

Community Forests Program

Funding and eligibility guidelines

Table of Contents

Program Description	2
Application Process and Requirements	3
Eligible Applicants	3
Applicant Requirements	4
Eligible Project Types and Activities.....	5
Acquiring Forestland Property	5
Combination Projects.....	5
Ineligible Project Activities and Costs	6
Eligible Costs (Use of Grant Funds)	6
Acquisition Costs and Incidentals	6
Development and Restoration Costs	7
Property and Project Requirements	7
Grant Requests and Matching Share	10
Matching Share	10
Stewardship and ongoing obligations.....	11
Permitted and Prohibited Uses.....	12
Use of Income	13
Accounting Assurances	13
Other Considerations	14
Policy Addendums for the first grant cycle.....	14
Project Evaluation	14
Evaluation criteria	15

Program Description

In 2020, the Washington State Legislature directed the Recreation and Conservation Office to establish eligibility criteria and a list of potential community forest projects for funding consideration. Community forests provide many public benefits including timber and non-timber forest products, forest management and forest products manufacturing jobs, revenue to fund public services, environmental services such as clean air and water, carbon sequestration, climate resiliency, and opportunities for recreation, education, and cultural enrichment. As the population and urban footprint of the state continues to grow, the community forest program provides communities with a valuable tool for preserving forested lands for the benefit of current and future generations.

Focus on Forest Conservation

The focus of this program is to maintain forestlands as forests, consistent with local land use planning. Fragmentation and development of forestlands results in greater risks of wildfire and climate change impacts and deprives the community of the economic, environmental, cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities a community forest could provide. The Community Forests program provides a source of funding to help communities protect and enhance their surrounding forest lands by developing collaborative models of community-based forest management and use.

Definitions

Acquisition project – A project that results in the purchase or donation of fee or less than fee interests in real property. These interests include, but are not limited to, conservation easements, access or trail easements, covenants, water rights, leases, and mineral rights. Additional guidelines and rules for acquisition projects can be found in [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#).

Development project – A project that results in the construction of or work resulting in new elements including, but not limited to, structures, facilities and materials to enhance outdoor recreation resources. Additional guidelines for development projects can be found in [Manual 4: Development Projects](#).

Forestland – Property that is at least five acres in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested or capable of being reforested. Forestland includes the trees, but also the infrastructure and other elements necessary to manage and operate the forest or for the production, preparation, or sale of the timber and non-timber forest products.

Project – The undertaking which is, or may be, funded in whole or in part with funds administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO).

Project area – A geographic area that delineates the grant assisted site which is subject to RCO application and project agreement requirements.

Restoration project – A project that brings a site back to its historic function as part of a natural ecosystem or improving the ecological functionality of the site. For the purposes of the Community Forest program, restoration projects can include activities that improve forest health, or the ability of the forest to produce timber and other non-timber forest products. Additional guidelines for restoration projects can be found in [Manual 5: Restoration Projects](#).



Other grant manuals needed

The manuals below provide additional information for grants and are available on the [grant manual page](#) of the RCO Web site. Each can be made available in an alternative format.

- [Manual 3](#): Acquisition Projects
- [Manual 4](#): Development Projects
- [Manual 5](#): Restoration Projects
- [Manual 7](#): Long-Term Obligations
- [Manual 8](#): Reimbursements

Application Process and Requirements

- Confirm applicant eligibility
- Review relevant grant manuals for the category
 - Manual XX: Community Forests
 - Manual 3: Acquisition Projects
 - Manual 4: Development Projects
 - Manual 5: Restoration Projects
- Start project application in PRISM
- Attach required materials in PRISM application
 - Authorizing Resolution/Application Authorization
 - Landowner Acknowledgement Form(s) – one for each landowner
 - A map of the project area, including all parcels proposed for acquisition – See [Manual 3](#) for more details on multi-parcel acquisitions
 - Local Jurisdiction Review Packet and Property Designation Notice
 - A sight plan (conceptual) for projects with development or restoration activities
 - A photograph of the project site
- Submit evaluation criteria responses in PRISM
- Submit PRISM application by the application due date
- Proposal will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee
- Applicants will be notified of their ranking on the list of projects
- Applicants will be notified of their funding status after the legislature passes the biennial capital budget
- Successful applicants will be notified of their grant award and next steps.

