

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants
- **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- **Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:** 11.463, Habitat Conservation
- **Dates:** Applications should be submitted via www.grants.gov, and must be received by grants.gov **no later than 11:59 PM EST on September 25, 2006**. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.
- **Application Submission:** Applications should be submitted via www.grants.gov. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, applications must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by **September 25, 2006** and sent to: NOAA Community-based Restoration Program (F/HC3), Office of Habitat Conservation, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East West Highway, Rm. 14701, Silver Spring, MD 20910. **ATTN: CRP Partnership Applications**. Refer to Application and Submission Information for further instructions.
- **Funding Opportunity Description:** The NOAA Restoration Center (RC) invites the public to submit applications requesting funding to establish multi-year national and regional habitat restoration partnerships for up to three years. Partnerships are expected to catalyze the implementation of locally-driven, grass-roots habitat restoration projects that will benefit living marine resources, including diadromous fish. NOAA envisions working jointly on such partnerships through its Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) to identify, evaluate, fund, and administer projects with substantial community involvement that restore NOAA trust resource habitats. This document describes the types of habitat restoration partnerships that NOAA envisions establishing, portrays the qualities that NOAA has found to be ideal in previously established partnerships, and describes criteria under which applications will be evaluated for funding consideration. Partnership applications selected through this announcement will be implemented through a grant or cooperative agreement, and will involve joint selection of multiple community-based habitat restoration projects funded as sub-awards made through the partner organization. Funding requested to establish partnerships in FY2007 is expected to be greater than funds available for this purpose and the selection process is anticipated to be highly competitive. Funding of up to \$10 million is expected to be available to establish habitat restoration partnerships in 2007, and annual funding is anticipated to maintain them for up to 3 years duration. Typical partnership awards will range from \$200,000 to \$600,000 per year. This is not a request for individual

community-based habitat restoration project proposals.

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Description

The CRP, a financial and technical federal assistance program, promotes strong partnerships at the national, regional and local levels to fund grass-roots, community-based activities that restore living marine resources and their habitats and promote stewardship and a conservation ethic for NOAA trust resources. NOAA trust resources are living marine resources that include commercial and recreational fishery resources (marine fish and shellfish and their habitats); diadromous species (fish, such as salmon, striped bass, shad and American eel whose life cycles carry them between rivers and oceans); endangered and threatened marine species and their habitats; marine mammals, turtles, and their habitats; marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and other coastal habitats; and resources associated with National Marine Sanctuaries and National Estuarine Research Reserves.

The CRP's objective is to bring together citizen groups, public and nonprofit organizations, watershed groups, industry, corporations and businesses, youth conservation corps, students, landowners, academic institutions and local government, state, and federal agencies to cooperatively implement habitat restoration projects to benefit NOAA trust resources. Partnerships developed at national, regional and local levels contribute funding, land, technical assistance, workforce support or other in-kind services to promote citizen participation in the improvement of locally-important living marine resources and develop local stewardship and monitoring activities to sustain and evaluate the success of the restoration. Partnerships also allow NOAA to focus on providing technical assistance to aid with project implementation.

The CRP recognizes the significant role that partnerships can play in making habitat restoration happen within communities, and acknowledges that habitat restoration is often best implemented through technical and monetary support provided at a community level. Community-based restoration projects supported by the CRP are successful because they have significant local backing, depend upon citizens' hands-on involvement, and typically involve NOAA technical assistance or oversight. The role of NOAA in the CRP is to help identify potential restoration projects, strengthen the development and implementation of sound restoration projects within communities, and develop long-term, ongoing national and regional partnerships to support community-based restoration efforts of living marine resource habitats across a wide geographic area. For more information on the CRP, see Section IV. A. "Address to Request Application Packages."

B. Restoration Partnership Mechanisms

NOAA envisions working collaboratively to implement fisheries habitat restoration primarily through cooperative agreements, where potential national and regional partners apply for funds to work with the Restoration Center (RC) on a multi-year basis to identify, develop, implement and monitor community-based habitat restoration projects to benefit NOAA trust

resources. Establishing partnerships through a cooperative agreement mechanism or interagency transfer will involve solicitation and joint evaluation of numerous community-based habitat restoration projects funded as sub-awards made through the partner organization.

C. Program Priorities

The program priorities for this opportunity support NOAA's Ecosystems Mission Goal to protect, restore and manage the use of coastal and ocean resources through ecosystem-based management. The program strives to demonstrate meaningful, measurable, and sustainable ecological benefits to coastal and marine resources through habitat restoration. The program aims to strike a balance between strong national and regional partnerships and seeks to involve diverse constituencies across a broad geographic region to restore, protect, conserve and enhance habitats that benefit NOAA trust resources. See Section III.C. for partnership qualities that are deemed highly desirable and represent program priorities that may result in an application receiving greater funding consideration.

