

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Funding Opportunity

F25AS00184 FY 2025 Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: Conservation
Planning Assistance

Funding Opportunity Number

F25AS00184

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BASIC INFORMATION

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: F25AS00184

Assistance Listing Number(s): 15.615

Estimated Total Program Funding: \$8,740,000

Expected Number of Awards: 12

Award Ceiling: \$1,000,000

Award Floor: \$0

For planning assistance grants, the maximum award is \$1 million with a maximum period of performance of three years. For Conservation Benefit Agreement administration grants, the maximum award is \$500,000 (\$100,000/ year for up to five years). There is no award floor.

Cost Sharing Required?

Yes

Closing Date for Applications: 03/14/2025

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 above.

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?

Have Questions: For additional information about this funding opportunity, please contact the appropriate Service representative list below.

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	Carolyn Menke (503) 880-2895 Carolyn_Menke@fws.gov
Region 2	Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas	USFWS 500 Gold Avenue SW, Room 6018 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102	Vanessa Burge (505) 248-6420 Vanessa_Burge@fws.gov
Region 3	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin	USFWS Ecological Services	Erik Olson (612) 713-5488

		5600 American Blvd. West Suite 990 Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458	& 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 Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199	Nichole Bjornlie (907) 786-3523 Nichole_Bjornlie@fws.gov
Region 8	California and Nevada	USFWS 2800 Cottage Way Room W-2606 Sacramento, California 95825- 1846	Rachel Henry (916) 414-6557 Rachel_Henry@fws.gov

Executive Summary

First awarded in fiscal year (FY) 2001, the Conservation Planning Assistance Grant program provides funding to States to support the development of new Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Conservation Benefit Agreements (CBAs; formerly referred to as Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances). Funding may also be used to support the renewal or amendment of existing plans and agreements. The development of HCPs that include only candidate or at-risk species (i.e., no Federally listed species covered by the HCP), such that the HCP would be in place if the species is listed, is also supported through

this program. Funding may be used to support development and planning activities such as document preparation, public outreach, baseline species surveys, habitat assessments, and inventories. The preparation of environmental compliance review documents, such as National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), is also an eligible use of grant funds. For CBAs, outreach, coordination, and administrative costs associated with the implementation of permitted agreements is also an eligible use of funds this year.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible Applicants

State governments

Additional Information on Eligibility

Only State agencies that have entered into a Cooperative Agreement pursuant to Section 6(c) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and have provided the information necessary for the annual renewal (reconfirmation) of their Cooperative Agreement are eligible to apply for funding. Applicants that have not fulfilled both criteria will not be considered. While funding may only be awarded to States, individuals or 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.

Neither the Federal funds 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).

For applications involving a previously funded planning effort, funding cannot be sought to support activities to meet deliverables that were identified for completion under open prior year awards. For example, if a prior planning assistance grant was awarded to a State to complete a draft NEPA document, funding from this opportunity cannot be sought to complete a draft NEPA document.

The Service will not fund work in conflict with species approved recovery plans [50 CFR 81.2]. An application cannot include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) costs.

State administrative costs must either be assumed by the State or included in the proposal in accordance with Federal requirements.

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).

Land acquisition is not eligible for consideration under this funding opportunity.

Cost Sharing Requirement

Cost Sharing Required?

Yes

Cost Sharing: 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 related to the project, but 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 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 81.8(b) and allow the cost share to be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, in accordance with the regulations at 2 CFR 200.306.

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 application through GrantSolutions.gov. You must register with GrantSolutions. See [Submission Instructions](#).

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Program Goals

- The primary goal of this program is to support the development of new HCPs and CBAs. This program also supports the renewal or amendment of existing HCPs and CBAs as well as costs associated with the administration of approved and permitted CBAs (formerly referred to as SHA and CCAAs). These plans and agreements can significantly reduce the effect of the ESA on small landowners by providing efficient mechanisms for compliance, distributing the economic and logistical impacts of species conservation among the community, and bringing a broad range of landowner activities under the legal protections of the plans and agreements.

Program Description

As many species listed as endangered or threatened under the Federal ESA spend at least part of their life cycle on non-Federal lands, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recognizes success in conserving and recovering these species depends largely on working cooperatively with States and Territories (hereafter, “States”).

Section 6 of the ESA authorizes the Service 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 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) applies specifically to CESCF Conservation Planning Assistance Grants.