Eligible Applicants

- Local government entities, including:
 - City or County government agencies
 - Special purpose districts (e.g. Park and Recreation Districts, Port Districts, Public Utility Districts, Conservation Districts, etc.)
 - Public Development Authorities (as authorized under RCW [35.21.730](#))
- Native American tribes
- Nonprofit conservation organizations
- A state agency *working directly* with one or more of the above entities



Applicant Requirements

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations must meet 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 nonprofit nature conservancy in Revised Code of Washington 84.34.250¹; and
- Consistent with Revised Codes of Washington 24.03.220, 24.03.225, and 24.03.230, identify a successor organization to ensure management continuity of any RCO grants received by the corporation or association.
- Demonstrate at least 3 years of experience actively managing projects relevant to the types of activities eligible for funding in the Community Forest program. “Actively managing projects” means performing the tasks necessary for developing and managing a community forest, such as negotiating for acquisition of property, closing on an acquisition, developing and implementing management plans, maintaining roads and other forest infrastructure, designing and implementing projects, securing and managing the necessary funds regardless of fund source, and other tasks. Experience can be demonstrated through the capacity and knowledge of individuals within the organization and should not be based solely on how long the organization has existed.

Public Development Authorities

- Must demonstrate legal authority to own property and operate in the proposed project area.
- Must identify an organization that will be responsible for receiving and maintaining the public community forest property, subject to RCO’s Deed of Right, in the event of insolvency or dissolution.
- Demonstrate at least 3 years of experience actively managing projects relevant to the types of activities eligible for funding in the Community Forest program. “Actively managing projects” means performing the tasks necessary for developing and managing a community forest, such as negotiating for acquisition of property, closing on an acquisition, developing and implementing management plans, maintaining roads and other forest infrastructure, designing and implementing projects, securing and managing the necessary funds regardless of fund source, and other tasks. Experience can be demonstrated through the capacity and knowledge of individuals within the organization and should not be based solely on how long the organization has existed.

State Agency Applicants

State agencies seeking to apply to the Community Forests grant program must demonstrate they are *working directly* with another entity that is eligible to apply in the program. The state agency must submit a written agreement formalizing the partnership with the other eligible entity prior to the application deadline. The agreement must specifically describe:

- The community benefits for which the forest is being acquired,

¹ RCW 84.34.250 defines nonprofit nature conservancies as having as one of its principle purposes, among other possible purposes, conserving natural resources. In the context of community forests, conserving natural resources should be interpreted to include conserving forestlands for timber management and harvest.



- Each entity's roles and responsibilities
- How community input will be integrated into forest planning and management decisions, and
- How future revenue generated by the community forest that exceeds operation and management expenses will be shared with the community.

Eligible Project Types and Activities

Projects must acquire fee simple title of real property. Projects may also include restoration activities or development of recreational facilities on the property acquired.

Acquiring Forestland Property

- Grant funds may be used for fee simple acquisitions only.²
- Acquisition projects may include incidental costs including but not limited to transaction fees, due diligence, initial invasive species treatment, fencing, signage, and property line adjustments. See RCO [Manual 3: Acquisitions](#) for a more complete list of eligible incidental costs.

Multiple Parcel Acquisition Projects are Allowed.

All parcels must be identified in the project application. If this creates a hardship for targeted landowners or jeopardize the acquisition, applicants instead may identify a geographic envelope containing all parcels under consideration and provide a written description of how the parcels will be prioritized for acquisition within the envelope. Proposed parcels should be contiguous with one another or contiguous with property currently managed under the community forest. Parcels may be non-contiguous if applicants can demonstrate that acquiring land anywhere within the geographic envelope will achieve the goals of the community forest.

Combination Projects

Combination projects include property acquisition and one or more other activities: forestland restoration, habitat restoration, or development of recreational opportunities. Restoration and development activities must occur on the property acquired. The total cost of the restoration and development activities combined cannot exceed 10% of the overall project budget.

Restoration

Activities may include forest health treatments, habitat or ecosystem restoration, in-water aquatic restoration, vegetation planting or reforestation, culvert and fish barrier removal and repairs, etc. Grant funds cannot be used for mitigation or other regulatory requirements for activities that are not related to the establishment or development of the community forest. (see RCO [Manual 5](#)).

Development

Activities may include developing trails and trailheads, parking, restrooms, campgrounds, picnic areas, day-use facilities, challenge courses, signage, interpretive displays, and other recreational opportunities that are compatible with the management objectives of the community forest (see RCO [Manual 4](#)).

² Per the budget proviso.



Phased Projects

Large acquisition projects can be complex, multi-year, and multi-partner efforts, and require extensive analysis, coordination, and implementation. A project sponsor should consider the potential complexity that large-scale or multi-million-dollar projects may create and should discuss phasing with RCO staff. Phased acquisition projects are subject to the following criteria:

- Approval of any single phase is limited to that phase. No endorsement or approval is given or implied toward future phases.
- Each phase must stand on its own merits as a viable project.
- Each phase must be submitted as a separate application.