D. Program Authority

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. 661, as amended by the Reorganization Plan No. 4 of 1970, to provide grants or cooperative agreements for fisheries habitat restoration.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

This solicitation announces that funding of up to \$10 million is expected to be available for establishing habitat restoration partnerships with the NOAA Restoration Center in FY 2007. Annual funding is anticipated to maintain partnerships for up to 3 years duration, but this is dependant upon the level of funding made available by Congress. Funding for subsequent years will also depend on the ability of partners to successfully perform partnership activities as stated in their applications. NOAA anticipates that typical partnership awards will range from \$200,000 to \$600,000 for the initial year of national and regional habitat restoration partnerships established in FY 2007. NOAA will not accept proposals with a single year budget under \$100,000 or over \$2,000,000 under this solicitation. Applicants can request increases to continue scaling up partnership activities in subsequent budget periods to a limit of \$2,500,000 in FY 2008, and to \$4,000,000 in FY 2009, however annual funding levels and any increases over FY 2007 levels for successful applicants will be dependent upon partnership success, regional priorities, and future budget increases provided by Congress.

In accordance with revised NOAA Community-based Restoration Program Guidelines proposed August 24, 2005 (70 FR 49578), the Restoration Center Chief (Chief) will determine the proportion of funds available to the CRP on an annual basis that will be obligated to national and regional partnerships each year. The number of partnership awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds

requested for initiating partnerships by the applicants, the merit and ranking of the proposals, and the amount of funds made available to the CRP by Congress. NOAA anticipates that between 8 and 15 awards will be made as a result of this solicitation.

There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to initiate partnerships where funding has been recommended, and the number of national and regional partnerships established will be up to the discretion of the Chief. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded to work within a habitat restoration partnership will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives, and multi-year funding requests are expected to be funded incrementally on an annual basis. Publication of this document does not obligate NOAA to establish any specific partnership proposed or to obligate all or any parts of the available funds for partnership activities.

For reference, in FY 2004 the program established and funded 13 multi-year partnerships for a total of \$5.8 million in their first year, \$6.8 million in FY 2005, and \$5.5 million in FY 2006.

B. Award Period

Applications for national and regional partnerships should cover a project period between 1 and 3 years. Multi-year partnership requests are expected to be funded incrementally on an annual basis. Once awarded in FY 2007, multi-year partnerships will not need to compete for funding in subsequent years. The intention of the CRP is to attract and maintain partnerships that will be ongoing and long-lasting; established partnerships are expected to continue through the duration of the award period. 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, is at the total discretion of the Chief.

Future opportunities for submitting proposals to the competitive process for developing multi-year, national and regional habitat restoration partnerships are anticipated, but will be dependent on CRP funding levels and on the performance of existing partners to successfully conduct partnership activities to identify, develop, evaluate, implement and monitor community-based fisheries habitat restoration projects.

The earliest anticipated start date for partnership awards will be May 1, 2007. Applicants should consider this date when developing plans for initiating proposed partnership activities.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement under the terms of this document. For applications funded through cooperative agreements, substantial involvement of the federal government may include, but is not limited to, activities such as assisting national and regional partners to promote locally driven habitat restoration

activities; cooperating with partners in project identification, evaluation and selection; conducting site visits and evaluating the performance of individual restoration projects sub-awarded through partnerships; supporting project partners to enhance their effectiveness in meeting stated restoration goals for improving fisheries habitat, including assistance with the development of appropriate monitoring to ensure a basic level of assessment of project success; providing project-specific permitting guidance and/or assistance; collaborating on the improvement of existing, and/or development of new performance measures to gauge project outcomes; and involvement in public events to highlight restoration activities.

D. Permits and Approvals

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. If specific projects are identified at time of application, documentation of requests or approvals of required environmental permits should be included in the application package as applicable. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they contain sufficient information to allow NOAA staff to conduct a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis so that appropriate NEPA documentation, required as part of the application package, can be submitted to the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) along with a recommendation for funding for selected applications. For applicants that have not identified specific projects, so that NOAA staff cannot complete a project level NEPA analysis by the time of award, Special Award Conditions regarding NEPA will be included in the award document.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the NOAA Fisheries Community-based Restoration Program Environmental Assessment (PEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and once available, the CRP Supplemental PEA and FONSI to understand how NOAA will evaluate individual restoration projects for environmental compliance aspects. The CRP PEA and FONSI can be found at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/assessment/ea_main.html.

