

Manual 10c

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

Forestland Preservation Category

February 2026

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At a Glance

Forestland Preservation Category

Purpose

Provides money to acquire a less-than-fee-simple interest to preserve opportunities for timber production and may include environmental enhancement or restoration of the land acquired.

Who may apply?

- Cities and towns
- Counties
- Nonprofit nature conservancies
- Washington State Conservation Commission

Is a plan required?

No

What types of projects are eligible?

- Acquisition of property rights through a conservation easement or lease.
- Combination of acquisition and environmental enhancement or restoration.

What are the grant limits?

\$500,000

How much match must the project sponsor contribute?

Cities, counties, and nonprofit nature conservancies—50 percent.
Washington State Conservation Commission—no match required.

How is the project evaluated?

An advisory committee evaluates a written application and scores the project.

When are applications due

April 30, 2026

When are grants awarded?

June 2027 estimate

What's new this year?

- Combination projects.
- Cost increases allowed.
- Removed the non-state, non-federal match requirement.

Section 1: Introduction

This section covers the following:

- ✓ The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
- ✓ Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- ✓ Who makes decisions
- ✓ Where to get information
- ✓ Grant process and timeline
- ✓ Time limits and extensions

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

The Washington State Legislature created the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)¹ in 1990 to accomplish two goals: acquire valuable recreation and habitat lands before they were lost to other uses and develop recreation areas for a growing population.

In 2016 the Legislature expanded those goals by creating the Forestland Preservation Category within the larger WWRP to conserve the state's valuable forests for timber production.

Today, WWRP provides funding for a broad range of projects that conserve wildlife habitat and working farms and forests, buy land for parks and trails, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. This landmark legislation and subsequent funding have come about through the support of the Governor, Legislature, and groups such as the many organizations comprising the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

¹Enabling legislation is in Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.

Accounts and Categories

State law² divides WWRP funding into three accounts, which are further divided into categories with unique funding priorities, shown below.

Farm and Forest Account	10 percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmland Preservation Category • Forestland Preservation Category 	<p>90 percent</p> <p>10 percent</p>
Habitat Conservation Account	45 percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Habitat Category • Natural Areas Category • Riparian Protection Category • State Lands Restoration and Enhancement Category • Urban Wildlife Habitat Category 	<p>35 percent</p> <p>25 percent</p> <p>15 percent</p> <p>10 percent³</p> <p>15 percent⁴</p>
Outdoor Recreation Account	45 percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Parks Category • State Lands Development and Renovation Category • State Parks Category • Trails Category • Water Access Category 	<p>30 percent⁵</p> <p>10 percent⁶</p> <p>30 percent⁷</p> <p>20 percent</p> <p>10 percent⁸</p>

²Revised Code of Washington 79A.15

³or \$3 million, whichever is less

⁴Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2019-27: 45 percent to local agencies, Native American Tribes, and nonprofit organizations; 45 percent to state agencies; 10 percent to fully fund partially funded local agencies, Native American Tribes, and nonprofit organizations; then fully fund partially funded state agency projects, and apply any remaining amount to the next highest ranked project(s), regardless of sponsor.

⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-52: 40 percent for acquisition costs and 60 percent for development costs.

⁶or \$3 million, whichever is less

⁷Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-52: 50 percent for acquisition costs and 50 percent for development costs.

⁸75 percent must be for acquisition costs. Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.050 (2)(d)

Each WWRP account and category receives a specified percentage of the money appropriated by the Legislature. While state law requires that these minimum percentages be met over the life of the program, it is the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's intent generally to meet them, by category, each biennium. However, the board may forego these statutory minimums in any one biennium, should circumstances warrant. The board's intent is to award grants to projects meeting the greatest need and with the potential to achieve the greatest benefit.

Choosing a Grant Category

A grant applicant submits a proposal to a specific WWRP category. The applicant should attempt to find a category that best fits the project, considering the goals and evaluation criteria. RCO staff review the applicant's choice and recommend any changes. The applicant may appeal the staff's decision about changing categories to RCO's director and, if necessary, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.

A WWRP project will be evaluated only in one category. At the applicant's discretion, a project appropriate to more than one category may be divided into stand-alone projects and submitted separately. The applicant must determine the best category for the project by the technical completion deadline, unless otherwise authorized by the director. See RCO website for WWRP [manuals about other accounts and grant categories](#).

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board

WWRP is administered by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, which is a governor-appointed board comprised of five citizens and the directors (or designees) of three state agencies—Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, and Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) supports the board. RCO is a small state agency that manages multiple grant programs to create outdoor recreation opportunities, protect the best of the state's wildlife habitat and working lands, and help return salmon and orca from near extinction.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board recognizes its obligation to ensure its programs and policies are equitable and inclusive and has taken steps

to address disparities. The board has resolved to continue to examine its policies and reach out to diverse partners to ensure that Washington's investments are not only for a few but reflect the board's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Read the board's [Resolution 2020-35](#) in full online.

Manual Authority

This manual is created under the authority granted to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board in WWRP's enabling legislation and Revised Codes of Washington 79A.15 and 79A.25. It reflects the specific statutory requirements of Revised Code of Washington 79A.15, Title 286 of the Washington Administrative Code, and Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's policies.

Who Makes Decisions

Staff Decisions

Staff review the grant application to ensure it is complete, the project is eligible to compete, the grant applicant is eligible to apply, and the match is certified. Staff also score objective evaluation criteria, such as those relating to match. Finally, staff make routine grant management decisions about billings, reports, minor scope changes, short time extensions, and more.

Advisory Committee Decisions

An advisory committee evaluates grant applications and scores them to create a ranked list of projects for the funding board to consider. The advisory committee also reviews proposed program policies and criteria changes and, sometimes makes recommendations to the funding board or director about how funding should be distributed.

Director Decisions

The RCO director, or designee, makes many project decisions based on rules and board policies. The decisions range from authorizing payments, to approving cost increases, to approving payment of charges greater than lower bids, to terminating the agreement.

A project sponsor may request that the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board reconsider a decision made by the director. To request reconsideration, the project sponsor must send a letter to the board chair at least sixty days before a

board meeting.⁹ The request is added to the board's meeting agenda and the project sponsor then may address the board at the meeting. The board's decision is final.

Board Decisions

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board makes the final decisions for funding, policy, and project changes although some decisions it has delegated to the agency director.

Not a Public Hearings Board¹⁰

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board is not a public hearings board and does not decide land-use issues. To the extent possible, each project proposal should demonstrate adequate public notification and review and have the support of the public body applying for the grant.

More detailed information about board and director decisions is available in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* and *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*.

Where to Get Information

Recreation and Conservation Office:

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington Street Southeast
Olympia, WA 98501

[Email](#)

Telephone: (360) 902-3000
FAX: (360) 902-3026
Washington Telecommunications
Relay Service: Call 711

[Website](#)

Mailing Address

PO Box 40917
Olympia, WA 98504-0917

RCO staff are available to answer questions about this manual and grant program. Please feel free to call. In addition, manuals, forms, and most other materials referenced in this manual are available on RCO's website on the [forestland grant page](#).

⁹Washington Administrative Code 286-04-060(4 and 5)

¹⁰Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2006-13b

Other Grant Manuals Needed

The manuals below provide additional information for grants and are available on the [grant manual page](#) of RCO's website.

- *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*
- *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*
- *Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations*
- *Manual 8: Reimbursements*

Alternative Format

To get this manual and other publications in an alternative format, please contact the RCO communications office at the mailing address above, by calling 711 for the Washington Telecommunications Relay Service for the hearing and speech impaired, or emailing [RCO Communications](#).

Grant Process and Timeline

RCO offers grants in even-numbered years, in conjunction with the state budget. The grant process, from application to grant award, spans eighteen months and is outlined below. While the order of the steps in this process remains consistent, visit the RCO website for precise dates.

Even-Numbered Years

Webinar. RCO conducts a webinar (an online meeting) in the winter or early spring to provide information about the grant programs offered that year.

Entering an Application. RCO strongly encourages the applicant to start the online application early. PRISM Online usually opens by March.

To enter an application, the applicant must sign up for a [SecureAccess Washington](#) account and submit a [PRISM account form](#). When using either of these databases for the first time, the applicant must complete a double sign-in.

1. Using SecureAccess Washington credentials, login to PRISM.
2. When redirected to the SecureAccess login page, enter the SecureAccess credentials.

3. When redirected to a one-time PRISM sign-in page, enter the PRISM login credentials.
4. The applicant will be directed back to the PRSM home page.

