

December 18, 2007

Topic #9: WWRP Urban Wildlife Habitat – Proposed Revisions

Prepared and Presented By: Leslie Ryan Connelly

Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Adopt Resolution 2008-06

Summary

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) is proposing revisions to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Urban Wildlife Habitat category evaluation criteria and fund allocation process, with the intention of increasing the number of grant awards to local agencies.¹ These changes to the Urban Wildlife Habitat category are being proposed for the 2008 grant cycle and include three revisions:

- 1) dedicating a percentage of funds to local agency and state agency projects,
- 2) revising the evaluation criteria scoring to award more points for projects that address the criteria specific to the Urban Wildlife Habitat category, and
- 3) encouraging more participation for local agency representatives on the evaluation team.

This package of proposed changes to the Urban Wildlife Habitat category combines all the options previously presented to the public for comment in October, 2007, and specifies how the evaluation criteria weighting could be revised. The RCFB is seeking comments on the likely results of applying all these proposed changes as a package, both on increasing grant awards to local agency sponsors in this category, and ensuring projects that provide habitat important to wildlife in proximity to metropolitan areas.

¹ Local agencies include cities, counties, federally recognized Native American tribes, special purpose districts, port districts, and other political subdivisions of the state providing services to less than the entire state if legally authorized to acquire and develop public open space, habitat, farmland, riparian habitat, or recreation facilities. RCW 79A.15.010(5)

Background

Urban Wildlife Habitat is defined in statute as lands that provide habitat important to wildlife in proximity to a metropolitan area. RCW 79A.15.010(8). This category is open to local and state agencies. Program information and project evaluation criteria can be found in Manual #10b, *WWRP Habitat Conservation Account and Riparian Protection Account: Policies and Project Selection*.

WWRP statutes emphasize that Urban Wildlife Habitat projects should benefit wildlife but should also be in proximity to urban areas and have the potential for public use. The statute gives RCFB considerable flexibility in striking a balance between projects in core urban areas where there is greater opportunity for public enjoyment versus projects outside urban growth areas that may have higher habitat value.

The policy reserving funding for local agency projects has changed over the life of the program. From 1991 to 1993 category funds were split evenly between local agency sponsors and state agency sponsors. From 1994 to 1999, the even split was eliminated and funding was set aside for a second year grant round which had the effect of dedicating 25% of funds for local agency sponsors. In 2000, the second year grant cycle was eliminated and state and local applicants competed “head-to-head” without any dedicated funding.

The evaluation criteria were last revised in 1999 to provide more weight to habitat factors and more flexibility for evaluators. The changes to the criteria were a significant overhaul with the intent to increase the points awarded for habitat related criteria. With the changes in 1999, the balance between habitat focused and public focused criteria changed so that habitat criteria could be awarded 45 of 60 possible points. Previously, only about one-third of the points could be awarded to habitat criteria (25 of 87.7 possible points).

The make-up of the evaluation team for the Urban Wildlife Habitat category has also changed over the course of the program. Along with the evaluation criteria changes that occurred in 1999, the evaluation team make up was changed from seats reserved for certain affiliations to appointment of representatives with certain expertise.

In early 2007, the RCFB began review of the Urban Wildlife Habitat category due to a concern that fewer grants were being awarded to local agencies than state agencies. In October 2007, the RCO requested public comment on proposed changes to the category with the intent of increasing grant awards to local agency sponsors. Based upon public comments received and discussion at the RCFB meeting in November, the following proposal is being offered for public comment in December.

Discussion

The package of proposed changes is intended to increase grant awards to local agency sponsors in the urban wildlife habitat category and ensure projects also provide habitat important to wildlife in proximity to metropolitan areas.

- 1) Dedicate a percentage of the Urban Wildlife Habitat category funds to local agencies and a percentage of funds to state agencies. The funding allocation would be as follows.
 - 40% of funds to local agencies,
 - 40% of funds to state agencies, and
 - 20% of funds applied in this sequence:
 - Fully fund partially funded local agency project(s)
 - Fully fund partially funded state agency project(s), then
 - Apply any remaining funds to the highest ranked alternate project regardless of sponsor.
 - Funds remaining due to an insufficient number of applications by either local agency or state agency sponsors will be awarded to the next highest ranked project(s) regardless of sponsor.

AND

- 2) Modify the evaluation instrument to give the criteria specific to the Urban Wildlife Habitat identified in RCW 79A.15.060 additional weight. Currently, the four specific criteria in the Urban Wildlife Habitat category identified in RCW 79A.15.060 are:
 - Population of, and distance from, the nearest urban area
 - Proximity to other wildlife habitat
 - Potential for public use, and
 - Potential for use by special needs populations.