Applicants should find this material helpful in developing some technical aspects of their applications, and should be prepared to state how they would provide the necessary information for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination for all projects, particularly those projects that fall outside programmatic NEPA documents. Applicants should note that environmental compliance is an element considered under evaluation criteria #2. "Technical/Scientific Merit". For more information see Section VI. B. "Administrative and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Requirements".

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, hospitals, other non-profits, commercial (for-profit) organizations, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, international organizations, state, local and Indian tribal governments whose

applications propose to benefit NOAA trust resources. 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, national service clubs or youth corps organizations and others that are eligible to apply.

The Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (DOC/NOAA) is strongly committed to broadening the participation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities in its educational and research programs. The DOC/NOAA vision, mission, and goals are to achieve full participation by Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) in order to advance the development of human potential, to strengthen the nation's capacity to provide high-quality education, and to increase opportunities for MSIs to participate in, and benefit from, Federal financial assistance programs. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals for innovative national and regional partnerships involving MSIs according to the criteria in this document, to strengthen the capacity of MSIs to foster student careers, research and workforce competitiveness in fisheries habitat restoration through identification, development, implementation and monitoring of on-the-ground community-based restoration projects on a national or regional scale.

B. National and Regional Restoration Partnership Goals

NOAA is interested in developing multi-year national and regional partnerships that will lead to the accomplishment of on-the-ground, community-based restoration of marine, coastal and freshwater habitats to benefit living marine resources, including diadromous fish species. The primary goals of NOAA in establishing these partnerships, as described in this announcement and the revised CRP Guidelines proposed August 24, 2005 (70 FR 49578), are to restore living marine resource habitats; to involve community member volunteers in restoration activities to increase public awareness of the ecological value of fisheries habitat and foster a sense of community stewardship and pride for local restoration efforts; to develop and maintain long-term, ongoing, working relationships of mutual benefit by partnering on activities where the priorities and goals of partners overlap; to combine resources with national and regional partners to increase the geographic scope and rate at which habitat restoration can be conducted; and to collaborate on project identification, development, and selection for funding with partners that are able to coordinate and manage most or all aspects of restoration activities.

Successful applicants will be those whose partnership proposals are broad-reaching and demonstrate the potential for significant benefits to living marine resources across a large geographic area and/or according to a publicly vetted, prioritized regional restoration plan or similar document to accomplish coordinated, strategic implementation of individual projects that will involve community participation. Applicants seeking to establish partnerships will need to demonstrate that restoration activities will be consistent with NOAA Fisheries priorities and goals outlined in this notice. Applicants should also note that the following activities will not be considered under partnership awards: (1) Activities that constitute legally required mitigation for the adverse effects of an activity regulated or otherwise governed by local, state or federal law; (2) activities that constitute restoration for natural resource damages under federal, state or local law; and (3) activities that are required by a separate consent decree, court order, statute or

regulation.

Proposals for both national and regional partnerships are encouraged. However, because regional partnerships are more focused in geographic scope, these applicants will be expected to demonstrate coordinated efforts among multiple groups such as universities, science centers, state and municipal agencies, watershed groups, local schools, civic groups and non-governmental organizations. Applications for regional partnerships should involve a coalition that has or will develop joint goals and objectives to accomplish habitat restoration, and whose activities are expected to take place across a substantial and defined geographic region, such as the Chesapeake Bay watershed or the states that border the Gulf of Maine or the Gulf of Mexico, for example, and/or that will work within a prioritized framework to implement projects of greatest benefit in a comprehensive, strategic fashion.

C. Ideal Partnership Qualities

The CRP has worked within a variety of partnerships focused on community-based fishery habitat restoration. Successful partnerships resulted where joint goals and priorities were most effectively accomplished through collaborative activities, including the pooling of financial and technical resources. The following list highlights the ideal qualities the CRP desires in working within national and regional community-based restoration partnerships. The list illustrates aspects that will be considered in the evaluation of applications, but it is not intended to limit the scope of partnership proposals.

