



STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

February 2009

**Item #10: Staff Recommendations Regarding 2009 Grant Round
Timeline and Manual 18**

Prepared By: Brian Abbott, Salmon Section Manager

Presented By: Brian Abbott, Salmon Section Manager

Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Discussion and Direction

Summary

Last year, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff worked with stakeholders and the review panel to make significant changes to Manual 18 and improve the processes. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (board) approved the changes in May 2008.

At this time, staff proposes only minor revisions to *Manual 18, Salmon Recovery Grants Manual: Policies and Project Selection* to start the 2009 grant round.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends only minor changes to Manual 18 at this time, pending further direction from the board. In addition, staff believes the board should start the 2009 grant round in February with a draft grant manual. Staff has prepared a 2009 grant round timeline for the board's reference (Attachment A).

Background and Analysis

Last year, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff worked with stakeholders and the review panel to make significant changes to Manual 18 and improve the processes. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (board) approved the changes in May 2008.

Due to the work done in 2008, only minor changes are required for the 2009 grant round. These changes include editing and updating the timeline or administrative procedures.

The board may identify additional changes from the review panel recommendations or through its strategic planning and funding approach discussion. Staff would develop language to reflect such changes, conduct public comment periods, and bring a revised manual to the board for adoption in May.



Next Steps

RCO staff seeks direction from the board on the following:

1. Whether to start the 2009 grant round with a draft of Manual 18, including minor changes as described above. The board would adopt Manual 18 in May.
2. Whether to begin staff work on any of the additional issues identified by the board or review panel.

If approved by the board, RCO staff will make minor updates Manual 18 and open the 2009 grant round in February. Staff also will prepare a final draft manual for approval at the May 2009 meeting.

Attachments

- A. Proposed 2009 Salmon Recovery Funding Board Grant Application Cycle

Attachment A: Proposed 2009 Salmon Recovery Funding Board Grant Application Cycle

Date	Phase	Description
February– August	Technical Assistance (required)	Grant staff and review panel members meet with lead entities and grant applicants to discuss project ideas and conduct site visits.
February – July	Project review materials due (required)	Project sponsors complete project review materials in PRISM for SRFB review panel review. This step can be conducted as early as necessary to fit with each lead entity's schedule. The project review materials are required to secure a site visit by the review panel. Other applications may be submitted at the application submittal date, but won't have the benefit of on-site technical assistance and review by the review panel.
May	Application workshops	Grant staff conducts application workshops in each region for lead entities and project sponsors.
March – July 31	Draft project review forms complete	Draft project review forms are forwarded to lead entities and grant applicants within two weeks of the project review date requested by the lead entity. Grant applicants should update their applications to address any review panel comments.
September 1	Applications due Lead entity and regional organization submittals due	Application materials, including attachments, are submitted via PRISM. Lead entities submit the final ranked list of projects. Regional organizations submit their recommendations for funding (if different from individual lead entity lists) and responses to the information questionnaire. Lead entities without regional organizations submit responses to the information questionnaire.
September 2-17	Grant Manager Review	All project applications are screened for completeness and eligibility.
September 18	Application Materials are mailed to SRFB review panel	Staff forward all project application information to review panel members for evaluation.
Sept. 28-29	SRFB review panel Evaluation Meetings	The review panel meets to discuss project application materials and develop draft evaluation forms.
September 30	Draft project evaluation forms complete	Staff forward draft project evaluation forms to regions, lead entities and applicants for all applications. Project applicants work with grant staff to address any "needs more information" or "projects of concern."
October 12 - 16	Regional presentations	Regional organizations provide formal presentations to the review panel. Presentations should address the regional responses to the oversight checklist and any projects that received "needs more information" or "projects of concern" comments.
October 30	Draft 2009 Project Comment Forms available	The report contains the review panel's recommendations to the board for funding. Public comments are due by 5 p.m. November 13.
November 20	Final 2008 Grant Cycle Report complete and available for public review	The final funding recommendation report is available for public review.
December 10-11	Board Funding Meeting	Public comment period available



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RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

February 2009

Item #10b: 2008 Review Panel Observations and Recommendations for the Future

Prepared By: Steve Leider, Review Panel

Presented By: Steve Leider, Review Panel

Approved by the Director:

Proposed Action: Briefing

Summary

On behalf of the 2008 (9th grant round) Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) Review Panel (Panel), I am pleased to submit to you this summary of the Panel's observations and recommendations. Members of the 2008 Panel were Michelle Cramer, Kelly Jorgensen, Patty Michak, Pat Powers, Tom Slocum, and Steve Toth. We hope you, staff, and others find this information useful as you consider adjustments to upcoming grant rounds.