The evaluation instrument would be amended as shown in Attachment A. The ~~strikeout~~ represents deletion and the underline represents additions to the current evaluation instrument. The new proposed scoring changes the balance of the criteria as shown in the following table.

	Current Points	Proposed Points
Habitat Related Criteria	45 of 60 (75%)	45 of 80 (56.25%)
Public Use Related Criteria	15 of 60 points (25%)	35 of 80 (43.75%)

AND

- 3) Include more people with a local agency perspective on the Urban Wildlife Habitat evaluation team. Currently the make-up of the evaluation team is

individuals with expertise in various disciplines. Many of the same team members evaluate Critical Habitat and Natural Areas category projects in addition to those in Urban Wildlife Habitat. RCO staff would work to recruit more representatives with a local agency perspective that have the required level of

expertise to score and evaluate proposals specifically in the Urban Wildlife Habitat category.

Next Steps:

Currently staff is soliciting public comments on the proposed recommendations. Comments received will be distributed to the Board prior to final decision at the January meeting.

Any changes adopted by the Board will be incorporated into Manual #10b, *WWRP: Habitat Conservation Account and Riparian Protection Account Policies and Project Selection*, and will affect grant requests beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Attachments

- Resolution 2008-06
- Attachment A

RESOLUTION #2008-06
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
Urban Wildlife Habitat Category Revisions

WHEREAS, Chapter 79A.15 RCW established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) and authorized the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) to adopt policies and rules for WWRP; and

WHEREAS, the RCFB has determined that there is inequity between the funds awarded to local agencies and to state agencies in the Urban Wildlife Habitat category of the Habitat Conservation Account; and

WHEREAS, the RCFB desires to incorporate a change to the WWRP policy manual regarding fund allocation in the Urban Wildlife Habitat category in order to increase grant awards to local agency sponsors and ensure projects also provide habitat important to wildlife in proximity to metropolitan areas; and

WHEREAS, the proposed policy has been made available for review and comment by individuals and organizations that have expressed an interest in WWRP; and

WHEREAS, adoption of this resolution furthers the RCO 2007-2011 Strategic Plan objective to provide leadership through policy development by considering new and updated policy recommendations (Goal 1, Strategy 1.1); and

WHEREAS, final adoption of this policy revision will be incorporated into Manual 10b: *WWRP: Habitat Protection Account and Riparian Protection Account: Policies and Project Selection*

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the RCFB hereby adopts the following funding allocation formula for the Urban Wildlife Habitat category: forty percent of the funds for local agencies, forty percent of the funds for state agencies, and the remaining twenty percent of the funds will be distributed as follows: fully fund partially funded local agency projects, then fully fund partially funded state agency projects, and finally apply any remaining funds to the next highest ranked project(s), regardless of sponsor. Funds remaining, due to an insufficient number of applications by either local agency or state agency sponsors, will be awarded to the next highest ranked project(s) regardless of sponsor; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RCFB hereby directs Recreation and Conservation Office staff to solicit for additional local agency representation on the Urban Wildlife Habitat category evaluation team; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RCFB hereby revises the scoring matrix for the evaluation instrument to increase the maximum points from 5 to 10 the for public benefit, public use and population criteria; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RCFB hereby further revises the evaluation criteria related to public use and creates a separate evaluation criteria for environmental and scientific benefit as presented in Attachment A. This revision removes the educational and scientific evaluation question from the public use criteria and provides for 5 points for educational and scientific value.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Recreation and Conservation Office staff is directed to take the necessary steps for implementation of this revision beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: January 15, 2008

Attachment A

Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program

Evaluation Criteria Urban Wildlife Habitat Category (State & Local Agencies)

“Urban Wildlife Habitat means lands that provide habitat important to wildlife in proximity to a metropolitan area.” RCW 79A.15.010

WWRP - Urban Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Summary		
Criteria	Evaluation Elements	Possible Points
Project Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate the project on statewide, vicinity, and site maps • Brief summary of the project [goal(s) and objective(s) statement] 	Not scored
Ecological and Biological Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bigger picture • Uniqueness/significance of the site • Fish and wildlife species and or communities • Quality of Habitat 	20
Species and Communities with Special Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat to species/communities • Importance of acquisitions • Ecological roles • Taxonomic distinctness • Rarity 	10
Manageability and Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediacy of threat to the site • Long-term viability • Enhancement of existing protected land • On-going stewardship 	15
Public Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project support • Educational and/or scientific value 	5 <u>10</u>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational and/or scientific value 	5 <u>5</u>
Public Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for, and appropriate level of, public use 	5 <u>10</u>
GMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMA Planning Requirement 	0
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population of, and proximity to, the nearest urban area 	5 <u>10</u>
Total Points Possible		80 <u>80</u>