This FOA fully describes application eligibility, evaluation, and selection. It should be read in its entirety as much of the information has changed from previous years. Applicants are also highly encouraged to read the Frequently Asked Questions document attached to this opportunity. Given the significant investment of time and money associated with projects funded through this program, we also recommend you coordinate with the appropriate Service point of contact before starting work on a project or application.

Conservation Planning Assistance Grants

The Conservation Planning Assistance Grant program provides funding to States to support the development of new HCPs and CBAs, formerly referred to as Safe Harbor Agreements (SHA) and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA). Funding may also be used to support the renewal or amendment of existing HCPs, SHAs, CCAAs, and CBAs. The development of HCPs that include only candidate or at-risk species (i.e., no Federally listed species covered by the HCP), such that the HCP would be in place if the species is listed, is also supported through this program. Funding may be used to support development and planning activities such as document preparation, public outreach, baseline species surveys, habitat

assessments, and inventories. The preparation of environmental compliance review documents, such as National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), is also an eligible use of grant funds. New this year, the Service will also consider applications to fund costs associated with the administration of approved and permitted CBAs (approved as an SHA or CCAA prior to May 13, 2024). Funding may be used for administrative costs as well as costs associated with activities such as coordination, outreach, and education.

Habitat Conservation Plans

Prior to 1982, non-Federal landowners undertaking otherwise lawful activities that were likely to take listed species risked violating section 9 of the ESA, which prohibits the "taking" of a listed species. In the 1982 amendments to the ESA, Congress established a voluntary mechanism under section 10(a)(1)(B) that authorizes the Service to authorize take of endangered and threatened wildlife species to non-Federal entities that is incidental to their otherwise lawful activities. An applicant is required to develop an 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 to 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.

Conservation Benefit Agreements

Section 10(a)(1)(A) authorizes the Service to issue enhancement of survival permits to non-Federal landowners participating in a Conservation Benefit Agreement (CBA). These voluntary agreements serve as an incentive to private landowners to engage in conservation activities that contribute to the conservation or recovery of the agreement's covered species. Covered species can include listed, candidate, and at-risk species. In exchange for actions that contribute to the conservation of species covered by an agreement on non-Federal land, participating property owners receive formal assurances from the Service that if they fulfill the conditions of the CBA, the Service will not require any additional or different management activities by the participants without their consent. Central to this approach is that the actions taken under the CBA will provide a net conservation benefit that contributes to the recovery or conservation of the species included in the agreement.

Species Eligibility

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, the planning effort must propose to include at least one of the following eligible species on the permit. Further, applicants must demonstrate how the proposed planning effort will benefit the species in accordance with the species' appropriate conservation document:

- Federally listed species: Species listed as threatened or endangered through section 4 of the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). A Federally listed species' appropriate conservation document may include a draft or final recovery plan, or a recovery outline if the species has been listed for less than 2.5 years.
- 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>. A Candidate species' appropriate conservation document may include a candidate assessment or species status assessment.
- 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 opportunity's postdate. A full list of at-risk species can be found in the FOA Attachments. 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.

In order to ensure that funding is available to fund both HCPs and CBAs, the Service will roughly split the total funding available as follows:

- Up to 40% to HCPs provided that the Service receives qualified applications for at least 40% of the funds;
- Up to 40% dedicated to CBA planning and development provided that the Service receives qualified applications for at least 40% of the funds;
- Up to 10% dedicated to the administration of permitted CBAs provided that the Service receives qualified applications for at least 10% of the funds;
- Remaining funds as needed to any application type dependent on the number and quality of applications received.

Conservation planning efforts, especially when covering large areas or multiple species, can require a significant investment of time and money. Providing Federal financial assistance, in the form of competitive grants, is an added incentive for entering into the conservation planning process beyond the regulatory assurances these plans and agreements provide. These plans and agreements can significantly reduce the effect of the ESA on small landowners by providing efficient mechanisms for compliance, distributing the economic and logistical impacts of species conservation among the community, and bringing a broad range of landowner activities under the legal protections of the plans and agreements. Planning efforts with the greatest potential contribution to species conservation will be prioritized.

The Service 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 Service 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 the Service’s commitment to cooperative conservation at the local level.

This opportunity will help to support the Administration’s priorities of the Build Back Better framework as well as the America the Beautiful initiative.