This double sign-in will happen only once. After completing the double sign-in, the applicant will use SecureAccess Washington credentials to log into PRISM. Learn more about [PRISM's components and technical requirements](#).

To begin an application, log into PRISM Online and select the + *New Application* button to enter grant application information. RCO uses this information to assign an outdoor grants manager. This manager guides the applicant through the process, reviews application materials, helps determine whether the proposal is eligible, and may visit the project site to discuss site-specific details.

Application Due. The application typically is due in late April or early May of even-numbered years.¹¹ The application includes the data entered into PRISM and all required attachments. The applicant must *submit* the application before the deadline. The *Check Application for Errors* button on the *Submit Application* screen will indicate which pages are incomplete. An incomplete application and an application received after the deadline will be rejected unless RCO's director has approved a late submission in advance. Follow the requirements in the Applicant's To-Do List online.

Technical Reviews. First, RCO staff review the application to ensure it is eligible, identify any issues of concern, and provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. Second, the advisory committee will review the application materials and provide written feedback. The applicant then may make changes to improve the project, if needed, and resubmit the application by the technical completion deadline.

Technical Completion Deadline. RCO establishes a technical completion deadline by which the application must be complete. After this date, the applicant cannot make changes. RCO will score applicable evaluation criteria as of this date.

Board Submits Biennial Budget Request. The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board sends the Governor a recommended funding amount for WWRP.

¹¹Applications are due at least four months before the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board approves funding (Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040).

Project Evaluation—Written Process. The advisory committee reviews the grant application and scores the proposal against a set of criteria approved by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.

Post-Evaluation Conference. After project evaluations, RCO staff tabulate the scores and share the results with the advisory committee. The committee discusses the preliminary ranked list and the application and evaluation processes. The public may join this advisory committee conference call; however, to ensure a fair and equitable process, guests may not testify. Shortly after the conference call, staff post the preliminary ranked list on RCO's website. The resulting ranked list of projects is the basis for the funding recommendation to the board.

Board Approves Project List. In an open public meeting, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board considers the recommendations of the advisory committee and staff, written public comments submitted before the meeting, and public testimony at the meeting. The board then approves the list of projects for submittal to the Governor by November 1.

When considering a list of projects for submittal to the Governor, the board will use both anticipated funding and project evaluation results to determine the length of the list. This list normally will exceed anticipated funding and will include alternate projects that could be funded if higher ranked projects fail or use less money than requested.

The board's recommendation of project lists to the Governor is not the same as funding approval.

The board submits alternate projects in an amount equal to 50 percent of the dollar amount requested. When possible, no fewer than six alternate projects are submitted.

Governor Submits Budget. Typically, the Governor's capital budget request to the Legislature includes funding for WWRP. The Governor may remove projects from the list recommended by the board but may not re-rank or add projects to the list.

Odd-Numbered Years

Legislature Approves Project. When it develops the state capital budget, the Legislature generally approves funding for WWRP and may approve the project list. The Legislature may remove projects from the list submitted by the Governor but may not re-rank or add projects to the list.

The project list approved by the Legislature in any one biennium is to be completed, to the fullest extent possible, within that biennium. A biennial project list is active until all the funding is used or no feasible projects remain. If a biennial list is completed and money remains, money may be awarded to projects in future years.

Certification of Matching Funds. An applicant with match included in the application must submit the [Certification of Applicant Match](#) by the match certification deadline, which is at least one month before board approval of funding.¹²

Board Awards Grant. After the Legislature and Governor approve the capital budget, the board makes the final grant award in a public meeting. The applicant may, but is not required, to attend.

Pre-agreement Materials. After grant award, the applicant has two months¹³ to submit the pre-agreement documents referenced in the Applicant's To-Do List or in a checklist provided by RCO staff. If not already submitted, RCO staff will request milestones or a timeline for project implementation, and final control and tenure documents for restoration projects. An applicant with an acquisition project must provide the preliminary title report. Check with RCO staff to ensure all required items are submitted.

Grant Agreement Issued. RCO staff then prepare and issue the grant agreement. The applicant must return the signed agreement within three months from the date RCO sends the agreement to the applicant for signature.¹⁴ Once the agreement is signed, the applicant, now referred to as project sponsor, may begin the project, according to the terms of the grant agreement. Each agreement will be written and monitored for compliance by RCO staff. See *Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations* for more information.

¹²Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(3)

¹³Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(4)

¹⁴Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(5)

Successful Applicant Webinar. After the board approves funding, RCO publishes online a recorded webinar for successful grant applicants. This webinar covers the sponsor's responsibilities to comply with the grant agreement, issues that might come up when implementing a project, billing procedures, amendments for changes and time extensions, closing project procedures, and long-term compliance.

Time Limits and Extensions¹⁵

The sponsor must complete the funded project promptly. For this reason, RCO staff, with sponsor assistance, establish a timetable for project completion, including milestones and a project completion date. To avoid the risk of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board or director withdrawing the grant, the board adopted the following guidance for each project phase.

Application Phase

The applicant must provide reasonable assurance that the project can be completed on time and meet milestones. Reasonable assurance may include such evidence as the following:

- Appraisals and review are completed.
- Designs are completed.
- Bid documents are prepared.
- Environmental assessment is completed.
- Hazardous substances review is completed.
- Matching resources are secured.
- Option agreements are signed.
- Permits are in-hand.
- Property is in escrow.
- Waiver of Retroactivity has been approved by RCO.

¹⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2000-13

An applicant may submit only a project that likely can be completed within four years.

Pre-Agreement Phase

With RCO staff assistance, the applicant must develop milestones and a timeline, to be included in the grant agreement. The milestones for project implementation should ensure timely completion as follows:¹⁶

- Acquisition projects 1-2 years
- Combination projects 2-3½ years
(The acquisition portion must be completed within eighteen months of funding approval. See "Combination Projects" for more information)
- Exceptionally complex projects 3½ years

Implementation Phase

To help ensure reasonable and timely project completion, accountability, and the proper use of funds, the sponsor must do the following:

- Adhere to the project implementation milestones and communicate with RCO staff about any issues or possible delays.
- Begin project implementation quickly and aggressively to show measurable progress towards meeting project milestones.
- Submit a reimbursement request at least once a year.¹⁷
- Submit progress reports at intervals as designated by the RCO grant agreement.

RCO staff monitors critical project milestones (for example, ordering appraisals and reviews, starting restoration). RCO may terminate projects that do not meet critical milestones established in the grant agreement. (See the grant agreement section on "Termination and Suspension.") The sponsor may appeal any RCO director decision to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.

¹⁶Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2000-13

¹⁷Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040

By June 1 of each year, RCO reviews the status of a project that is incomplete three or more years from the date of funding approval. RCO will ask the sponsor to provide assurances that the project will be completed on time, such as the following:

- Executed purchase and sale agreements.
- Proof of permitting approvals.
- Awarded contracts.
- Progress on other significant milestones listed in the grant agreement.

If satisfactory assurances are not provided, the director may terminate the project.

Extensions

The director may approve a project completion timeline for up to four years. When one Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant is used to match another or a new grant is merged with a previous grant award, RCO staff will use the earliest grant award to determine the four-year window.

Requests for extensions that would exceed four years may be referred to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board for action.

Extension requests must be in writing and submitted to RCO at least sixty days before expiration of the project's completion date.¹⁸ The request must justify the need and commit to a new set of specified milestones.

Project Completion

The grant agreement end date will be written into the grant agreement. It is the date that is the end of the period of performance and all project work must be complete and may be extended only when authorized by the board or director.

When a project is completed, the sponsor must submit the final bill, final report, and supporting documents needed to close the project as specified in the agreement.¹⁹ If the bill and documentation are not submitted within six months

¹⁸Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(8)

¹⁹Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(7)

of the end date in the agreement, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board may terminate the agreement without payment.

Section 2: Policies

This section covers the following:

- ✓ Forestland Preservation Category
- ✓ Eligible forestland
- ✓ Eligible applicants
- ✓ Eligible project types and activities
- ✓ Environmental requirements
- ✓ Property requirements
- ✓ Other requirements and things to know
- ✓ Project area stewardship and ongoing obligations

Forestland Preservation Category

Program History

The Washington State Legislature created the Forestland Preservation Category in 2016 when it made other changes to WWRP²⁰ in response to a program review in 2015.²¹ The program review recommended creating the Forestland Preservation Category to support working forests that also provide connectivity, habitat enhancement, sustainable ecological benefits, and public access.