- Partnerships able to provide cash match for project implementation funds at the national/regional level, before local contributions for specific projects are factored in. Providing cash match at the national/regional level for project implementation and a 1:1 match overall will enable a greater number of jointly evaluated and recommended community-based habitat restoration projects to be implemented.
- Partnerships that limit their administrative costs so that the bulk of funding goes to support on-the-ground project implementation.
- Partnerships that rely on regional restoration planning or other comprehensive planning framework for identifying priority projects so that restoration conducted under sub-awards is more strategic and less opportunistic.
- Partnerships that address underserved or underrepresented regions and communities
- Partnerships featuring an established network to effectively advance the vision of habitat restoration and support NOAA's ecosystem mission goal.
- Partnerships that propose a competitive mechanism or similarly rigorous process to direct funding to highly qualified projects.
- Emulation of the CRPs evaluation criteria for individual projects, based on NOAA standard criteria common to all its competitive grant programs, so that joint project evaluation will be relatively consistent for NOAA across a wide variety of partnerships. The five standard NOAA criteria are 1) importance and applicability of proposal; 2) technical and scientific merit; 3) overall qualifications of applicants; 4) project costs; and 5) outreach, education and community involvement.
- Incorporation or expansion of the Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) minimum

monitoring guidance. Implementation of on-the-ground sub-awards that will have clearly defined goals and specific measurable objectives that will involve monitoring during the project period of structural and functional parameters.

- Provision of information (for NOAA inclusion in the Restoration Center Database) on individual project accomplishments using the CRP's OMB approved progress report form and format, or other tool that provides information at an equivalent level of detail to allow for robust project tracking and evaluation of performance measures.

D. Restoration Expectations through the Sub-award Process

Projects funded under a partnership will be expected to have strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that provide educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological habitat improvements for NOAA trust resources. 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 unduly restricting proposed activities to specific restoration phases or categories of cost.

Restoration is defined here as activities that contribute to the return of degraded or altered marine, estuarine, coastal and freshwater diadromous fish habitats to a close approximation of their condition prior to disturbance. Restoration may include, but is not limited to, improvement of coastal wetland tidal exchange or reestablishment of historic hydrology; dam or berm removal; improvement or reestablishment of fish passage; reef/substrate/habitat creation; establishment of riparian buffer zones and improvement of freshwater habitat features that support diadromous fish; exclusionary fencing and planting; invasive species removal; planting of native coastal wetland and submerged aquatic vegetation; and enhancement of feeding, spawning and growth areas essential to marine or diadromous fish.

A partnership application may target the restoration of specific habitats or the use of certain restoration techniques, or may focus work within certain geographic locations, if the restoration of these habitats or work with particular techniques or restoration in designated locations has been documented under an inclusive, regional planning effort to be a priority that is also consistent with the priorities of NOAA Fisheries. An example would be proposed restoration activities resulting from a regional planning or other process where multiple stakeholders have reached consensus and for which suitable documentation of the planning effort is included with or referenced by the application.

Projects conducted through a partnership will also be expected to involve science-based monitoring of restoration projects where appropriate in an effort to improve on-the-ground restoration efforts and increase Program effectiveness. Applications requesting sub-award funding to implement on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that will result in structural or functional habitat changes will be expected to have clearly identified goals (broad in scope) and specific, measurable objectives. Applicants should aim to include monitoring during the project period of at least one structural and one functional parameter, as supported by Title I of the Estuaries and Clean Waters Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-457), to ensure a basic assessment of

project success. A fact sheet with examples of structural and functional monitoring parameters is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>.

Proposals for partnerships with a narrow restoration focus that will benefit limited resources or few user groups, that emphasize a single restoration component, such as only outreach, monitoring, or program coordination, that lack a competitive or 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 partnership agreements with the RC.

E. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements

The overall focus of the CRP is to provide seed money to individual projects that leverage funds and other contributions from a broad public and private sector to implement locally important habitat restoration to benefit living marine resources. To this end, applicants seeking national and regional partnerships with the RC are encouraged to demonstrate a 1:1 non-Federal match overall for federal funds requested. Additionally, those partnerships that propose to provide cash match toward project implementation funds at the national/regional level (before local, project-specific contributions are included) will be likely to score higher in the evaluation of project costs. While this is not a requirement, the RC strongly advises applicants to leverage as much investment as possible. Applicants with less than 1:1 match and those that do not have cash match for project implementation funds at the national/regional level will not be disqualified, however applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered in evaluation criteria #4. "Project Costs." Similarly, proposals that limit administrative costs to 20% at the national or regional level also will be likely to score higher on this criterion.

The match can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include in-kind goods and services. Federal funds may not be considered matching funds. Applicants are permitted to combine non-federal contributions from additional partners in order to meet the 1:1 match expected to establish a partnership, as long as the matching funds are not already being used to match other funding sources and are available within the project period stated in the application. Applicants are also permitted to apply federally negotiated indirect costs in excess of federal share limits as described in Section IV. E. 2. "Indirect Costs".