These observations and recommendations are based on the assumption that the SRFB desires the Panel to serve as its main source of independent statewide review information and advice, as the SRFB endeavors to fund the best, most strategic projects aimed at implementing salmon recovery plans and lead entity habitat strategies.

These comments are organized into three general categories (I) general observations, (II) recommendations to improve processes, and (III) other.

General Observations

Project Consultations

2008 marked the first year the Panel was available for consultation with project sponsors and lead entity processes on a year around basis. To help improve projects the SRFB and staff encouraged sponsors and lead entities to engage in early and ongoing deliberations with the Panel. This was successful where it occurred, and could be even more so to the extent other lead entities and sponsors take advantage. Lead entities that were particularly well organized to use Panel members on field visits and pre-meetings included WRIA 9-King County, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Yakima, Lower Columbia, Grays Harbor, and Chelan.



It is likely that as grant rounds continue, the most beneficial and strategic salmon recovery projects brought forward will tend to be larger, more complex, and more costly. Maintaining the SRFB's standard of quality will require more up front work by all.

Noteworthy or "WOW!" Projects

Using its review process the SRFB strives to fund the best and most strategic locally supported projects for salmon. In response to SRFB interest, 2008 marked the first year the Panel identified noteworthy or "WOW" projects in the final report. Projects were deemed noteworthy if they had special significance in things like the type or amount of habitat improved, benefits to fish, or cost savings.

To provide more information for the SRFB, lead entities, and project sponsors, and to encourage submission of projects with greatest significance to salmon, the Panel recommends continuing to identify a short list of noteworthy projects in the final report. Accordingly, the Panel suggests applying more specific criteria so that the SRFB, Panel, sponsors, regional organizations and others understand what such projects exemplify. For example, on an annual statewide basis, noteworthy projects could be defined to be those that, to the greatest extent, protect or restore natural watershed processes for significant amounts of high priority habitat in the most cost-effective manner.

Acquisitions

Panel review and evaluation of acquisition (protection) projects continue to absorb a large amount of time and effort by all involved. For various reasons uplands are often included in proposals for protection projects. Upland areas typically have much less direct benefit to salmon compared to riparian areas. But often a case can be made, in the larger watershed context, that including both provides ecological and cumulative benefits to the aquatic system. To date, the Panel has applied SRFB benefit and certainty criteria for protection projects with an emphasis on salmon benefit. As observed by the Panel in the past, additional policy and technical guidance to lead entities, sponsors, and the Panel would be helpful. The Panel recommends clarifying SRFB policy with a statement stressing that protection grant requests should be commensurate (relative to total project costs) with the amount of aquatic and riparian habitat being protected.

In addition, the Panel recommends that to better set the acquisition context, application materials include a description of an overarching lead entity and project acquisition strategy, with a corresponding area map showing the project in the context of acquisitions desired to implement the strategy or plan.

Finally, the Panel recommends consideration of the following:

- To what extent are substantial areas of uplands eligible? If eligible, does the SRFB have guidance on the appropriate split between upland areas and riparian areas, and criteria that should be used to evaluate acquisitions (e.g., fish benefit, cost, area)?
- To what extent should the type, size, and application of match be a factor in evaluating acquisition projects? (Note comments on match below.)

Assessments

The additional SRFB guidance provided in 2008 for assessments was helpful but more specific guidance would be desirable. The Panel continues to encounter difficulties with project eligibility issues and application of benefit and certainty criteria for projects aimed at data gaps. Lead entities and others do not always seem to be aware of the existing assessment eligibility criteria.

Match

Match pertains to project eligibility and is reviewed by staff. Projects that staff determines meet match requirements are forwarded to the Panel for review. The Panel strives to understand match in the context

of SRFB benefit and certainty criteria that pertain to issues of cost effectiveness. The Panel notes that it is not always clear how or where project match is coming from, or how often the same match (e.g., equipment) is used for different projects within the same grant cycle, or across multiple grant cycles. The Panel suggests clarifying eligibility criteria and consider disallowing the use of the same match for multiple projects, and to ensure the match is necessary for implementation of the project.

Recommendations on Process

Context and “String of Pearls”

Understanding the context for projects as they become increasingly complex and spread over multiple phases will be an ongoing challenge (i.e., understanding connections among the “string of pearls” of individual projects within areas). To help address this challenge and reduce overall application and review demands, the Panel recommends that revisions be made to application materials to better set the past, present, and future project context for submitted projects. A map would be very helpful in understanding spatial context of the projects over time. For example, in 2008 some lead entities and regional organizations documented the history of restoration actions (funded by both SRFB and other sources) completed within their areas. This was very informative in clarifying context and implementation progress made to date, by showing linkages and incremental progress afforded across proposed and future-phase projects (locations and types) as part of a comprehensive approach. This information would ideally also include previously funded projects, and projects implemented using non-SRFB funding sources. Identification of multi-year, phased projects encompassing and addressing watershed processes would be particularly helpful.