Funding is available for sponsors to buy a conservation easement or lease to protect forestland forever. RCO is a party to the easement or lease, but the sponsor and landowner are responsible for upholding it.²²

²⁰Chapter 149, Laws of 2016

²¹Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Review, 2015, Recreation and Conservation Office

²²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Purpose²³

Focus on Timber Production

The primary purpose of this category is to acquire and preserve opportunities for timber production, consistent with local comprehensive planning. Types of forests eligible for funding include industrial, private, community, Tribal, and publicly owned forests.²⁴ Regardless of the type of forest, the property must be devoted primarily to timber production.

A secondary purpose is to support other benefits of preserving forestland such as jobs, recreation, protection of water and soil resources, habitat for wildlife, and scenic beauty.

Eligible Forestland

Definition of Forestland²⁵

Forests must be designated by the county as either timberland or forestland to be eligible for funding and must remain in the county program for the duration of the conservation easement or lease. If the property owner fails to remain in the county program, it is a violation and enforceable by the sponsor and RCO.

- Timberland Designation:**²⁶ "Timberland" means any parcel of land that is five or more acres, or multiple parcels of land that are contiguous and total five or more acres. The land also must be devoted primarily to the growth and harvest of timber for commercial purposes. "Timberland" means the land only and does not include a residential homesite. The term includes land used for incidental uses that are compatible with the growing and harvesting of timber but no more than 10 percent of the land may be used for such incidental uses. It also includes the land on which appurtenances necessary for the production, preparation, or sale of the timber products exist in conjunction with land producing these products.

²³Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

²⁴Property owned by an eligible sponsor is not eligible for grant funding. See Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-13, as amended.

²⁵Revised Codes of Washington 84.33.010, 84.33.035(5) and 84.34.020(3)

²⁶Full definition in Revised Code of Washington [84.34.020\(3\)](#)

- **Forestland Designation:**²⁷ "Forestland" means any parcel of land that is five or more acres, or multiple parcels of land that are contiguous and total five or more acres, and that is or are devoted primarily to growing and harvesting timber. Designated forestland means the land only and does not include a residential homesite. The term includes land used for incidental uses that are compatible with the growing and harvesting of timber but no more than 10 percent of the land may be used for such incidental uses. It also includes the land on which appurtenances necessary for the production, preparation, or sale of the timber products exist in conjunction with land producing these products.

Required Documentation for Property Designation²⁸

The applicant must provide a written notice from the county assessor, a current property tax notice, or a recent title report to document that each parcel in a grant application is designated as timberland or forestland by the application due date, except as noted in the following paragraph.

If a parcel is not designated as timberland or forestland by the application due date, the applicant must seek an informal or preliminary determination from the county assessor that the parcel could be designated as timberland or forestland. Acceptable documentation is a letter from the county assessor or the county assessor's approval of an application for designation. The property owner must enroll the property as timberland or forestland before RCO releases funds for the acquisition of the easement or lease.

The applicant also must submit to RCO the county-approved timber management plan, if the plan is a requirement of the county's tax program.

The RCO director may extend the deadline for documentation up to one month before the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board meeting when it approves the ranked list of projects for submittal to the Governor and Legislature.

²⁷Full definition in Revised Code of Washington 84.33.035(5)

²⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Eligible Applicants²⁹

Eligible applicants are shown below.

- Cities and counties
- Nonprofit nature conservancies³⁰
- Washington State Conservation Commission

Applicant Requirements

Nonprofit Nature Conservancies

A nonprofit nature conservancy must meet all the following eligibility requirements:

- Be registered in the State of Washington as a nonprofit corporation as defined by Chapter 24.03 Revised Code of Washington AND meet the definition for a nonprofit nature conservancy in Revised Code of Washington 84.34.250.
- Consistent with the Revised Code of Washington 24.03A and Recreation and Conservation Funding Board policy, prepare to identify a successor organization fully qualified to ensure management continuity of any grants received by the corporation or association.
- Demonstrate at least three years actively managing projects relevant to the types of projects eligible for funding in the forestland category. "Actively managing projects" means performing the tasks necessary to manage on-the-ground forestland management functions, such as negotiating for acquisition of property rights, closing an acquisition, developing and implementing management plans, designing and implementing projects, securing and managing the necessary funds regardless of fund source, and other tasks.
- Demonstrate a proven ability to draft, acquire, monitor, enforce, and defend conservation easements.

²⁹Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(4)

³⁰Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.010(10)

- Provide a copy of articles of incorporation and bylaws including any amendments.

Legal Opinion for First-Time Applicants³¹

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board requires an organization wishing to apply for a grant for the first time to submit a legal opinion from an attorney licensed in Washington State that the applicant is eligible to do the activities below. The legal opinion is required only once to establish eligibility.

- Contract with the State of Washington and the United States of America.
- Meet any statutory definitions required for Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant programs.
- Receive and spend public funds including funds from the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.
- Acquire and manage interests in real property for public conservation or outdoor recreation purposes.
- Develop and/or provide stewardship for structures or facilities eligible under board rules or policies.
- Undertake planning activities incidental thereto.
- Commit the applicant to statements made in any grant proposal.

Eligible Project Types³²

Acquisition Projects

An acquisition project is one that purchases or receives a donation of less-than-fee interests in real property. These interests include, but are not limited to, conservation easements, access and trail easements, covenants, water rights, leases, and mineral rights. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests must be for at least fifty years and may not be revocable at will. Grants are available to acquire a less-than-fee-simple interest in real property through a conservation easement or

³¹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolutions 2010-08 and 2016-37

³²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

lease.³³ Less-than-fee interests include, but are not limited to, access, water, air, carbon, mineral, and other rights that aid in preservation of the forest or secondary benefits supported by the category. An acquisition must include purchase and extinguishment of all development rights (see “Building Envelopes” for exceptions). The acquisition must be recorded at the county auditor’s office where the land is located.

Incidental and administrative costs related to an acquisition are eligible including a baseline inventory and a forest stewardship plan as described below. Additional policies for property acquisition are in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

Multiple Parcels

An application may include one or more parcels.

All parcels proposed for acquisition must be identified in the grant application by the technical completion deadline.

Each parcel must be shown on a map, labeled with a county parcel number and its current classification (see “Eligible Forestland” section above).

Each parcel must be enrolled with the county as either forestland or timberland.

All parcels must be contiguous or within the same ownership.³⁴ “Ownership” means the individual, individuals, or businesses that hold title to a parcel of land. “Contiguous” means two or more parcels that physically touch one another along a boundary or a point. Land divided by a public road, but otherwise an integral part of a forestry operation, is considered contiguous.

Value of Acquisitions

A sponsor may seek reimbursement from RCO for the value of the easement or lease based on the appraised value of the easement or lease, not including the underlying ownership of the land.³⁵

Before applying for a grant, an applicant is strongly encouraged to review *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*, which provides details on acquisition procedures and requirements. Some important highlights are below.

³³Revised Code of Washington 70A.15.130(3)

³⁴Revised Code of Washington 84.34.020(6)(b)(i) and (ii)

³⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2008-027

Appraisals

Must be performed by licensed appraisers, must value the exact eligible property rights being acquired with RCO funds, and must be reviewed by a second licensed appraiser. The sponsor should direct the appraisers to follow the requirements in manual 3 to ensure the resulting report (and easement or lease value) is acceptable for the purpose of RCO reimbursement. If the match for the project is coming from a federal source, RCO's manual 3 requirements still apply, including the requirement to obtain an appraisal review. However, if the federal funding source requires the applicant to follow the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions (aka Yellow Book), RCO will accept appraisals prepared to these standards in place of the manual 3 appraisal requirements.

Acquisition Procedures

The sponsor must follow the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policy Act of 1970. See manual 3 for details.

Conversions

To protect the investment of public funds, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board prohibits the conversion of a funded project to ineligible uses. Therefore, property rights acquired with a forestland preservation grant must be protected by language in the lease or easement that describes how property value will be recovered if the property is converted from forestland during the term of the easement or lease. The RCO easement template includes this language. A Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant cannot be used to remedy a conversion.

Documents

Because appraisals must reflect the property rights as conveyed, the sponsor should provide copies of any proposed easement or lease to the appraisers as part of the appraisal instructions. The board has developed a model conservation easement that is recommended but not required for use. If the sponsor doesn't use this model easement or uses only portions of it, the sponsor must demonstrate that the easement language addresses each applicable element of the model easement and is consistent with the intent of each element, with this manual, and with Washington State laws. The sponsor must send draft easements to RCO for review before final approval.

Combination Projects³⁶

Combination projects involve acquisition and environmental enhancement or restoration. Environmental enhancement and restoration activities must further the ecological functions of the forestlands acquired. Additional policies for enhancement and restoration activities are in *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*.