N/A

Legislative Authority

16 U.S.C. §1535

Type of Award

Projects will be funded through:

Funding Instrument

G (Grant)

PREPARE YOUR APPLICATION

Applications Content and Format

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-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs	Required for non-construction projects
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

Forms/Assurances/Certifications	Submission Requirement
	lobbying related to the proposed project.
Project Abstract Summary (OMB 4040-0019). Must include, in plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, addressing all stated eligibility and evaluation criteria. Applicants should only include information on species eligible for consideration under this funding opportunity, as defined in the program description. Although not required, applicants may consider including response tables to summarize information as it relates to a specific criterion within the project narrative. 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**
- **Statement of Need**

The need for the proposed project in relation to the purposes of the Conservation Planning Assistance Grants Program. Identify the conservation issue, problem, or opportunity to be addressed by the planning effort as well as the species to benefit. Provide evidence to demonstrate that the need is real and not perceived, such as results from surveys, research, or other data. Identify the negative result of taking no action.

- **Purpose**

The purpose describes the desired future state to addresses the need. For example, providing regulatory streamlining opportunities while promoting species conservation.

- **Objectives**

Objectives are specific outcomes to be accomplished during the project’s period of performance pursuant to the stated need. Objectives should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound. For example, drafting the final five chapters of the HCP and holding three stakeholder meetings by September 21, 2027.

- **Methods/Approach**

This section of the narrative should describe the specific conservation actions necessary to accomplish the project objectives.

- **Description of entity(ies) undertaking the project**

List all subrecipients or partners and briefly describe their role(s) in the project. (Criterion 4 for planning assistance)

- **Anticipated Outcomes/ Expected Benefits**

This section of the narrative should describe the plan's expected contributions to species conservation and potential to streamline regulatory processes (Criteria 1 & 2).

- **Timetable**

The project timetable describes significant milestones in successfully completing the project. Timetables will be used to assess project readiness and should clearly demonstrate how the project is likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance. Include a brief description of any due diligence completed to date. (Criterion 3)

- **Project Location/ Maps**

This section of the narrative should describe the proposed plan area, habitat type(s), and relevant ecosystem/watershed characterization. Although not required, maps or photographs that characterize the existing state of the plan area may be included in the application.

- **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 information that may be relevant to compliance with NEPA.
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) – provide information that may be relevant to compliance with the ESA.
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) – provide 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 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).

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.

Other Required Information

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 contact listed above in the Basic Information section. Information on CESCO 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: 03/14/2025

Closing Date Explanation

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 above.

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.

Application packages will be screened to ensure all required forms and application elements have been provided and both applicants and projects meet all basic eligibility criteria described above. The Service 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 Service staff determine the project cannot meet Federal requirements. Incomplete applications will 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. The Service, 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 the National Merit Review Team 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.

Prior to participating in any review or evaluation process, all merit review members must sign and return to the program office point of contact the "Department of the Interior" Conflict of Interest Certification" form. Each application will be reviewed, evaluated, and scored independently by the merit review team members with appropriate subject-matter expertise (e.g., HCPs, CBAs, ESA policy and programs, Federal financial assistance). Reviewers may discuss individual applications, but all scoring will be non-consensus. Following ranking, due to limited funding or for other reasons, the Service 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 narratives prior to award.

Merit Review Criteria:

Habitat Conservation Plans

1. Magnitude of Species Benefit: HCP Plan Area Conservation (30 points maximum)

The purpose of this criterion is to evaluate the potential magnitude of conservation benefit the HCP will provide to covered species in the proposed plan area. Only eligible species as defined in the Program Description section above to be included on a section 10(a)(1)(B) permit will be considered when evaluating applications for funding through this opportunity.

Score: To score the maximum points under this criterion, the applicant must demonstrate the HCP will potentially result in a high conservation benefit for at least one covered species.

- High benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (30 pts)
- Medium benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (15 pts)
- Low benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (5 pts)

A potential high benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- HCP plan area includes an important migration corridor or wintering habitat as identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- HCP plan area includes the location for all critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, and sheltering) as identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- HCP directly addresses more than one specific management action and/or threat identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- If the proposed HCP has already developed its conservation strategy, the applicant commits to implementing that conservation strategy which more than fully offsets expected impacts and contributes to a covered species recovery by addressing a priority recovery action as specified in a species' draft or final recovery plan or recovery outline, and/or the decision to preclude listing by addressing threats to a covered species as specified in its candidate species assessment, state wildlife action plan, or state recovery plan.

A potential medium benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- HCP plan area includes the location for two critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, or sheltering) as identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- HCP directly addresses one specific management action and/or threat identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- If the proposed HCP has already developed its conservation strategy, the applicant commits to a conservation strategy that fully offsets expected impacts but does not contribute to additional conservation of covered species.

