



**File Code:** 3360  
**Route To:**

**Date:** JUL 02 2015

**Subject:** Fiscal Year 2017 Project Selection Process for the Forest Legacy Program

**To:** Regional Foresters, Area Director, and IITF Director

**REPLY DUE NOVEMBER 30, 2015**

The fiscal year (FY) 2017 project selection process for the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) will be competitive, merit-based, and coordinated by the Washington Office (WO). The final project list will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget, through the Department of Agriculture, for consideration in the President's Budget. The process to complete the final project selection will be as follows:

**Step 1: Projects Submitted for Funding Consideration to R/A/I Due: November 23, 2015**

Each Region, Area, and Institute (R/A/I) will work with State Lead Agencies to ensure that all proposed projects are entered into the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS). The States can submit up to three projects, not to exceed a total of \$10,000,000 (individual projects cannot exceed \$7,000,000). The State Lead Agency is responsible for data entry and accuracy. The R/A/I is responsible for reviewing and validating the information for each project. All projects must meet the following criteria:

- Be reviewed, evaluated and selected by the State's Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee and approved by the State Lead Agency (States may include priority ranking if more than one project is submitted, but it is not required);
- Be consistent with the FLP goals of the State Forest Action Plan (Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy, including Assessments of Need incorporated by reference);
- Be located within a designated Forest Legacy Area; and
- Be within the funding limits described above.

The information provided for each project should include:

- The project's priority rank, if indicated by the State;
- List of supporting tracts in order of priority, if applicable;
- Estimated project costs which cannot exceed \$7,000,000;
- Estimated cost-share, which must be at least 25 percent of the total project cost;
- Estimated costs of each tract rounded to the nearest \$5,000; and
- Project description in FLIS.

The R/A/I should provide the State Lead Agencies with the scoring guidance (Enclosure 1), and the States should use it when preparing the project description in FLIS. Enclosure 2 should also be provided. Enclosure 2 provides recommendations for improving project maps. In addition, the State Lead Agencies should be advised that a total of 18 projects were funded in FY 2015. The funding average was \$2,588,000 and the funding range was \$650,000 to \$7,000,000.



The enclosed scoring guidance has not been changed from what was sent last year. Forest Service and State Lead Agency staff should be aware of President Obama's Priority Agenda Report "Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources."<sup>1</sup> In order to address the Administration's goals and objectives related to greenhouse gas reduction and mitigation of climate change, it may be necessary to update the project selection process, including the scoring guidance, in the future.

**Step 2: Regional Project List to WO****Due: November 30, 2015**

Prior to developing the Regional project list, each State should be evaluated by the R/A/I regarding its fulfillment of the FLP core program requirements listed below:

1. Baseline reports for all closed conservation easement tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 18);
2. Forest stewardship plan or multi-resource management plan for all closed conservation easement tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 18);
3. Annual monitoring conducted for all closed conservation easements tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 20);
4. Addresses significant conservation easement violations and/or has a conservation easement violation plan (FLP Guidelines, page 20);
5. Implements a record keeping protocol for all FLP tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 37);
6. Developed and implemented an action plan to address recommendations in a Quality Assurance Inspection (Quality Assurance Plan for Forest Legacy Program Appraisals, September 2006);
7. State is Up-to-date on grant reporting requirements.

In addition the R/A/I should provide the amount of unspent funds and number of project tracts a State has outstanding. The panel will evaluate unspent funds as part of the development of the prioritized project list. If a State has substantial unspent funds, this will be evaluated along with other criteria, to determine a project's position on the prioritized list and may also be used to determine the amount of funding recommended by the National Project Selection Panel.

The information requested in this section is necessary for the panel to have available during the project prioritization process. Please ensure that the information provided is accurate and complete.

For the majority of States, we expect that all requirements will be met. In the rare case that persistent deficiencies in a State's performance are identified and cannot be remedied, the State can either not submit projects for consideration or submit projects with the understanding that the R/A/I will inform the WO that these projects should not be reviewed and ranked by the National Review Panel. The projects will still be part of the National list, but will be added to the bottom below the reviewed and ranked projects. It is expected that the R/A/I will have been working closely with the State during the year to address all deficiencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Report available at:

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing\\_climate\\_resilience\\_of\\_americas\\_natural\\_resources.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing_climate_resilience_of_americas_natural_resources.pdf)

Prior to the due date, Forest Service WO and R/A/I FLP program staff will discuss deficiencies to ensure consistent treatment of States' projects. Using the information above, each R/A/I will submit to the WO a list of recommended projects and supporting information. The R/A/I will inform the WO if projects should not be reviewed and ranked because of performance deficiencies. Also, the R/A/I will identify any projects that must be funded in their entirety and cannot be phased.

Project briefs are expected to be an accurate representation of the property and the conditions upon which the projects are ranked. After project competition, any changes to the project size, configuration, or the estate presented for funding consideration can only be made with the approval of the Forest Service. States submitting projects should have an understanding of the quality of title when submitting a project for consideration. Encumbrances to title and agreements that impact a project should be reviewed to determine if a project is eligible to participate in the FLP.

Project briefs are designed to represent the property proposed for acquisition, not the attributes of a larger proposed project area, previously acquired phases or the general geographic area where a project is located. Attributes of a larger project may be discussed in the general description and in the Strategic section.

### **Step 3: Project Briefs for National Review Panel**

**December 7, 2015**

The WO will compile all project briefs from FLIS for distribution to National Review Panel members on December 2, 2015. These documents will be the primary source of project information used by the National Review Panel to score and rank the projects. The package will include project briefing sheets, regional project lists, and scoring guidance (see enclosure). In addition, at the in person meeting, the National Review Panel will receive project backlog information and average duration for a State to close projects, compiled as of January 4, 2016.

### **Step 4: National FLP Review Panel Meeting**

**January 6-7, 2016**

The WO will convene a National Review Panel to facilitate the development of a National Project List. The panel will include three Forest Service WO representatives, three R/A/I representatives, and four State Lead Agency representatives. The panel will review and rank the projects based on the scoring guidance. In addition, the review panel will pay particular attention to the amount of unspent funds each State has acquired in outstanding grants, and is most concerned with funding from 2013 and earlier.

In the event that a significant change to a submitted project (i.e., project phasing, funding reduction, or selection out of State priority order) is being considered by the panel, an attempt will be made to consult with the affected State. It is recommended that State Forest Legacy Program Managers be available to answer questions and provide information during the timeframe of this meeting. Whether a project is phased or the funding is reduced, it is expected that the State proceed toward closing on the portion of the project it can complete with the appropriated FLP funds, not hold the money, and seek additional funding in a future fiscal year.

**Step 5: Submit National FLP Project List to OMB/Congress**

**January 8, 2016**

The final Project List will be submitted to the State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Deputy Chief for approval. Then, the S&PF Deputy Chief will obtain clearance for the FLP list in accordance with deadlines for the release of the President's budget in early February. After the release of the President's Budget, the S&PF Deputy Chief will provide the House and Senate Appropriations Committees the Project List and accompanying project briefing materials.

If you have any questions, please contact Scott Stewart at (202) 205-1618.



JAMES E. HUBBARD  
Deputy Chief for State & Private Forestry

cc: Scott Stewart

Enclosures (2)