To help ensure timely completion of a combination project, the applicant must acquire the property rights within eighteen months of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board approval of funding.³⁷ If not acquired already via a Waiver of Retroactivity, the sponsor also must provide draft copies of all leases or easements to RCO for review. Execution of the leases or easements must occur within eighteen months after funding.

For the acquisition to remain eligible, the sponsor must follow all the requirements and procedures outlined in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

Fish Passage Barriers

The project must include correcting all fish passage barriers on property owned by a private, small forest landowner. A private, small forest landowner harvests less than two million board feet of timber each year from land it owns in Washington. Funding from the Family Forest and Fish Passage Program and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board are eligible sources of match for this restoration activity. Fish passage barriers on other forestland are not eligible for grants because property owners must correct barriers in their Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans as required by the Forest Practices Act.

Other Considerations

Phased Projects³⁸

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board recommends that the applicant discuss phasing a very expensive and large-scale project with RCO staff. A phased project is subject to the following parameters:

³⁶Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

³⁷Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2025-05

³⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37 and 2007-27

- Approval of any single phase is limited to that phase. No approval or endorsement is given or implied toward future phases.
- Each phase must stand on its merits as a viable project and not be dependent on the completion of future phases or work.
- Each phase must be submitted as a separate application.

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board may consider progress and sponsor performance on previous grants when making decisions on a current project proposal.

If two or more projects are ranked equally through the evaluation process, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board will give preference to a project that has had a previous phase funded by the board.³⁹

Riparian Habitat

Management of riparian habitat along rivers, streams, and other flowing waters should comply with recommendations established in *Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Habitats: Riparian* produced by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Waivers of Retroactivity: Buying Property Rights Without a Signed RCO Grant Agreement

An applicant may request approval from RCO to buy property rights and preserve the eligibility of that purchase before a grant agreement is signed. This approval is called a Waiver of Retroactivity and is described more fully in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*. All rules associated with a Waiver of Retroactivity apply.

Eligible Project Activities

Incurring Pre-agreement Costs⁴⁰

RCO may reimburse a sponsor for certain allowable expenses incurred before the start date of a grant agreement. However, any costs associated with the preparation or presentation of the grant application are ineligible.

³⁹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2007-27

⁴⁰Washington Administrative Code 286-13-085

For an acquisition project, most incidental costs incurred before an RCO grant agreement are reimbursable. Property right costs are not allowable as a pre-agreement cost unless RCO has approved a Waiver of Retroactivity. See *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

For a combination acquisition and restoration project, preliminary costs necessary to get a project ready for construction (i.e., architecture and engineering, permits) may be reimbursed. The sponsor may not incur any construction costs before the period of performance in the agreement except those defined by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. See *Manual 5: Restoration Projects* for further information.

Acquiring Property

Acquiring property may include the following:

- Purchasing or receiving a donation of less-than-fee interest in real property.
- Incidental and administrative costs related to acquisition are eligible.

Additional rules for land acquisition are in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

Enhancing and Restoring Activities

Enhancement or restoration activities within a project must further the ecological functions of the forestland. The project should enhance the viability of the preserved forestland to provide timber production while conforming to any legal requirements for habitat protection. Activities should be based on accepted methods of achieving beneficial enhancement or restoration results.⁴¹ Guidelines for restoration and enhancement projects are in *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*. Examples of eligible project elements include the following:

- Bridging watercourses
- Fencing, gates, and signs
- In-stream habitat such as bank stabilization
- Habitat enhancement such as native plantings and invasive plant removal

⁴¹Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(13)

- Removal of structures
- Replacing culverts

Aquatic restoration projects should follow the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's aquatic habitat guidelines for water crossings, stream restoration, and stream bank protection.

- [Water Crossing Design Guidelines](#)
- [Integrated Streambank Protection Guidelines](#)
- [Stream Habitat Restoration Guidelines 2012](#)

Preparing a Baseline Inventory⁴²

A baseline inventory is required. A baseline inventory records and characterizes the condition of the property at the time of the easement acquisition. The inventory provides the basis for future easement or lease monitoring and, if necessary, enforcement. See the [Acquisition Toolkit](#) on the RCO website for baseline inventory requirements.

The baseline inventory must be prepared before closing and signed by the landowner and sponsor at closing. In the event of poor seasonal conditions for documenting all conservation values, an interim baseline with a completion schedule must be signed at closing. If the baseline has been completed and a significant amount of time has elapsed before the easement is transferred, it should be reviewed and possibly updated before closing.

Preparing a Forest Management Plan⁴³

A forest management plan is required and must follow the [Washington State Integrated Forest Management Plan Guidelines & Template](#) produced by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Washington State Department of Revenue, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, and American Tree Farm System. One of the cooperating agencies listed above approves the plan. The sponsor is strongly encouraged to include the county assessor in review and approval of any forest management plan.

⁴²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁴³Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

The maximum allowable cost for developing or updating a forest management plan is \$10,000.

EXCEPTION: When another funding agency provides matching funds to a WWRP forestland preservation project, the RCO director may approve the use of an alternative plan if it meets the intent of the *Washington State Integrated Forest Management Plan Guidelines & Template*.

Developing a Site Stewardship Plan

An applicant may request up to 1 percent of the total project cost or \$10,000, whichever is less, for development of a site stewardship plan. An outline for the stewardship plan must be submitted with the grant application. At a minimum, a completed stewardship plan must contain the following elements:

- Long-term stewardship goals and objectives
- Monitoring goals and objectives
- Restoration goals and objectives (if applicable)
- Short-term land management goals and objectives
- Description of the project area, including the following:
 - U.S. Geological Survey quadrant map and county assessor's parcel map
 - Map⁴⁴ showing all human-made and natural features
 - Narrative description of the property
 - Photographs taken at permanent photograph points
- A detailed stewardship plan implementation budget that also identifies the source of funding

⁴⁴Further guidance provided in appendix F of *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

Ineligible Project Activities and Costs

Several sources are used to determine project eligibility including Revised Code of Washington 79A.15. The following project elements are ineligible for funding consideration:

- Acquisition of fee title.
- Animal species introduction or propagation, other than biological controls for invasive species, etc.
- Concessionaire buildings or concessionaire space.
- Consumable supplies such as fuel, fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides, except as one-time applications if they are necessary parts of eligible restoration activities.
- Costs associated with preparing this or any other grant application.
- Costs not directly related to implementing the project such as indirect and overhead charges or unrelated mitigation.
- Crop plantings.
- Elements that cannot be defined as fixtures or capital items.
- Environmental cleanup of illegal activities (removal of contaminated materials or derelict vessels, trash pickup, methamphetamine labs, etc.).
- Fish or other wildlife production facilities, such as fish hatcheries for producing sport fish populations.
- Indoor facilities such as community centers, environmental education or learning centers.
- Multisite projects.
- Offices, shops, residences, and meeting and storage rooms.
- Purchase of land already owned by an applicant or sponsor described in Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(4) except as allowed by other board policy.

- Purchase of land already owned by a government agency. Limited exceptions may apply so check with an RCO grants manager.
- Properties acquired via a condemnation action of any kind. On multi-parcel acquisitions, sponsors may acquire those parcels that cannot be purchased from a willing seller via condemnation using only non-WWRP funds. Complete documentation of parcels acquired by WWRP funding versus those acquired entirely by sponsor funds under condemnation must be maintained and available. The value of parcels acquired via condemnation may not be used as part of the matching share.
- Protection of land for the purposes of satisfying a habitat conservation plan under the Endangered Species Act.
- Purchase of maintenance equipment, tools, or supplies.
- Restoration work done before a grant agreement is signed between the applicant and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. This work also cannot be used as match.
- Restoration work required under the Forest Practices Act or other regulatory mitigation requirement, except as described under the "Fish Passage Barriers" section.
- Routine operation and maintenance costs.
- Specific projects identified as mitigation as part of a habitat conservation plan approved by the federal government for incidental take of endangered or threatened species, or other projects identified for habitat mitigation purposes. Also, see *RCO Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* and *Manual 5: Restoration Projects* for exceptions.
- Transfer of development rights. Development rights acquired under this program may not be transferred to other property or for other uses.
- Utility payments such as monthly water or electric bills.

Environmental Requirements

Invasive Species⁴⁵

The Washington Invasive Species Council developed [protocols](#) for preventing the spread of invasive species while working in the field. The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board encourages grant sponsors to consider how their projects may spread invasive species and work to reduce that possibility. Invasive species can be spread unintentionally during construction, maintenance, and restoration activities. Here are examples of how it could happen:

- Driving a car or truck to a field site and moving soil embedded with seeds or fragments of invasive plants in the vehicle's tires to another site. New infestations can begin miles away as the seeds and fragments drop off the tires and the undercarriage of the vehicle.
- Sampling streams and moving water or sediment infested with invasive plants, animals, or pathogens from one stream to another via boots, nets, sampling equipment, or boats.
- Moving weed-infested hay, gravel, or dirt to a new site, carrying the weed seeds along with it, during restoration and construction activities. Before long, the seeds germinate and infest the new site.