The funding boards may consider progress and sponsor performance on previously funded phases when making decisions on current proposals.

Ineligible Project Activities and Costs

Grant funds cannot be used for the following project activities:

- Acquisition of lands Land already owned by an applicant or eligible sponsor except under a waiver of retroactivity
- Properties acquired by a condemnation action of any kind
- Restoration costs required by permit or other regulatory requirements to mitigate for activities that are not related to establishment of or development on the community forest
- Costs not directly related to implementing the project such as overhead or indirect costs
- Environmental cleanup of illegal activities (contaminated materials, derelict vessels, trash pick-up, methamphetamine labs, etc.)
- Animal species introduction or propagation, other than biological controls for invasive species
- Fish or wildlife production facilities, such as fish hatcheries to produce sport fish
- Indoor facilities such as community centers, environmental education or learning centers, gymnasiums, swimming and therapy pools, and ice-skating rinks
- Routine operation and maintenance costs
- Purchase of maintenance equipment, tools or supplies

Eligible Costs (Use of Grant Funds)

Acquisition Costs and Incidentals

Acquiring property means purchasing or receiving a donation of fee interest in real property. Acquisition may include the underlying land, timber, any associated mineral and water rights and any other fixed assets that accompany the property. Other non-fixed assets such as heavy equipment or movable structures are not eligible in this program. Incidental costs related to acquisition are eligible. Examples include: Appraisals, administrative costs, title reports, recording fees, closing fees, fencing, invasive species control, surveys, relocation, signs, taxes. Administrative costs for acquisition projects are limited to no more than 5 percent of the total costs of the property and incidental costs combined. Additional rules for land acquisition are in [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#).



Development and Restoration Costs

Development and restoration costs are for actual construction activities. These activities include costs for labor, materials, and equipment use. They start with site preparation and end with completion of the final punch list. Additional rules for recreational development projects can be found in [Manual 4: Development Projects](#). Additional rules for restoration projects can be found in [Manual 5: Restoration Projects](#).

Administrative, Architectural and Engineering Costs

Administrative costs are necessary to prepare a project for development or restoration, but do not involve direct construction activities. These activities may occur before and during actual project construction and may include bidding, construction supervision, environmental site planning, project administration, project closeout, recording documents, surveys, etc. Note: In RCO's online PRISM system, these activities are categorized as "architectural and engineering (A&E)" costs. Administrative costs for development and restoration activities are limited to no more than 20 percent of the total construction amount. See *Manual 4* or *Manual 5* for more information.

Community Forest Management Plan

Sponsors are required to submit a community forest management plan to RCO prior to project completion. The sponsor may use up to \$30,000 or 1% of the total project cost, whichever is less, for development of a Community Forest Management Plan.

Pre-Agreement Costs

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

For acquisition projects, most incidental costs incurred before an RCO grant agreement are allowable for reimbursement. Land costs are not allowable as a pre-agreement cost unless a Waiver of Retroactivity has been approved. See *Manual 3: Acquisition Projects*.

For restoration and development projects, preliminary costs necessary to get a project ready for the construction phase (i.e. architecture and engineering, permits) are allowable for reimbursement. The sponsor may not incur any construction cost before the period of performance in the agreement, except those defined by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. See *Manual 5: Restoration Projects* and *Manual 4: Development Projects* for further information.

Property and Project Requirements

Property Acquired Must be Forestland

Forestland is defined as property that is at least five acres in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested or capable of being reforested. For projects that acquire multiple parcels, the sum of all parcels must create an area that is at least five contiguous acres of forestland. Use of the property and management activities must maintain and support the forestland character.

If the property being acquired is enrolled in the county's forestland, timberland or open space tax program, the sponsor must maintain the property's enrollment in the program. If the property being



acquired is not already enrolled in the county's forestland, timberland or open space tax program, applicants must seek a preliminary determination from the county assessor that the property qualifies for one of the forestland, timberland or open space current use tax programs and are strongly encouraged to enroll any qualifying property in the relevant program upon acquisition.

Community Forest Management Plan

A community forest management plan must be submitted to RCO prior to project completion. Forest management plans must follow the [Integrated Forest Management Plan Guidelines](#) produced by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Department of Revenue, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Forest Service, and American Tree Farm System.

In addition to the elements included in the Integrated Forest Management Plan Guidelines, a community forest management plan must also include:

- a) a description of the public benefits provided by the community forest;
- b) a plan for community engagement and decision making;
- c) a financial management plan, consistent with the income use policy below, that includes a description of how any revenue generated that is in excess of the community forest's stewardship, management and operational needs will support the stated public benefits.

