

Item 5

Meeting Date: March 2010
Title: Evaluation Process for Natural Areas Category
Prepared By: Scott Robinson, Conservation and Grant Services Section Manager

Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Decision

Summary

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is proposing that the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (board) make the following changes to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Natural Areas category:

1. Eliminate project review meetings, and;
2. Conduct a written evaluation process that is scored by volunteer evaluators at their home or office.

Staff believes that these changes will reduce the time and resources committed to project review and evaluation without losing the effectiveness of the process.

Strategic Plan Link

Adopting this revision would continue to ensure that the board funds the best projects as determined by a fair evaluation process, while also promoting the board's goals to be accountable for and efficient with its resources.

Staff Recommendation

RCO staff recommends adoption of the revised evaluation process via Resolution #2010-03.

Background

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Natural Areas category was established in 1990 and is available only to the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Department of General Administration.

The current process includes meetings for both project review and project evaluation. Each meeting takes one or two days and involves grant applicants, RCO staff, and up to 10 volunteer evaluators.

- At the project review meeting, evaluators comment on proposals so that applicants can improve their projects before the final evaluation.
- At the project evaluation presentations, applicants present their proposal and answer questions from evaluators, who then score each project.

About two weeks after the evaluation presentations, RCO staff and the evaluators assemble again to review the final project rankings. Some evaluators participate in this meeting by conference call.

Analysis

In order to reduce this sizable time and resource commitment, RCO staff proposes that the board eliminate the project review meeting and adopt a written evaluation process for the Natural Areas category.

Project Review Meeting

The project review meeting is intended to give the applicant constructive feedback before they submit their project for final evaluation. This process is helpful for applicants in many grant programs. However, it is less useful in the Natural Areas category because the projects involve acquisitions that have already received considerable review by the state agencies sponsoring the proposals. In addition, many of the projects represent subsequent phases of previously grant-funded sites. Staff has found that project reviews typically yield suggestions that improve the application's clarity (e.g., improving map details), but do not significantly affect the scope or acquisition approach.

In lieu of the project review meeting, RCO staff would ensure that applicants have a completed and clear project packet.

Written Evaluation Process

In a written evaluation process, evaluators would review and score project proposals at their own pace within a given timeframe. Evaluations would continue to be based on the project packet, including:

- Project description/summary;
- Cost estimate summary;
- Evaluation question responses;
- Special status species table;
- Project location map(s); and
- Photos or other graphics.

The board has adopted similar approaches for the WWRP State Lands Development and Restoration categories, and these procedures could be applied to the Natural Areas category.

After all written projects have been reviewed and scored, RCO would conduct a post-evaluation conference call in which evaluators would discuss project rankings, develop a final ranked list, and review the evaluation process.

Considerations in Converting to a Written Evaluation Process

There are advantages and disadvantages to this proposed process change. Some factors to consider include:

- RCO successfully uses “score-at-home” evaluations in other grant programs.
- This process would reduce travel costs and require less time away from home and office for both evaluators and applicant staff.
- It would add flexibility for the evaluators by allowing them to score written proposals at their own pace within an identified time period.
- Applicants would submit a written application packet instead of producing and practicing an in-person presentation. This would save applicant staff time.
- Projects would not be evaluated in a meeting open to the public.
- Applicants would not have the opportunity to reinforce project benefits or strengths through an oral presentation.
- It would be more difficult for an evaluator to ask an applicant questions; if needed for important issues, an evaluator would submit a question to RCO which would refer the question to the applicant, and then share the answer with all evaluation team members.

Public Review

On February 12, 2010, RCO staff circulated a draft proposal for public comment through email and the agency web site. Comments are due by March 13. Staff will present the comments at the March 25 board meeting.

Next Steps

If the board approves the change, RCO staff will update manual 10b and implement the new approach to evaluate projects in the WWRP Natural Areas category beginning with the 2010 grant evaluations.

Attachments

Resolution 2010-08

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
Resolution #2010-03
Project Evaluation Processes For WWRP Natural Areas Category

WHEREAS, in-person Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (board) project reviews and evaluations in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Natural Areas category require considerable time and resources from volunteer evaluators, project applicants, and staff; and

WHEREAS, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) wanted to find a way to reduce this commitment without diminishing the high quality of the evaluations; and

WHEREAS, a less time and resource intensive system, based on written evaluations, rather than in-person presentations, is now successfully used in several board program categories and can be adapted to other board programs; and

WHEREAS, the project review meeting does not significantly change the quality of projects in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Natural Areas category; and

WHEREAS, evaluators would discuss project rankings and make final recommendations at the post-evaluation meetings; and

WHEREAS, adopting this revision would continue to ensure that the board funds the best projects as determined by a fair evaluation process, while also promoting the board's goals to be accountable for and efficient with its resources; and

WHEREAS, using written evaluations in other grant programs has shown that the process supports the board's goal to conduct its work in an open manner;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the board does hereby adopt the written evaluation process for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Natural Areas category; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the project review meeting will be eliminated from the application process for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Natural Areas category; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the board directs RCO staff to implement this revision beginning with the 2010 grant cycle.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: _____