The key to preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species on restoration projects is twofold: Use materials that are known to be free of invasive plants or animals in the project and clean equipment both before and after the job. Equipment to clean should include, but not be limited to, footwear, gloves, angling equipment, sampling equipment, boats and their trailers, and vehicles and tires.

Sustainability⁴⁶

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board encourages grant recipients to design and build sustainable projects to maximize the useful life of what they build and do the least amount of damage to the environment.

⁴⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁴⁶Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37 and 2011-22

The board encourages sponsors to use sustainable design, practices, and elements in their projects. Examples may include use of recycled materials; native plants in landscaping; pervious surfacing material for circulation paths and access routes, trails, and parking areas; energy efficient fixtures; onsite recycling stations; and composting.

Property Requirements

Reviewing the Project with the Local Jurisdiction⁴⁷

Before applying for a grant to acquire property rights, the applicant must review the proposed project with the county or city with jurisdiction over the project area. The applicant then must provide documentation that the applicant has conferred with the local county or city officials. The jurisdiction's legislative authority may submit a letter to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board stating its support of, or opposition to, the project. The board shall make the letter available to the Governor and the Legislature when submitting its prioritized list as part of RCO's biennial capital budget request. The applicant must complete this local review for each new application, even if resubmitting a project from a previous grant cycle.

To meet this requirement, the applicant must demonstrate that the conferral⁴⁸ process has begun by providing each member of the county commission or city council with a packet including all the following information:

- A cover letter referencing Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.110 along with a request to confer with the city or county officials about the project. The letter must state the option for the county or city to send a letter to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board stating its position on the project. A sample letter is available in the [Acquisition Tool Kit](#) on RCO's website.
- The project description as it will be submitted in the grant application.

⁴⁷Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37 and Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.110

⁴⁸"Confer" is defined as a dialogue between project sponsors and local county or city officials with the purpose of early review of potential projects. The dialogue may include any matter relevant to a particular project, which may include, but need not be limited to, the following: project purpose and scope; project elements; estimated project cost; costs and benefits to the community; plans for project management and maintenance; and public access.

- A location map.
- A parcel map of the proposed acquisition.

A copy of the packet must be attached to the project application in PRISM before the application deadline.

The applicant also must document that the conferral process took place. The documentation must be attached to the project application in PRISM before the technical completion deadline and must include all the following:

- Conferral dates
- Name and title of each person participating in the conferral process and that person's relevant organization
- A list or map of acquisition properties under consideration
- A list of the county or city official's key questions or concerns
- A description of any project revisions resulting from the conferral process
- A summary of any relevant follow-up actions

A sample documentation form is available in the Acquisition Tool Kit on RCO's website.

A local government proposing to acquire property within its own political boundaries meets this requirement by submitting the adopted resolution that is required with the RCO grant application before the application deadline. A local government proposing to purchase property outside its jurisdiction (e.g., a city acquiring property outside its city limits or a county acquiring property within a city's limits) must comply with the conferral requirement.

Landowner Acknowledgement for Acquisition Projects⁴⁹

As part of any grant application for acquisition, the applicant must demonstrate that the landowner is aware of the applicant's interest in buying an easement or lease. The applicant may meet this requirement by completing one of four options detailed in RCO's *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

⁴⁹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Compliance with the Forest Practice Act⁵⁰

The property owner must comply with the Forest Practices Act.⁵¹ RCO will consult with the Washington Department of Natural Resources to determine compliance after an application is submitted. If a parcel in the application is not in compliance, the property owner must correct the violation before RCO issues the grant agreement. If the property owner fails to comply with the Forest Practices Act after a conservation easement or lease is acquired, it is a violation and enforceable by the sponsor and RCO as well as the Department of Natural Resources.

For more information on compliance with the Forest Practices Act, contact the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' [Forest Practices Compliance Monitoring Program](#) at DNRreCoMo@dnr.wa.gov, 360-481-9838, or dial 711 for the Washington Telecommunications Relay Service for the hearing or speech impaired.

Preference for Community Priorities⁵²

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board recognizes that interest and commitment to preserve forestlands will vary by community. Communities may exhibit their commitments to forestland preservation through a variety of mechanisms including zoning, adopted strategies for forestland preservation, and dedicated funds to buy development rights.

Consistency with community priorities is one element in the evaluation criteria. To assist evaluators, an applicant may submit any combination of the following to RCO:

- Letters of endorsement or support from local governments, chambers of commerce, and other organizations
- A copy of the applicant's current capital facilities plan or capital improvement program in which the project is listed by name or by type
- A copy of results of a needs assessment or community survey

⁵⁰Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁵¹Chapter 76.09 Revised Code of Washington

⁵²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

- A copy of a survey or plan for preserving forestlands with a resulting priority list of acquisitions
- Documented results of a series of community meetings that may have resulted in consensus for forestland preservation

Control of the Land

To protect investments made by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and to assure public access to those investments, a sponsor must have adequate control of a project site to construct, operate, and maintain the area for the term required by the grant program and grant agreement. This “control and tenure” may be through land ownership, a lease, use agreement, or easement. See *Manual 5: Restoration Projects* for more information.

Building Envelopes⁵³

The concept of a building envelope is common in conservation easements. Building envelopes identify the footprint within which buildings are located or may be constructed in the future. A sponsor should work closely with landowners to identify appropriate locations for these envelopes to minimize disruption to the forest’s timber values. For example, if a building envelope is in the middle of a forest to take greatest advantage of a view, this not only will constrain logging, but also encourage estate-type development thereby creating a property value reflective of an estate rather than a forest. In general, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board encourages building envelopes to be near property edges and roads, where they won’t degrade long-term viability of the forest.

If there are no buildings, the sponsor should consider whether reserving the right to develop a future home site or other buildings would increase the long-term viability of the forest and reserve the rights needed to allow such development. The appraisal must reflect the number and type of reserved rights. If there is an existing home site that will remain, at least one development right must be retained to allow the home site to continue to exist.

Locations of building envelopes and allowed improvements must be identified in the conservation easement. The sponsor should identify general locations by the time the project is evaluated so evaluators can consider their impact to the long-term viability of the forest. It also will be important for the appraiser to be made

⁵³Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

aware of building envelopes to factor that into the market value analysis. Building envelopes must be identified, preferably by survey, on a site map that will become an exhibit to the easement.

Projects on State-owned Aquatic Lands

If a project will occur over, in, or alongside a navigable body of water, an authorization to use state-owned aquatic lands may be needed.

All marine waters are, by definition, navigable, as are portions of rivers influenced by tides. Navigable rivers and lakes are those determined by the judiciary, those bounded by meander lines, or those that could have been used for commerce at the time of statehood. The Department of Natural Resources' aquatic land managers will help the grant applicant determine if the project will fall on state-owned aquatic lands and provide more information on its authorization process. See the [land manager coverage map](#) online for contact information for the Department of Natural Resources aquatic land managers.

If the project is on state-owned aquatic lands, the grant applicant will need to secure a lease or easement (use authorization) to use those lands from the Washington Department of Natural Resources. Securing a lease or easement may take up to a year. RCO requires the executed lease or easement within two months after board funding approval to show control and tenure for the site.⁵⁴ The lease or easement is required before the project will be placed under agreement, unless RCO's director approves an extension in advance. Review the control and tenure requirements in *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*.

The following online resources may be helpful to review:

- [Grant Projects on State-owned Aquatic Lands](#)
- [Leasing State-owned Aquatic Lands](#)
- [Boundaries of State-owned Aquatic Lands](#)
- [Caring for Washington's Nearshore Environments](#)

⁵⁴Washington Administrative Code 286-13-0045(4)

Department of Natural Resources' Review of Project Scope

Local and Tribal governments and nonprofit nature conservancy applicants that need to secure a use authorization must do all the following:

- Meet with the Department of Natural Resources to review the proposed scope of work.
- Complete a Joint Aquatic Resource Permit Application (JARPA) and give a copy to the Department of Natural Resources.
- Attach to the grant application a Scope of Work Acknowledgement Form (signed by the Department of Natural Resources) by the technical completion deadline.

A state agency applicant must follow the same procedure when developing a new facility where one currently does not exist. RCO will coordinate an interagency, in-person review of proposals for all other state agency projects.