A potential low benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- HCP plan area includes the location for one critical life cycle function (breeding, feeding, or sheltering) as identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- HCP does not address a specific management action or threat identified in a covered species' appropriate conservation document.
- If the proposed HCP has already developed its conservation strategy, the HCP applicant commits to a conservation strategy that offsets expected impacts to the maximum extent practicable but may not fully offset expected impacts to covered species.

2. Magnitude of HCP Impact: Regulatory Streamlining (additive, up to 20 points)

HCPs that streamline regulatory processes for landowners and project proponents by providing efficient mechanisms for compliance, distributing the economic and logistical impacts of species conservation among the community, and bringing a broad range of landowner activities under the HCP's legal protections will be prioritized.

Score: Potential impact of HCP to provide regulatory streamlining opportunities. Additive, up to 20 points.

- Permit structure: programmatic plans and integrated plans (5 pts)
- HCP plan area crosses multiple jurisdictions, e.g., across multiple cities, counties, or States. (5 pts)
- HCP development and permit issuance will facilitate permittee in complying with other Federal statutes or regulations. (5 pts)
- HCP development and permit issuance will facilitate permittee in complying with other local or State statutes or regulations. (5 pts)

3. Project (Grant) Timetable/ Milestones (30 points maximum)

Reviewers will evaluate the timetable for the proposed scope of work to determine the reasonableness of the applicant's approach, including significant milestones, to successfully completing the work within the grant's proposed period of performance. Additional points will be awarded if the applicant demonstrates readiness to submit a complete section 10(a)(1)(B) permit application by the end of the period of performance.

Score: Projects poised for successful implementation will be prioritized.

- Project timetable includes significant milestones and clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance (three-year maximum) with the understanding that no extensions will be considered. (20 pts)
- Project timetable includes significant milestones and clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of

performance (three-year maximum). Project is poised for successful implementation. (10 pts)

- Project timetable includes basic information to demonstrate how all the proposed activities will be accomplished but lacks significant milestones necessary to evaluate the likelihood of success. (5 pts)
- Project timetable lacks basic information necessary to demonstrate how all of the proposed activities will be accomplished within the requested period of performance. (0 pts)
- Timetable that includes the applicant's intent to submit a complete section 10(a)(1)(B) permit application by the end of the period of performance showing that the project is poised for successful application will earn an extra 10 points.

4. Coordination/ Capacity of HCP Applicant (20 points maximum)

This criterion addresses whether HCP applicants (including project partners) have committed the necessary resources to accomplish the proposed scope of work and HCP planning effort in accordance with the above timetables. For the purposes of this criterion, project partners include contractors, consultants, and other cooperators. To evaluate necessary resources, reviewers will consider whether an HCP applicant has identified and/or contracted an environmental consultant and/or assigned dedicated staff to manage the planning effort. Reviewers will also consider if the HCP applicant has met past planning milestones, if applicable.

Score: Applications that demonstrate coordination with the appropriate Service Field Office will be prioritized.

- HCP applicant possesses all necessary resources and capacity (i.e., contracted an environmental consultant and/or assigned dedicated staff) to accomplish the project and HCP and has demonstrated coordination with appropriate Service Field Office. (20 pts)
- HCP applicant possesses all necessary resources and capacity (i.e., contracted an environmental consultant and/or assigned dedicated staff) to accomplish the project and HCP but has not demonstrated coordination with appropriate Service Field Office. (10 pts)
- HCP applicant lacks the necessary resources and capacity to accomplish the project and HCP. (0 pts)

5. Regional Director's Discretion (25 points maximum)

Each Service 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 Review and Selection Process section below to reflect Service and Regional priorities.

Conservation Benefit Agreements- Planning

1. Magnitude of Species Benefit: Plan Area Conservation (30 points maximum)

The purpose of this criterion is to evaluate the potential magnitude of conservation benefit the agreement will provide to eligible covered species in the conservation area. Only eligible species as defined above in Species Eligibility to be included on a section 10(a)(1)(A) permit will be considered when evaluating applications for funding through this opportunity.

Score: To score the maximum points under this criterion, the applicant must demonstrate the agreement will potentially result in a high conservation benefit for at least one covered species.

- High benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (30 pts)
- Medium benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (15 pts)
- Low benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (5 pts)

A potential high benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation area includes important species breeding habitat, migration corridor, or wintering habitat as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for all critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, and sheltering) as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation area includes at least 75% of a covered species' range-wide habitat.