Applicants whose proposals are selected for habitat restoration partnership funding will be bound by the percentage of cost sharing reflected in the award document signed by the NOAA Grants Officer. Successful applicants must be prepared to carefully document matching contributions, including the number of volunteer or community participation hours devoted to individual habitat restoration projects.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

This solicitation, complete application packages (including required federal application forms) with instructions and the address for submission, and information on the Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition can be found on the world wide web at www.grants.gov, or by contacting Melanie Gange (Melanie.Gange@noaa.gov) or Robin Bruckner (Robin.Bruckner@noaa.gov) at 301-713-0174. General information on the CRP itself, including examples of national and regional partnerships and community-based habitat restoration projects that have been funded to date, can be found at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>.

Potential applicants are invited to contact NOAA Restoration Center staff before submitting an application to discuss the applicability of partnership ideas to the CRP's goals and objectives, and/or to request an application package that contains instructions for submitting NOAA standard grants applications and supplementary instructions specific to the CRP partnership competition.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply through the grants.gov website, www.grants.gov, the clearinghouse for Federal financial assistance. A complete standard NOAA grants application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. Each application should include (mandatory forms in bold):

- required federal application forms, including:
 - Application for Federal Assistance: **SF-424** (9/03 version or newer)
 - Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: **SF-424A (one for each annual budget period)**
 - Assurances, Non-construction Programs: **SF-424B**
 - Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters: Drug Free Workplace Environment: **CD-511**
 - CD-512 (remains with applicant—do not submit as part of the application package)
- depending on the applicant, the following forms may also be required:
 - Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)
 - Applicant for Federal Assistance: **CD-346** (required for the following individuals: Non-profit Organizations, Sole Proprietorship, Partnerships, Corporations and Joint Venture);
- a project summary (described below) (2 pages);
- a project narrative (described below) (15 pages);
- a detailed, narrative budget justification (described below) (2 pages/annual budget period);
- the curriculum vitae or resume of primary project personnel;
- letters documenting support; and
- other relevant attachments the applicant deems important to the overall understanding and evaluation of the proposed project, such as regional restoration planning documents or a

site location map to indicate the geographic scope of the partnership.

Applications submitted through the grants.gov website should include only three files in addition to the Federal Application forms: 1) the project summary and narrative, 2) the budget justification, and 3) all other attachments combined, including resumes, restoration plans, maps, and support letters. PDF files are the preferred format; information about converting documents to PDF files is available on the grants.gov website.

1. Project Summary (2 pages):

- **Applicant Organization**
- **Partnership Title**
- **Geographic Scope** - state whether the partnership is national or regional, and what states and/or watersheds 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 solicitation, project sub-award, and initiation of on-the-ground implementation.
- **NOAA Trust Resources likely to benefit**– briefly describe the partnership resource focus, any restrictions expected such as only certain habitat types, specific applicant/user groups, specific resource/habitat targets, etc.
- **Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Anticipated** (including other Federal contributions that may help support the partnership)
- **Letters of Support** (list those included with the application, particularly those from members of Congress)

2. Project Narrative (15 pages)

The **project narrative** should closely follow the organization of the evaluation criteria (below) for the application to receive a consistent review against competing applications. The body of this narrative description should be no more than 15 pages long (in 12-point font with 1” margins; double-spaced type is preferred, but not required). The narrative should clearly demonstrate the broad-based benefits expected to living marine resource habitats, and how these benefits will be achieved through the proposed partnership activities. It should identify the problems the partnership plans to address and the geographic area over which the partnership will operate. The narrative should describe short- and long-term objectives and goals, methods for identifying potential projects, the criteria that will be used for selecting restoration proposals and determining the success of projects implemented at a community level under the partnership, and the relevance and significance of the proposed partnership to enhancing habitat to benefit living marine resources. If specific projects are identified in the application, the narrative should describe the historic condition of the restoration sites, the processes which resulted in degradation of the area and how these processes have been abated to allow for successful restoration, if applicable.

The narrative should describe how partners 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, particularly those projects that fall outside programmatic NEPA documents. It should also identify the anticipated partnership duration (between 12 and 36 months), the amount and timing of funds requested, potential sources of national/regional and local match, including cash match available at the national/regional level for supporting project sub-awards, and any restrictions the partner may impose on the further use of Federal funds. For example, if the partner anticipates limiting competition, restricting the level of funding per project, designating funding for specific project phases, cost categories or to specific recipients, restricting habitat types, organization types or geographic locations from consideration, these limitations or restrictions should be clearly detailed in the narrative. It is NOAA's intention to maintain maximum competition and flexibility in the use of Federal restoration funds.