Other Requirements and Things to Know

Carbon and Ecosystem Service Credits⁵⁵

Land acquired or encumbered with an RCO grant may be enrolled in carbon credit and other payments for ecosystem service programs. These programs issue credits or direct payments to landowners for activities such as protecting land, planting trees, or improving management practices that reduce, sequester, or prevent future carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. Read more information in *RCO Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

Number of Grant Proposals Allowed

In general, RCO does not limit the number of grant proposals from a single applicant during the biennial grant cycle. However, each application must be for a one site or forest and a different scope of work. Each application must stand alone on its own merits as a viable forest and not be dependent on other projects or future phases of work.

⁵⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2021-02

A grant proposal for the same project or scope of work may be submitted to another RCO grant program only if it is being used as match. Each proposal must identify the other RCO matching grant proposal. RCO recommends applicants contact staff to discuss options for phasing costly, interrelated, or complex project proposals.

Public Access⁵⁶

By state law, the acquisition of a property interest does not provide a right of access to the property by the public unless explicitly permitted by the landowner in the conservation easement, lease, or other form of deed restriction.⁵⁷

If a willing property owner, or future property owner, and the sponsor agree to allow public access in the conservation area, such use shall be identified as a permitted use and included in the forestland conservation easement or lease or amended into the easement or lease at a later date. Examples of public access may include walking, public trails, water access sites, and areas for wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing.

By state law, acquisition priorities for the Forestland Preservation Category shall consider whether a forestland conservation easement or lease is consistent with a regional or statewide recreation plan.⁵⁸ Evaluators shall give higher consideration to applications that are consistent with such plans when scoring the other benefits in the "Community Values" evaluation question.

Permitted Uses⁵⁹

The area subject to a conservation easement or lease may contain the permitted uses below if they are not inconsistent with the primary and secondary purposes of the forestland program and the designated tax program status as described above. Any foreseen uses that would be inconsistent with the program must be excluded from the conservation easement or lease area.

- Fire defense and other emergencies
- Forest research

⁵⁶Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2015-23 and 2016-37

⁵⁷Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(6)

⁵⁸Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(12(d))

⁵⁹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

- Habitat enhancement and restoration
- Limited building rights for forest management purposes and ranching facilities
- Limited utilities consistent with forest management purposes
- Non-timber forest harvest and collection
- Recreational or educational uses
- Ranching activities consistent with an approved forest management plan
- Sale of carbon credits for the purposes of prolonging the life of the timber stand
- Timber harvest and forest management in accordance with a forest management plan and the Forest Practices Act
- Use of chemicals for forest management purposes

Prohibited Uses⁶⁰

The following uses are inconsistent with the primary or secondary purposes of the forestland program and are prohibited within the conservation easement or lease area:

- Agriculture
- Alteration of watercourses, except those required to comply with the Forest Practices Act
- Commercial feed lots
- Commercial mining or excavation
- Commercial signs or billboards unrelated to the forest management purposes of the property
- Construction of new buildings, structures, or improvements, except as permitted above

⁶⁰Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

- Game farming or game farm animals
- Hazardous materials disposal
- Industrial, commercial, or residential activities
- Intentional introduction of nonnative and invasive species
- Subdivision of the property to smaller parcels
- Surface or subsurface mineral extraction, except for forest management purposes
- Third party compensatory mitigation, including wetlands, and other habitat mitigation activities purchased by a third party to offset regulatory requirements
- Topographic modifications, except for forest management purposes
- Unregulated use or activity that causes significant erosion or pollution
- Waste disposal
- Wireless communication facilities

Competitive Bid Requirements⁶¹

The project sponsor shall follow current state procurement procedures or write its own. When buying things, the project sponsor shall provide open and free competition, to the maximum extent practical. Be aware of organizational conflicts of interest. Contractors that develop specifications, requirements, statements of work, invitations for bids, or requests for proposals cannot be hired for the resulting work. The project sponsor receiving federal money also must follow federal laws and regulations.

Grant Program Acknowledgement

The sponsor must acknowledge Recreation and Conservation Funding Board by program if possible, in all projects. This includes the following:

⁶¹RCO's grant agreement standard terms and conditions, Compliance with Applicable Law and Procurement Requirements.

- Written acknowledgement in any news release or publication developed or modified for the funded project.
- Verbal acknowledgement during all ground-breaking and dedication ceremonies.

A sponsor should notify RCO at least two weeks before any project dedication ceremony and thirty days in advance if an RCO representative or speaker is requested at the ceremony.

Public Disclosure Rules⁶²

RCO records and files are public records that are subject to the Public Records Act.⁶³ More information about the [RCO's disclosure practices](#) is available online.

Administrative Rule Exceptions⁶⁴

The following Washington Administrative Codes do not apply to projects funded in the Forestland Preservation Category:

- Washington Administrative Code 286-13-110—Income, use of income
- Washington Administrative Code 286-13-120—Permanent project signs
- Washington Administrative Code 286-13-035—Planning requirement

Additional Rules and Instructions

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board and RCO may issue additional or modified rules, instructions, interpretations, and guides from time to time as they believe necessary for the effective conduct of the grant program. Such changes may apply to all projects. Whenever possible, sufficient lead time will be given between the announcement and the effective date to minimize impacts to projects already in process at the time of announcement.

⁶²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁶³Revised Code of Washington 42.56

⁶⁴Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Project Area Stewardship and Ongoing Obligations⁶⁵

An RCO grant comes with long-term obligations to maintain and protect the project area⁶⁶ after a project is complete. The long-term obligations for the Farm and Forest Account are in state law⁶⁷ and RCO's grant agreement. A [sample grant agreement](#) may be found on RCO's website.

RCO recognizes that changes occur over time and that some facilities may become obsolete or the land needed for something else. The law discourages casual discards of land and facilities by ensuring that grant sponsors replace the lost value when changes or conversions of use take place.

In general, the project area funded with an RCO grant must remain dedicated to the use as originally funded, such as forestland preservation, for as long as defined in the grant agreement. For acquisition projects, the period is determined by the rights that are acquired.

A conversion occurs when the project area acquired, developed, or restored with an RCO grant is used for purposes other than what it was funded for originally. See *RCO Manual 7: Long-Term Obligations* for a discussion of conversions and the process for replacement of the public investment. Check the easement to see if repayment is an option and contact a grants manager if that is a possibility. The sponsor must obtain RCO approval to replace the converted property or repay the grant. Other RCO grants may not be used to resolve a conversion.

Non-compliance with the long-term obligations for an RCO grant may jeopardize an organization's ability to obtain future RCO grants.

After a project is complete (that is, after RCO's final reimbursement and acceptance of the project), RCO documents that were signed by the sponsor continue to govern the project area described in the boundary map for which funds have been granted.

Changes may be made only with the prior approval of the board. If a compliance issue arises, RCO staff works with the sponsor to resolve the issue. Unresolved, identified issues could result in restrictions on applying for, or receiving, future grants.

⁶⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁶⁶Washington Administrative Code 286-04-010(19). Project area is the geographic area that delineates a grant-assisted site, which is subject to application and grant agreement requirements.

⁶⁷Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.030(9) and Washington Administrative Code 286-13-160

Easement Compliance⁶⁸

The model agricultural conservation easement template requires that each easement include a provision to provide access to the project sponsor and RCO to conduct a general inspection of the easement area and to monitor compliance with the easement terms. The project sponsor must develop and implement a plan to monitor RCO-funded conservation easements.

Due to the complexity of the conservation easement and the long-term implications for the landowner, RCO advises the sponsor to strongly encourage the landowner to consult with an attorney before granting an easement.

Easements and leases must be recorded through the assessor's office in the county where the land lies. The easement or lease will be between the landowner and the sponsor. Partners, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or another eligible co-grantee, also may be named as parties to the easement. RCO must be named as a third-party beneficiary, and its director must sign the easement before closing.

⁶⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Section 3: Money Matters

This section covers the following:

- ✓ Grant limits
- ✓ Matching share
- ✓ Types of match
- ✓ Federal rules
- ✓ Records and reimbursements

Grant Limits⁶⁹

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grants are intended to expand the sponsor's existing capacity, not to replace funding that would have been used for a project without the grant.⁷⁰

The board establishes grant limits for its programs. Grant limits for forestland projects are shown below. WWRP funds may not exceed 50 percent of a project's total cost, except for a grant to the State Conservation Commission.