A potential medium benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for two critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, or sheltering) as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation area includes at least 26%, but less than 75% of a species' range-wide habitat.

A potential low benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for one critical life cycle function (breeding, feeding, or sheltering).
- Conservation area includes less than 26%) of the species' range-wide habitat.

2. Magnitude of Benefit: Streamlining (additive, up to maximum 20 points)

This criterion will prioritize proposals that provide efficient mechanisms for compliance, distribute the economic and logistical impacts of species conservation among the community, and bring a broad range of landowner activities under the agreement's legal protections or assurances, resulting in a greater conservation benefit to species and provide more opportunities for landowners, especially in underserved communities, to more easily enroll in conservation agreements. Agreements that will streamline the issuance of permits to small landowners will be prioritized.

Score: Potential impact of plan/agreement to provide streamlining opportunities for landowners. Additive, up to maximum 20 points.

- Applicant is establishing a programmatic agreement or general conservation agreement. (15 pts)
- Applicant is joining an existing programmatic agreement or general conservation agreement. (10 pts)
- Agreement area crosses multiple jurisdictions e.g., across multiple cities, counties, or States. (10 pts)

3. Project (Grant) Timetable/Milestones (30 points maximum)

Reviewers will evaluate the timetable for the proposed scope of work to determine the reasonableness of the applicant's approach, including significant milestones, to successfully completing the work within the grant's proposed period of performance. Additional points will be awarded if the applicant demonstrates readiness to submit a complete section 10(a)(1)(A) permit application by the end of the period of performance.

Score: Projects poised for successful implementation will be prioritized.

- Project timetable includes significant milestones and clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance (three-year maximum) with the understanding that no extensions will be considered. (20 pts)
- Project timetable includes significant milestones and clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance (three-year maximum). Project is poised for successful implementation. (10pts)
- Project timetable includes basic information to demonstrate how all the proposed activities will be accomplished but lacks significant milestones necessary to evaluate the likelihood of success. (5 pts)
- Project timetable lacks basic information necessary to demonstrate how all the proposed activities will be accomplished within the requested period of performance. (0 pts)
- Timetable that includes the applicant's intent to submit a complete section 10(a)(1)(A) permit application by the end of the period of performance showing that the project is poised for successful application will earn an extra 10 points.

4. Coordination/ Capacity of Applicant (20 points maximum)

This criterion addresses whether applicants (including project partners) have committed the necessary resources to accomplish the proposed scope of work and agreement planning effort in accordance with the above timetables. For the purposes of this criterion, project partners include contractors, consultants, and other cooperators, and, to evaluate necessary resources, reviewers will consider whether an applicant has identified and contracted an environmental consultant and/or assigned dedicated staff to manage the planning effort. Reviewers will also consider if the applicant has met past planning milestones, if applicable.

Score: Applications that demonstrate coordination with the appropriate Service Field Office will be prioritized.

- Applicant possesses all necessary resources and capacity (i.e., has identified and contracted an environmental consultant and/or assigned dedicated staff) to accomplish the project and plan and has demonstrated coordination with appropriate Service Field Office. (20 pts)
- Applicant possesses adequate resources and capacity to accomplish the project and plan but has not demonstrated coordination with appropriate Service Field Office. (10 pts)
- Applicant lacks the resources or capacity to accomplish the agreement. (0 pts)

5. Regional Director's Discretion (25 points maximum)

Each Service 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 Review and Selection Process section below to reflect Service and Regional priorities.

Conservation Benefit Agreements- Administration

1. Magnitude of Species Benefit: Plan Area Conservation (30 points maximum)

The purpose of this criterion is to evaluate the potential magnitude of conservation benefit the implementation of the agreement will provide to eligible covered species in the conservation area. Only eligible species as defined above under Species Eligibility to be included on a section 10(a)(1)(A) permit will be considered when evaluating applications for funding through this opportunity.

Score: To score the maximum points under this criterion, the applicant must demonstrate that implementation of the agreement will potentially result in a high conservation benefit for at least one covered species.

- High benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (30 pts)
- Medium benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (15 pts)
- Low benefit to conservation for at least one covered species (5 pts)

A potential high benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation area includes an important species migration corridor or wintering habitat as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for all critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, and sheltering) as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation area includes 75% or more of a covered species' range-wide habitat.

A potential medium benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for two critical life cycle functions (breeding, feeding, or sheltering) as identified in a species' appropriate conservation document.
- Conservation area includes at least 26, but less than 75% of a species' range-wide habitat.