The project narrative should also include information on how the selection of projects under the partnership with NOAA will promote significant community involvement in fisheries habitat restoration and stewardship, and describe how the partnership will be advanced or promoted. It should also describe the organizational structure of the applicant, detail their qualifications and identify proposed partnership staff. Anticipated project partners other than the applicant should be identified, and supporting documentation indicating their intent to participate and identifying their potential contributions should be included. This is particularly important for those applying to establish regional partnerships. Inclusion of supplementary materials such as letters of support, restoration planning documents, photographs, etc. is strongly encouraged and do not count toward the narrative page limit. All supplementary materials should be combined and submitted as one single file separate from the narrative. 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 (2 pages/annual budget period)

Budgets must include a detailed breakdown by category of cost (object class) separated into federal and non-federal shares as they relate to specific aspects of the partnership, with appropriate justification for both the federal and non-federal shares. A separate SF-424A budget form should be used to break down multi-year budget requests into annual funding increments, and the budget justification should mirror the organization of the forms. Budget justifications should indicate if funding requests to support partnership activities have been submitted elsewhere, whether the funds requested are federal or non-federal, and what amount has been requested or secured from other sources to support partnership activities described in the application submitted to NOAA. The NOAA Grants Management Division will review budget information for recommended applications to determine if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and realistic. The NOAA Grants Management Division has a Budget Guidelines document available at: <http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/appkit.shtml>.

4. Other Application Submission Information

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply through www.grants.gov. It takes approximately 3 weeks to register with grants.gov, and registration is required only once. Applicants should consider the time needed to register with grants.gov, and should begin the registration process well in advance of the application due date if they have never registered with grants.gov. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, a hard copy application (signed in blue ink) may be submitted to the NOAA Restoration Center (see sub-section F. "Other Submission Requirements"). Paper applications should be printed on one side only and should not be bound in any manner. Applicants submitting paper applications should also include a full copy of the application on compact disc.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications for **partnership funding** under the CRP should be submitted via www.grants.gov, and must be received by grants.gov **no later than 11:59 PM EST on September 25, 2006** to be considered for funding. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, applications must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by **September 25, 2006** and sent to: NOAA Community-based Restoration Program (F/HC3), Office of Habitat Conservation, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East West Highway, Rm. 14701, Silver Spring, MD 20910. **ATTN: CRP 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 15 business days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program from 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

1. Allowable Costs

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the partnership. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment and supplies, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable" specifically for the purpose of the award. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Circulars A-122,

“Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations”; A-21, “Cost Principles for Education Institutions”; A-87, “Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments”; and Federal Acquisition Regulation, codified at 48 Code of Federal Regulations, subpart 31.2 “Contracts with Commercial Organizations.” All cost reimbursement sub-awards (subgrants, subcontracts, etc.) are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular type of organization concerned.

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable. A pre-award cost incurred before a notice of award document is provided by the NOAA Grants Office is at the applicant’s own risk. Typically, the earliest date for receipt of partnership awards will be May 1, 2007. Applicants should consider this award timing when developing requested start dates for proposed restoration partnership activities.

2. Indirect Costs

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, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular partnership. 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 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 part of 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 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

If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, a hard copy application (signed in blue ink) should be sent to the NOAA Community-based Restoration Program (F/HC3), Office of Habitat Conservation, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East West Highway, Rm 14701, Silver Spring, MD 20910. **ATTN: CRP Partnership Applications.** Applicants submitting paper copies should also include a full copy of the application on compact disc.

V. Application Review and Selection Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Technical reviewers will assign scores to proposals ranging from 0 to 110 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below.

1. Importance and Applicability of Proposal (25 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 Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition this includes:

- Evaluating applications based on the potential of the partnership to significantly restore, protect, conserve, and enhance habitats and ecosystems vital to self-sustaining populations of living marine resources under NOAA stewardship.
- The extent to which partnerships are national or regional in geographic scope, the types of habitats that are proposed to be restored under the partnership, and the range of species, including threatened or endangered species expected to benefit from on-the-ground restoration activities will all be considered.
- The extent to which partnerships ensure long-term sustainability of the ecological benefits resulting from the proposed restoration activities.