- The maximum grant request can be \$500,000. There is no minimum grant amount.
- Enhancement or restoration activities must be less than 50 percent of the acquisition cost of the project including any in-kind contribution by any party.⁷¹ For example, if the total acquisition cost is \$200,000, restoration

⁶⁹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁷⁰Washington Administrative Code 286-13-045(6)

⁷¹Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(13)

costs may not exceed \$100,000, for a total project cost of \$300,000. Total project cost includes the grant amount and sponsor's matching share.

Administration, Architecture, and Engineering Costs

Direct administrative costs for acquisition of real property are limited to no more than 5 percent of the total acquisition cost.

Architecture and engineering costs for restoration are limited to 20 percent of the total restoration costs.

Additional information about eligibility and reimbursement maximums for these elements is contained in *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* (administration costs) and *Manual 5: Restoration Projects*, (architectural and engineering costs).

Matching Share

Matching Share

Match is the project sponsor's contribution to the cost of a project. By requiring a match for grants, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board intends to foster and demonstrate local commitment to the projects and to spread the money from the grant program to a greater number of projects.⁷² All applicants are encouraged to contribute matching shares and reduce government cost.

Cities, Counties, and Nonprofit Conservancies

By statute, cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations must contribute matching resources at least equal to the amount of the grant requested.⁷³ For example, if an applicant requests a \$250,000 grant, the applicant must contribute \$250,000 for a total project cost of \$500,000. This is called providing a 50 percent or one-to-one matching share.

In addition, the applicant may have to provide additional match if RCO's share is less than 50 percent of the total project cost because of grant limits. For example, if a total project cost is \$1.2 million and RCO's grant is limited to \$500,000, the applicant must contribute \$700,000.

⁷²Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(9), Washington Administrative Code 286-13-045

⁷³Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.060 (4) and 79A.15.120(7)

In many grant programs, particularly those where match is not required, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board adopted evaluation criteria to encourage applicants to contribute matching shares.⁷⁴ In this grant program, an applicant will receive points for match of 55 percent or more. See evaluation criterion 8 "Match."

State Conservation Commission

The Washington State Conservation Commission does not need to provide match. If the commission partners with another eligible applicant, the minimum matching share is determined by who will own the property when the project is complete.

Eligible Match

Applicant resources used to match board funds must be eligible in this grant category. A sponsor's matching share may include any one or more of the following:

- Appropriations and cash
- Bonds—council or voter
- Conservation futures
- Corrections labor
- Donations—the value of using donated cash, equipment, labor, materials, property rights, or services (see the "Types of Match" section below)
- Force account—the value of using the sponsor's equipment, labor, or materials (see the "Types of Match section" below)
- Grants—federal, state, local, and private (see the "Types of Match" section below)
- Other Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grants that meet the requirements outlined below⁷⁵

⁷⁴Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2003-24

⁷⁵Washington Administrative Code 286-13-045

Not Allowed as Match

- Cost associated with meeting a mitigation requirement unrelated to the funded project. See "Mitigation Funds as Match" below.
- Costs that are double counted. (A cost incurred by a sponsor in a project that already has been reimbursed or used as match in another RCO project shall not be used as a match on another RCO project.)
- Costs that are not eligible for grant assistance.
- Costs that are not necessary or an integral part of the project scope.
- Existing sponsor assets such as real property or developments.

Match Requirements

All matching resources must meet the following criteria:

- Be an integral and necessary part of the approved project
- Be part of the work identified in the application and grant agreement
- Be for eligible work types or elements
- Be committed to the project

RCO rules governing projects apply to the grant applicant's match. For example, if a grant applicant uses donated property rights as a match, RCO rules requiring the property to remain in forestland use forever apply to the donated property as well.

Except for a grant application submitted within the same biennium, matching resources or board grants committed in one board-funded project must not be used as match in another board-funded project.

Match Availability and Certification

To help ensure the project is ready for implementation when approved, the applicant must have matching funds available for expenditure before the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board approves funding. The applicant must sign and submit a Certification of Applicant Match Form for the project to be included in RCO's funding recommendation. The applicant is advised to plan

for a project with match dependent on a citizen vote or ballot measure. This certification is due at least one month before board action.⁷⁶ The form and deadlines for certifying match are on the RCO website.

RCO may declare a project ineligible if there is no guarantee that matching funds are available. That project may be passed over in favor of a project with match in place. Such decisions are based on the board's confidence in the applicant's ability to have the match in place when required.

When another Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant is used as match, the certification of match will be conditioned on receipt of the other grant or on the sponsor providing the match with other resources. To prevent a backlog of unspent grants, the sponsor must finish the project by the earliest completion date of the two grants.⁷⁷

Types of Match

Donations

Donations are eligible only as matching funds and are not reimbursable. This means RCO will not pay more than the sponsor's out-of-pocket expenses. Valuing donations of equipment, labor (including inmates, community service labor, and volunteers), and material is discussed in *Manual 8: Reimbursements*. RCO strongly encourages the applicant to secure written confirmation of all donations planned as match and to attach the donation letters to the application.

Donated property rights must expand existing forestland or stand on their own as a viable forest. Review *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* before taking title to property that will be donated and used as match. Manual 3 outlines the requirements for valuing the property and for securing a donation statement from the seller.

Force Account

Force account refers to use of a sponsor's staff (labor), equipment, or materials. These contributions are treated as expenditures for billing purposes.

⁷⁶Washington Administrative Code 286-13-040(3)

⁷⁷Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2004-08 and 2006-13b

Other Grants

In some cases, a sponsor may use funds awarded from another grant program as its match. For example, federal forest easement program grants might be used to match forestland preservation grants. Other grants are eligible if the purposes are similar and grant sources do not restrict or diminish the use, availability, or value of the project area. These grants are eligible only as matching funds and are not reimbursable.

The eligibility of federal funds to be used as a match may be governed by federal and state requirements and thus will vary with individual program policies.

The applicant clearly must identify in the grant application all grants to be used as match. Applicants must document the compatibility of other grants with the RCO grant program and category. RCO will review the documentation provided to determine if the source is compatible with Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grants.

Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Grants as Match⁷⁸

Another Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant may be used to help meet the match requirements if the following conditions apply:

- The grants are not from the same Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grant program.
- Only elements eligible in *both* grant programs may count as match.
- Each grant is evaluated independently and on its own merits, as if the match were coming from elsewhere.
- The grant applications are submitted in the same biennium.⁷⁹

For evaluation scoring, an RCO grant used as match will not count toward the award of matching share points.⁸⁰

Matching resources also must conform to the deadlines discussed in section 1, "Grant Process and Timeline."

⁷⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2006-04 and 2016-37

⁷⁹Washington Administrative Code 286-13-045

⁸⁰Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2015-02

Mitigation Funds as Match

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board allows use of impact fees and mitigation cash payments, such as money from a fund established as a mitigation requirement, as match if the money has been passed from the mitigating entity to an eligible applicant, and the board's grant does not replace mitigation money, repay the mitigation fund, or in any way supplant the obligation of the mitigating entity.

Third-Party Match⁸¹

Cash spent on restoration by a third party may be used as match, if the value of the labor, equipment, and materials applied toward the activity is a donation to the sponsor. The value would be based on the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's existing donation policy, not necessarily on the amount the activity originally cost the third party. If the sponsor pays the third party for the value of the restoration, it becomes an expenditure and is eligible as in-kind match.

A sponsor may not use the value of development rights granted to a party other than the sponsor as a donation.

Cost Increases⁸²

Cost increases for approved projects may be granted by the board or director if financial resources are available. Each cost increase request will be considered on its merits. The director may approve a cost increase request as long as it does not exceed 10 percent of the total project cost. The director's approval of an acquisition project cost increase is limited to a parcel-by-parcel appraised and reviewed value. See *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* and *Manual 5: Restoration Projects* for more details on cost increases.

Federal Rules

For a project funded with federal funds or other grants that are used by RCO as match to a federal source, the grant sponsor must comply with

⁸¹Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁸²Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2025-23

[Part 200—Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#) and RCO may require additional information.

Records⁸³ and Reimbursements

Sponsors Must Pay First⁸⁴

RCO pays grants through reimbursement. A sponsor may request reimbursement only after paying employees and vendors. RCO does not provide money before vendors are paid.

Except as otherwise provided below, RCO will pay only at the percentage identified in the grant agreement after the sponsor has presented an invoice documenting costs incurred and compliance with the provisions of the grant agreement.

RCO will not pay more than the sponsor's out-of-pocket costs.

Reimbursement shall not be approved for any donations, including donated land.

RCO may pay an escrow account directly for RCO's share of the approved cost of land and related costs if the sponsor indicates a temporary lack of money to buy the land on a reimbursement basis. Before release of RCO grants into escrow, the sponsor must provide RCO with a copy of a binding agreement between the sponsor and the seller, all required documentation, and evidence of deposit of the sponsor's share, identified in the grant agreement, into an escrow account. See *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects* for more information on escrow payments.