If the sponsor already has a forest management plan for lands already managed as a community forest, an update to the plan to include the acquired properties is an allowable cost not to exceed \$10,000. When another plan exists, the director may approve an alternative plan format that meets the intent of the community forest management plan guidelines.

Public Access

Regardless of whether the property is developed, all property acquired in fee title with RCO grants must be available for public use. Public use means that the general public has regular legal access and use of property acquired with RCO grants. For more information on public access requirements, see [Manual 3](#).

Limiting or restricting public access to a project area, or a portion of the project area, is allowed for the following reasons:

- Protection for the safety of the public. For public safety closures, the sponsor must identify a specific hazard with known consequences to visitors.
- Protection of water quality or critical, important, or sensitive species, habitats, or ecosystems.
- Protection of significant research and education sites or resources that might otherwise be compromised by public access, and areas where there is active research or education.
- Protection of historical or cultural resources. However, the sponsor shall allow exemptions to limits on public access in the case of cultural and spiritual uses that do not damage or otherwise adversely affect the protected resource(s).

The director may approve additional limits to public access on a case-by-case basis.

Existing Buildings and Structures

Existing buildings and structures may remain on the property if they support the purpose and function of the Community Forest. If a project sponsor wishes to retain a building or structure that exists on the property, the intended use of the structure must be clearly identified in the grant



application. If a project sponsor wishes to retain a structure that is not eligible for RCO grant funding, then the structure and associated land and support facilities must be excluded from the grant proposal.

Acquiring Land with Severed Mineral Rights

While a sponsor may acquire land with severed mineral rights, the sponsor is strongly encouraged to perform additional due diligence to determine the feasibility and risk of a third-party mineral owner exercising their rights. Development of the mineral rights by a third party could be treated as a conversion under RCO's long-term obligations policy. In such an event, the sponsor may encounter a legal obligation to find, fund, and acquire replacement land with similar community forest benefits and value.

Landowner Acknowledgement

As part of any grant application for property acquisition, the applicant must demonstrate that the landowner is aware of the applicant's interest in purchasing the property. Applicants may meet this requirement by completing one of four options detailed in RCO's Manual 3, Acquisition Projects.

Local Jurisdiction Review

Any organization applying for a grant to buy land shall provide the counties or cities with jurisdiction over the project area an opportunity to review the project. To meet this requirement, the applicant must provide the county commission or city council with a packet including the following information:

- A cover letter explaining the project and this requirement
- A description of the project as it will be submitted in the grant application
- A parcel map of the proposed acquisition, or a map of the geographic envelope if the sponsor is pursuing a multi-site acquisition strategy.

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

As part of this review, if the parcel being acquired is not already enrolled in the county's forestland, timberland or open space tax program, the applicant must seek an informal or preliminary determination from the county assessor whether the parcel could be designated as forestland, timberland, or open space. Acceptable documentation is a letter from the county assessor or the county assessor's approval of an application for designation.

Compliance with Forest Practices

Community Forest owners must comply with the Forest Practices Rules or other equally protective standard of forest management when conducting timber management or harvest activities. For more information on compliance with the Forest Practices Act, contact the Washington State Department of Natural Resources at (360) 902-1400, fpd@dnr.wa.gov, or www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/forest-practices/rule-implementation.



Cultural Resources Review

Governor's Executive Order 05-05, Archaeological and Cultural Resources, directs state agencies to review certain acquisition and construction projects for potential impacts to cultural resources to ensure that reasonable action is taken to avoid adverse impacts to these resources. The federal government, through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, requires the same compliance for federally funded projects and projects with other federal involvement, for example, projects on federal lands or those that require a federal Army Corps of Engineers permit. RCO facilitates review under the Governor's executive order. The appropriate lead federal agency facilitates review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. If the federal review covers the entire RCO project area, there is no additional review required to meet state requirements. See RCO [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#) for full description of the cultural resources review process.

Accessibility

Facilities or elements constructed with RCO grants and sponsor match are required by law to be accessible regardless of whether there are specific standards adopted in the State Building Code, Americans with Disabilities Act, or Architectural Barriers Act, as amended. Other federal laws, guidelines, and best practices also may apply to achieve accessibility.