A potential low benefit to species conservation may include any of the following:

- Conservation measures improve the ability of at least one covered species to use the conservation area for one critical life cycle function (breeding, feeding, or sheltering).
- Conservation area includes less than 26% of the species' range-wide habitat.

2. Magnitude of Benefit: Streamlining (additive, up to maximum 30 points)

This criterion will prioritize proposals that provide efficient mechanisms for compliance, distribute the economic and logistical impacts of species conservation among the community, and bring a broad range of landowner activities under the agreement's legal protections or assurances, resulting in a greater conservation benefit to species and provide more opportunities for landowners, especially in underserved communities, to more easily enroll in conservation agreements. Implementation of agreements that will streamline the issuance of permits to small landowners will be prioritized.

Score: Potential impact of plan/agreement to provide streamlining opportunities for landowners. Additive, up to maximum 30 points.

- Applicant is implementing a programmatic agreement or general conservation agreement. (15 pts)
- Agreement area crosses multiple jurisdictions e.g., across multiple cities, counties, or States. (15 pts)

3. Timetable (20 points maximum)

Reviewers will evaluate the timetable for the proposed scope of work to determine the reasonableness of the applicant's approach to successfully completing the work within the grant's proposed period of performance.

- Timetable clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance (five-year maximum) with the understanding that no extensions will be considered. (20 pts)
- Timetable clearly demonstrates how all the proposed activities are highly likely to be accomplished within the requested period of performance (five-year maximum). Applicant retains option of requesting a period of performance extension. (10 pts)
- Project timetable lacks basic information necessary to demonstrate how all the proposed activities will be accomplished within the requested period of performance. (0 pts)

4. Costs (20 points maximum)

Reviewers will evaluate the budget to determine if it is sufficiently detailed, realistic, and commensurate with the stated needs and time frame. Reviewers will consider whether sufficient detail was provided to evaluate how costs were estimated.

Scoring: 1-20 points; where, for example, 1 = unrealistic and lacking sufficient detail; 10 = adequately detailed and realistic; 20 = extremely detailed and realistic.

5. Regional Director's Discretion (25 points maximum)

Each Service 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 Review and Selection Process section below to reflect Service and Regional 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 Service 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:

- Regional/ National priority
- Applicant's ability to use partial funding
- Availability of funding
- Balance/distribution of funds geographically within a Service Region
- Balance/distribution of funds geographically across Service Regions
- Balance/distribution of funds by type of planning/implementation effort
- Whether this project duplicates other projects funded by Service or other Department of the Interior agencies
- The applicant's prior award performance

- Partnerships with and/or participation of targeted groups

The Service Director will make the final award selections.

Risk Review

Prior to making an award, the program assesses the risk posed by the applicant per [2 CFR 200.206](#). If an award will be made, the program may apply special conditions corresponding to the risk assessed. For awards over the simplified acquisition threshold (currently \$250,000), the program reviews eligibility and financial integrity information in the applicant's SAM.gov records per [2 CFR 200.206\(a\)](#). The program also assesses financial management capabilities, project delivery experience, staffing resources, past performance, administration and reporting compliance records, and overall project complexity and potential challenges.

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: 05/30/2025

Anticipated Project End Date: 05/30/2030

The Service intends to make award recommendations within 60 days of the closing date of this opportunity. Following review and approval, the Service's Regional Offices will make pre-award notifications and outline the process for finalizing awards. The Service intends to make pre-award notifications by May 30, 2025, and obligate funds within 120 days. The maximum period of performance (PoP) for a planning 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. The maximum PoP for an implementation grant awarded through this opportunity is five years, beginning on the effective date established at the time of grant approval or the date of award obligation, whichever is earlier.

Awarded grant funds must be expended in a timely manner or returned to the Service for reallocation through the next competitive award 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, the Service will not consider requests to extend the PoP for planning projects that received additional consideration under the Project (Grant) Timetable/ Milestones evaluation criterion during merit review. Any project awarded funding that will not be used, 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 Service 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. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified through GrantSolutions.

The Service may publish one or more media releases and post information about projects selected for funding on Service websites. These releases may be made in coordination with the Department of the Interior and may be made nationally 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) requires certain recipients to report information on executive compensation through SAM.gov and information on all sub-awards, subcontracts, and consortiums over \$30,000 to the [FFATA Subaward Reporting System \(FSRS\)](#).

Other Information