Billing procedures are explained further in *Manual 8: Reimbursements*.

Records

The sponsor must keep detailed records of all funded project costs including force account values and donated contributions. Refer to *Manual 8: Reimbursements* for details and instructions about audits, record retention, and documents required for reimbursement.

⁸³Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁸⁴Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

Audits

All records relevant to a project funded by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board must be on file with the grant sponsor and are subject to audit by the State and inspection by RCO. If the auditor's inspection of the records discloses any charges incorrectly claimed and reimbursed, cash restitution of the incorrect amount must be made to the board.

Section 4: Project Evaluation

This section covers the following:

- ✓ How project evaluation works
- ✓ Evaluation criteria

How Project Evaluation Works⁸⁵

Project evaluation involves the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board adopting the evaluation criteria and the RCO director setting the evaluation process.⁸⁶

The RCO director appoints people to serve on an advisory committee to evaluate each grant proposal. In recruiting members for the committee, RCO seeks to appoint people who possess a statewide perspective and are recognized for their experiences and knowledge of forestland management in Washington. The director may appoint ex officio members to the advisory committee to provide additional representation and expertise. Visit RCO's website for [membership and other details](#).

An applicant prepares written responses to address the evaluation criteria. Advisory committee members individually review the written responses, graphics included in the applications, and summary application materials, and score the project. Scoring is confidential.

⁸⁵Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

⁸⁶Washington Administrative Code 286-13-020 and Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2023-24.

Letters and other documented expressions of project support provided to RCO by the technical completion deadline will be provided to the advisory committee as part of the evaluation materials packet. An applicant also should summarize this support when responding to evaluation Criterion 5: Community Values.

At the same time, RCO staff score the objective sections of the application, such as the amount of matching share an applicant is providing. Staff scores are based on information submitted by the applicant.

The advisory committee's and staff's scores are combined for an application's total evaluation score. The resulting ranked list is the basis for funding recommendations that the RCO director submits to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, which makes the final decision about funding in public meetings.⁸⁷ The public is given an opportunity to comment on the grant proposals before the board makes its decision.

⁸⁷Washington Administrative Code 286-13-050

Forestland Preservation Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria Summary

Criteria	Points
Scored by the Advisory Committee	
1. Viability of the Site	15
2. Forestland Stewardship	8
3. Stewardship Practices	2
4. Threat to the Land	8
5. Community Values	4
6. Community Support	2
7. Multiple Benefits	2
Scored by RCO Staff	
8. Match	2
Total	43

Detailed Scoring Criteria⁸⁸

1. Viability of the Site. What is the viability of the site for commercial timber production?

- What are the major tree species and their sizes, ages, and conditions?
- What is the long-term forest management strategy? Will it result in ongoing commercial timber production?
- Is there enough income generated on the property to sustain the long-term forest management strategy goals?
- How many acres is the area proposed for conservation? Evaluators provide a preference for larger areas.

▲ Point Range: 0-15 points based on the viability of the site for commercial timber production.

⁸⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-37

- 2. Forestland Stewardship.** What stewardship practices beyond the Forest Practices Act are in place that support timber production or provide ecological benefits?⁸⁹ What is the experience of the applicant to monitor the conservation easement to ensure the forest stewardship activities proposed are realized?

Examples of stewardship that achieve sustainable forest management include practices in accordance with any of the following:

- Integrated forest management plan
- Forest stewardship plan (approved by the Washington Department of Natural Resources)
- Conservation activity plan (National Resources Conservation Service)
- Tree farm management plan (Washington Tree Farm Program)

Ecological benefits include clean air, clean water, stormwater management, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and other benefits. Examples of stewardship that achieve ecological benefits include the following:

- Managing for wildfire
- Managing the spread of invasive species
- Managing for forest health and climate change
- Obtaining a third-party certification (e.g., Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council, American Tree Farm System)
- Demonstrating an estimate of the amount of biological carbon stored in trees and understory plants
- Efforts to protect state priority plant and animal species and ecosystems
- Flood reduction and floodplain connections
- Removal or correction of fish passage barriers

⁸⁹Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(12)(f)

- Dedication of stream and wetland riparian areas larger than the minimum requirements in the Forest Practices Act

▲ Points Range: 0-8 points

0 points	There are no specific stewardship practices in place and the applicant has minimal experience managing easements or leases.
1-4 points	There are one or more stewardship practices planned and the applicant has moderate experience managing easements or leases.
5-8 points	There are one or more stewardship practices in place and the applicant has strong experience managing easements or leases.

3. Stewardship Practices. What voluntary stewardship practices (described in criterion 2) will be included in the terms of the conservation easement or lease as required stewardship practices?

▲ Point Range: 0-2 points

4. Threat of the Land. What is the likelihood the land will be converted to some other use than forestland if it is not protected?⁹⁰

Score the question based on the severity of the threat that the property will be converted to some use other than forestland within the next five years. Threat may include lack of protection of the land, landowner circumstances, adjacent land uses, zoning supports ability to develop the land, or other conditions.

▲ Point Range: 0-8 points

0 points	Low likelihood it will be converted to another use
1-4 points	Medium likelihood it will be converted to another use
5-8 points	High likelihood it will be converted to another use

⁹⁰Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(12)(c)

- 5. Community Values.** How will protecting the land for timber production provide benefits to the community? Do the community and area Native American Tribes support the project?⁹¹

Preference is provided to projects that are identified in community planning efforts in one or more of the following ways:

- Is the project recommended in a limiting factors analysis or critical pathways analysis?
- Is the project recommended in a watershed plan developed under Revised Code of Washington 90.82 or other planning effort?
- Is the project recommended in a conservation plan (other than a habitat conservation plan required under the Endangered Species Act)?
- Is the project recommended in a coordinated, region-wide prioritization effort?
- Is the project consistent with a regional or statewide recreational or resource plan?
- Is the project consistent with the local comprehensive plan as forestland of long-term significance or other local planning effort?
- Does the project assist in the implementation of a local shoreline master plan updated according to Revised Code of Washington 90.58.080?

Benefits to the community also may include the following:

- Creation or protection of jobs
- Support for local mills
- Viewshed and scenic beauty
- Research and educational opportunities

⁹¹Revised Code of Washington 79A.15.130(12)(a), (b), and (d)

Support from the community and Native American Tribes may be demonstrated by letters of support or donations to assist with implementing the project.

▲ Point Range: 0-4 points

0-2 points The project will provide few additional benefits to the community.

3-4 points The project will provide many additional benefits to the community.

6. Community Support. Are there one or more letters in the application that demonstrate community support for the project?

▲ Point Range: 0-2 points

0 points There are no letters of support in the application.

2 points There are one or more letters of support in the application that demonstrate community or Native American Tribal support for the project.

7. Multiple Benefits

- Does the project area include recreational uses that are compatible with habitat conservation?

Explain these recreational uses and how they are compatible with the habitat conservation objectives of the project.

- Provide an evidenced-based explanation of compatibility.
 - Explain how recreational uses are managed on the landscape and balanced with habitat conservation.
 - Discuss the quality of the recreational experience.
- Does the project area include resource uses or management practices that are compatible with, and provide the ability to achieve, additional conservation benefits?

Describe the resource uses or management practices and explain how they are compatible with conservation and achieve additional conservation benefits.

- Provide an evidenced-based explanation of (1) compatibility with conservation and (2) achieving additional conservation benefits.
- How will these resource uses and management practices be managed?
- Describe how the local or regional communities and their leaders value these resource uses or management practices.

Evidence provided by the sponsor showing local support for conservation due to the applicant continuing a compatible historic use or practice that would otherwise be threatened may be considered as meeting the criteria of achieving additional conservation benefits.

Scoping the project to avoid impairing a locally preferred resource use or management practice may be considered as meeting the criteria of achieving additional conservation benefits.

▲ Point Range: 0-2 points

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 0 points | No multiple benefits provided or multiple benefits are not compatible with or achieve additional conservation benefits. |
| 1-2 points | More points shall be given to the extent multiple benefits exist, recreational uses are compatible with conservation, and resource uses and management practices achieve additional conservation benefits. |

8. Match. Applicant does not answer this question. Is the applicant providing additional match above the minimum requirement?

For evaluation scoring purpose, an RCO grant used as match will not count toward the award of matching share points.

▲ Point Range: 0-2 points

0 points The applicant is providing less than 55 percent match.

2 points The applicant is providing 55 percent or more match.