. Applicants may be required to revise the project scope and/or budget before a final Notice of Award can be issued. The Notice of Award is the authorizing document for a grant and will be received through GrantSolutions upon completion of all review requirements. Acceptance of an award is defined as starting work, drawing down funds, or accepting the award via electronic means. The Notice of Award will include specific instructions on how to request payment. If applicable, the instructions will detail any additional information/forms required and where to submit payment requests.

FWS may publish one or more media releases and post information about projects selected for funding on FWS websites. These releases may be made in coordination with the Department of the Interior and may be made Nationally and/or Regionally.

POST AWARD REQUIREMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION

Administration and National Policy Requirements

For award administration and national policy requirements, see the [DOI General Terms and Conditions](#). Infrastructure projects require the use of American iron, steel, manufacture products, and construction materials per [2 CFR 184](#).

See the [FWS General Award Terms and Conditions](#) for national policy requirements for FWS awards. Special terms and conditions will be detailed in award notices.

Reporting

The recipient's Notice of Award will detail all reporting requirements, including frequency, due dates, and instructions for requesting extensions. In general, but not limited to, recipients must:

- Submit Federal Financial reports and Program Performance reports.
- Use the [Federal Financial Report \(SF-425\) form](#) for financial reporting,
- Monitor award activities and report on program performance per [2 CFR 200.329](#),
- Promptly notify the awarding program in writing of any issues, delays, or conditions impairing award objectives per [2 CFR 200.329\(e\)](#),
- Disclose any conflicts of interest related to their award that arise during the award period per [2 CFR 1402.112](#),
- Report on the status of real property acquired under the award in which the Federal government retains an interest per [2 CFR 200.330](#), and
- Report all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award per [2 CFR 200.113](#).
- Report any matters related to recipient integrity and performance to SAM.gov per [Appendix XII to 2 CFR 200](#).
- If the Federal share of the award is more than \$100,000 and the recipient makes or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying in connection to the award, disclose those activities using the Disclosure of Lobbying (SF-LLL) form per [43 CFR 18.100](#).
- Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (FFATA) and 2 CFR 170 requires certain recipients to report information on executive compensation, and information on all sub-awards, subcontracts and consortiums equal to or over \$30,000 to SAM.gov.

If selected for an award, the applicant may be responsible for entering information in the FWS Tracking and Reporting Actions for the Conservation of Species (TRACS) inventory modules to create real property/facility record(s). FWS will use these real property/facility records to ensure your periodic compliance requirement to submit reports on the status of real property acquired or constructed under a Federal award as outlined in the Notice of Award is met. The Director, Office of Grants Management, has approved FWS' use of TRACS as an alternate equivalent format for the collection of data needed for the OMB approved form, *Real Property Status Report SF 429-A* (2 CFR 1402.329(d)(4)). If the real property will be held for 15 years or more, the first report will be due within a year of the end of the period of performance, and subsequent reporting on a schedule determined by us. Reports for real property held for 15 years or more will be due at least once every five years but could be required more often.

Performance will be assessed using measures from FWS's annual performance plan, including the number of federally listed species benefiting from proposed project(s) and the number of priority recovery actions implemented. These measures help determine whether recipients are making clear, measurable progress toward the conservation outcomes in their approved project narrative.

Other Information