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (25 points)

This criterion assesses whether the partnership approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition this includes:

- Evaluating applications based on the feasibility of the partnership to accomplish stated goals and objectives and the likelihood that the partnership will achieve significant progress within the proposed project period, including minimum monitoring, as demonstrated by the thoroughness of the partnership plan.
- Evaluating applications with respect to: (a) the adequacy of proposed strategies for coordination with NOAA in all phases of project selection, design, implementation and monitoring; (b) the degree to which the selection process is competitive or uses a similarly rigorous process to ensure that sub-awards will be identified through joint technical evaluations consistent with NOAA priorities and NOAA's standard evaluation criteria for competitions; (c) the likelihood that restoration activities supported through the partnership will be consistent with regional/community/stakeholder planning processes, tie into restoration plans, or utilize some other planning framework to ensure prioritization of projects; and (d) whether there is an adequate strategy to ensure that projects implemented through sub-awards will meet all federal, state and local environmental laws and obtain applicable permits and consultations.

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicants (20 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition this includes:

- Evaluating applicants based on their capacity to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work by examining the qualifications, past experience, and potential of the project partners to effectively identify, develop, select, manage and oversee all project phases, particularly financial and administrative management of sub-awards, and their ability to ensure scientifically-based monitoring is implemented on individual projects funded through sub-awards. The applicant should demonstrate the ability to effectively and efficiently manage a significant number of projects simultaneously. Applicants developing their first partnership proposal with NOAA may not be able to document direct past experience and, therefore, will be evaluated on their potential to effectively manage and oversee all administrative aspects as described above, and by their description of qualifying characteristics such as education, training and/or experience of primary project participants, and facilities and/or administrative resources and capabilities available to support the partnership work, including the availability of technical expertise to handle sub-award processes and guide individual habitat restoration projects to a successful completion, as well as on past experience working in partnership with other federal agencies.

4. Project Costs (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition this includes:

- Evaluating applications based on whether the proposed budget is realistic, sufficiently detailed and commensurate with the project needs and time frame, and for appropriate budget breakdown and justification of both federal and non-federal shares by object class as listed on form SF-424A, and by annual budget period. A separate SF-424A budget form should be used to break down multi-year budget requests into annual funding increments. Applications proposing to use restoration funds to expand an organization's day-to-day activities are unlikely to obtain a high score under this criterion. In order to encourage on-the-ground restoration, if funding for salaries is requested, it should be used to support staff directly involved in overseeing the accomplishment of the restoration work that will take place under the partnership and should contain a detailed breakdown of personnel hours and costs by task.
- Evaluating applications based on the need for funding and their cost-effectiveness by examining: (a) the percentage of funds that will be dedicated to all phases of restoration project implementation including physical, on-the-ground restoration compared to the percentage that is for administration, overhead and non-essential travel to be used by the partner--proposals that limit administrative costs to 20% at the national or regional level will be likely to score higher for this criterion; (b) the overall leverage of NOAA funds anticipated, including the amount of cash match available on the national/regional level specifically to support project implementation; and (d) the ability of the applicant organization to demonstrate that a significant benefit will be generated for a reasonable cost. NOAA desires cost sharing to leverage funding and to further encourage partnerships among government, industry, and academia.

5. Outreach, Education and Community Involvement (20 points)

This criterion assesses whether the proposal provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission. For the Community-based Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grants competition this includes evaluating applications based on:

- The potential of the partnership to foster long-term stewardship for living marine resources and generate or increase a community conservation ethic through actions that involve community volunteers and broaden their participation in habitat restoration projects;
- 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 to publicly advance the partnership and its goals and objectives;
- The level support as demonstrated by a diversity of other involved partners, either known or anticipated based on past experience; and
- The level of support for the partnership as demonstrated by letters of support from these partners, 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; (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

1. Initial Screening of Applications

Applications will be screened by CRP staff to determine if they are eligible, complete and in accordance with instructions detailed in the standard NOAA Grants Application Package.

2. Technical Review

Eligible restoration partnership applications will undergo a technical review and ranking. As appropriate during this process, the NOAA Restoration Center will solicit individual technical evaluations of each partnership proposed to determine how well it meets the stated aims of the solicitation and NOAA's Ecosystems mission goal. Applications for proposed partnerships will be evaluated by at least three individual technical reviewers according to the criteria and weights described in this solicitation.

3. Panel Review

The FFO, proposal ranking, top ranked proposals, and technical review comments and scores will be provided to a Panel whose members may or may not also have participated as a technical reviewer. Depending on how many proposals are involved, the Panel will convene in person or by teleconference to discuss the proposed activities and consider technical reviewer comments. Following the panel discussion, each member of the panel will then independently assign a numerical rating between 1 and 4 for each proposal according to the following scale:

- 1 – Marginal; proposal adequately meets evaluation criteria (Section V.A) for partnerships and addresses some of the program priorities outlined in the FFO.
- 2 – Fair; proposal adequately meets evaluation criteria (Section V.A) for partnerships and addresses a majority of the program priorities outlined in the FFO.
- 3 – Good; proposal thoroughly meets selection criteria (Section V.A) for partnerships and addresses most of the program priorities outlined in the FFO.
- 4 – Excellent; proposal exceptionally meets selection criteria (Section V.A) for partnerships and addresses all of the program priorities outlined in the FFO.