Finally, the Panel recommends submission of improved documentation that more fully and efficiently documents and describes the rationale for scope changes, continuations, extensions, and new phasing for projects the Panel is asked to review.

Tracking Project History

Tracking the evolution and status of individual projects within and between rounds can be challenging for all. This is especially true where individual projects are part of a series of inter-related or phased projects, and when project objectives and details appropriately evolve over time. It is increasingly important for the Panel to be able to understand the evolution of projects submitted, whether or not projects in their current form received some funding in previous rounds. This information is not routinely included in application materials, nor is a system in place for staff to provide summary materials to the Panel. Lack of ready access to this information can lead to frustration by all involved, consume valuable time, and lead to misunderstandings.

The Panel recommends inclusion of the following information in application materials for projects previously proposed but not funded: (1) a brief history of funding requests (could be as simple as checking a box on a form and referencing the previous grant round project number), (2) outlining why the project was not previously funded, and (3) clarifying how the project has been revised from the previous submittal(s).

Additionally, within a grant cycle, Panel project comment forms and tracking responses in fix-it loops (especially where multiple reviews and responses are involved) can be cumbersome communication mechanisms. While striving to avoid being overly complicated for project sponsors and others, the Panel recommends that Manual 18 include a standard “response to comment” form (e.g., see Lower Columbia form), or a similar question/answer format that could be by used applicants/lead entities. This would make Panel review discussions with sponsors about responses much more efficient and actually help to increase responsiveness on the part of the applicant. The Panel will continue to strive to communicate as clearly as possible at each opportunity.

Plan/Strategy Context and Fit of Lists

To the extent that the SRFB wants the Panel to continue to review some lead entity strategies and understand relationships between project lists to strategies or recovery plans, the Panel recommends that those review steps be accomplished prior to project reviews so that the context is clearer when the Panel interacts with lead entities and sponsors on projects.

Other

Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR)

In 2007, the SRFB review process included projects proposed for funding from two major funding sources (traditional SRFB and new PSAR funds). If projects funded using PSAR funds continue to need Panel review in the future, we would urge the SRFB to review our 2007 recommendations seeking clarification about the SRFB intent regarding application of benefit and certainty criteria between SRFB and PSAR funds. Specifically, the 2007 SRFB policy manual (Manual 18) stated that SRFB criteria would be applied to PSAR proposals “to the extent possible.” In 2007, the Panel used a consistent statewide approach to application of SRFB benefit and certainty criteria, and for the few projects that did not fit the criteria well, comments were provided but no determination was made and the situation was flagged for the SRFB. However, a common outside perception was that the SRFB intended the phrase to mean that the Panel’s application of the criteria to PSAR proposals should be “relaxed” (essentially lowering the SRFB low bar for PSAR project-of concern (POC) determinations).

In 2008, a project that did not fit SRFB criteria well was deemed to be a POC by the Panel. The project was later proposed for funding using available PSAR monies. If the Panel had known in advance the project was to be funded using PSAR funds, the Panel would have used the 2007 approach, providing comments and flagging the project for the SRFB, but not rendering a POC determination for it.

If PSAR projects are to be reviewed by the Panel in the future, the Panel recommends that the SRFB and staff clarify existing guidance and especially, whether the intent of the phrase “to the extent possible” is intended to relax any criteria. The Panel feels the approach used in 2007 was reasonable and could continue to be workable in the future.

Regional-scale/Strategy Review

In 2008, regional-scale information was summarized for the SRFB by staff; the Panel provided no comments. However, the Panel did review and evaluate habitat strategies for those lead entities not involved in recovery plan implementation. The Panel has noted in the past that it is not unusual for information received from lead entities and regional organizations to state that a project or list is “consistent with” a strategy or plan.

Based on the Panels’ past experience, the specificity and focus of the actual “fit” can be highly variable, with projects addressing rather moderate priorities even when deemed to be consistent with strategies or plans. This situation can arise due to issues of opportunity and project development timing. At the least, the SRFB could ask regional organizations and review groups at the regional scale to clarify what level of project evaluation was done, how consistency was determined, and whether proposed projects are specific to focused needs in plans and importantly, the extent to which projects reflect the most important and specific remaining implementation needs at the watershed and region-wide scales.