Panel member scores will be averaged and an interim ranking will result which will be presented to the Panel for discussion, with the goal of reaching consensus on the applications to be recommended for funding and developing a final ranking. The final consensus ranking from the Panel will be presented to the Selecting Official (SO) and should be the primary consideration by the SO in deciding which proposals will be recommended to the NOAA Grants Office. If consensus cannot be reached by the Panel, the SO may rely on either the technical review ranking or the interim panel ranking to make final decisions. The proposals shall be recommended in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

- 1. Availability of funding
- 2. Balance and distribution of funds
 - i. Geographically
 - ii. By type of institution
 - iii. By type of partners
 - iv. By research areas
 - v. By project types
- 3. Duplication of proposed activities with other activities funded or considered for funding by NOAA and/or other federal agencies
- 4. Program priorities and policy factors as set out in Section I.C.
- 5. Applicant's prior award performance
- 6. Partnerships with/participation of targeted groups.
- 7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to GMD.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest scored proposals. Unsuccessful

applicants will be notified in writing that their proposal was not among those recommended for funding, and unsuccessful applications will be kept on file until the end of the fiscal year for which they were submitted.

Successful applications generally will be identified by March 1, 2007. Typically, the earliest start date for partnerships will be May 1, 2007, dependant on the completion of all NOAA/applicant negotiations and NEPA analysis and documentation supporting of cooperative activities. Applicants should consider this timeline when developing requested start dates for proposed partnership activities.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets 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 the NOAA CRP staff. Partnership activities should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

B. Administrative and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 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 with a copy of the award by the NOAA Grants Office, and can be found at: <http://www.osc.doc.gov/oebam/pdf/ST&C-rev-1002.pdf>.

In addition, award documents provided by the NOAA Grants Office 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 the required use of the NOAA Restoration Center data form and narrative format approved by OMB under control number 0648-0472 for submitting semi-annual progress reports and/or reports from sub-awardees.

2. NEPA Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA,

http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm.

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, 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).

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

Applicants proposing restoration activities that cannot be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis or that are not covered by the NOAA Fisheries Community-based Restoration Program Environmental Assessment (PEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Supplemental PEA and FONSI will be informed after the peer review stage and may be requested to assist in the preparation of an EA prior to an award being made, or provide for NOAA review a copy of an EA that covers proposed activities if one exists. The CRP PEA and FONSI can be found at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/assessment/ea_main.html.

In most cases, applicants will not have identified specific projects to be funded as sub-awards under the partnership. Therefore, under each partnership awarded, the CRP will review individual project proposals considered for sub-award funding for National Environmental Policy Act compliance 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>.

Successful partnerships 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 completes necessary 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.

C. Reporting Requirements

Progress reports are due semi-annually and cover 6-month periods as indicated in the

award documentation provided by GMD. Progress reports are due directly to the NOAA Community-based Restoration Program office and are due no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. A final report is due no later than 90 days after the expiration date of an award.

Progress reports should detail partnership activities that have occurred at the national or regional level during the reporting period that correspond with goals and objectives identified in the narrative, as well as provide specific, project-related information, as described below.

Progress reports for individual projects sub-awarded under each approved partnership must be submitted using a specific format for narrative information and a form for project specific details. This format and form can be found on the NOAA Restoration Center webpage at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/partners_funding/project_reports.html. Use of this required progress report form and format involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act, and has been approved by OMB under control number 0648-0472 and expires on April 30, 2006. Complete details on reporting requirements will be provided to successful applicants in the award documentation provided by the NOAA Grants office.

Financial reports are due semi-annually and should be submitted directly to the NOAA Grants Office. Financial reports cover the periods from October 1 - March 31 (due by April 30) and April 1 - September 30 (due by October 30).

VII. Agency Contacts

For further information contact Melanie Gange or Robin Bruckner at (301)713-0174, or by fax at (301) 713-0184, or by e-mail at Melanie.Gange@noaa.gov or Robin.Bruckner@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

The Community-based Restoration Program expects to solicit applications for implementing individual habitat restoration projects in FY 2007. A separate notice of funding availability will be issued to request individual project applications.

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2004 (69 FR 78389) are applicable to this solicitation.

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not obligate 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. Accordingly, a regulatory flexibility analysis is not required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S. C. 601 et seq.).

This action has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

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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