RCO encourages sponsors to exceed the minimum accessibility standards and use a design principle that maximizes universal accessibility for all. See *Manual 4: Development Projects* and the [RCO Web site](#) for detailed information about how to make the facility meet accessibility requirements. Plans, project applications, cost estimates, and construction drawings must reflect compliance with facility access and signing requirements

Grant Requests and Matching Share

Minimum Request

No minimum request limit

Maximum Request

\$3,000,000

Matching Share

15% minimum match share required

Sources of Match

RCO policy allows only match sources that are eligible for reimbursement in the program. Examples of eligible match sources include other state, federal, or local grants; donated land value, labor, equipment, materials, or supplies (for recreation development or restoration projects); private cash donations; etc. Existing assets, costs associated with required mitigation, and costs not eligible for grant assistance are precluded from being used as match.

For the community forests program, the value of a conservation easement that protects forest land adjacent to the project area is eligible to be used as match. In such cases, the conservation easement value will be based on the easement appraisal, or if already acquired, the actual purchase



price/donated value. The easement acquisition must occur within the period of performance for the community forest project or the sponsor must request a waiver of retroactivity. RCO must review the easement to ensure consistency with the purpose of the Community Forests program. The sponsor must grant to RCO a third-party right of enforcement on the conservation easement for as long as the easement is active.

Limit on the Number of Projects

In general, RCO does not limit the number of grant proposals from a single applicant during the biennial grant cycle. However, each proposal must be for a different scope of work.

Payment on Reimbursement Basis

RCO pays grants through reimbursement. Sponsors may request reimbursement only after having paid their employees and vendors. RCO does not provide money before vendors are paid. See [Manual 3](#) for information on receiving advance payments to an escrow account for to complete acquisition projects.

Records

Applicants 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 regarding audits, record retention, and documents required for reimbursement.

Public Disclosure Rules

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

Stewardship and ongoing obligations

Long-Term Obligations

Use of RCO grants creates a condition under which funded property and structures become part of the public domain in perpetuity. An RCO grant comes with long-term obligations to maintain and protect the project area after a project is complete. The long-term obligations are in RCO's project agreement standard terms and conditions, and [Manual 7, Long-Term Obligations](#). A [template of the project agreement](#) can be found on RCO's Web site.

Interests in real property, structures, and facilities acquired, developed, enhanced, or restored with RCO funds must not be changed, either in part or in whole, nor converted to uses other than those for which the funds originally were approved. If an RCO funded project is found to be changed or converted (out of compliance with the project agreement or agreement amendments), the project sponsor is responsible for replacing the changed or converted interests in real property, structures, or facilities with interests, structures, or facilities of equivalent size, value, and utility.

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 director or board. If a compliance issue arises, RCO staff works with sponsors to resolve the issue. Unresolved, identified issues could result in restrictions on applying for or receiving future grants.

Deed of Right

RCO requires a Deed of Right to be recorded on each parcel acquired with RCO funding assistance. The Deed of Right grants to the State of Washington the right of public access, and grants to RCO the right to inspect the property, to enforce the terms of the grant agreement, and protect the property for the primary purpose of the grant funding. For an example see [Manual 3: Acquisition Projects](#), pg. 84

Inspections

RCO staff is responsible for implementing the compliance policy. RCO has a policy to inspect completed projects to compare actual conditions to the terms and conditions of the project agreement. An inspection may be done at any time during the life of an RCO funded project. Inspection will result in a determination of compliance, non-compliance, or conversion.

RCO encourages sponsors to regularly inspect their projects and to advise RCO if potential compliance issues exist. For more information see RCO [Manual 7: Long Term Obligations](#), pg. 9

Stewardship monitoring and reporting

A community forest monitoring report must be submitted to RCO at least once every 5 years. The report must include a description of resource management that occurred within the last five years including harvest, stewardship, development or restoration activities; any anticipated changes to the operation or management of the community forest; and any natural or unplanned human alterations to the land. The report may be the same report developed or used for other funding sources such as the USFS Community Forest Program. For more information, see [Manual 3: Acquisitions](#), pg. 70

Permitted and Prohibited Uses

Property acquired for a community forest must be managed according to the sponsor's Community Forest Management Plan. Generally, communities have wide discretion in the use and management of the community forest so long as the property's forestland character is maintained. Some incidental, non-forestry related uses of the property are allowed that do not significantly reduce or alter the forestland of the property at the time of acquisition.

Permitted Uses of Community Forests (not limited to):

- *Timber Harvest and forest management*
- *Harvest of non-timber forest products*
- *Public hunting, gathering, and other subsistence activities*
- *Managed grazing compatible with forestlands*
- *Development of recreational and educational facilities*
- *Transferring development rights; leasing water rights*
- *Payments for ecosystem services*
- *Limited utilities that do not compromise forest land classification*



Prohibited Uses of Community Forests:

- *Residential development*
- *Commercial mining or mineral extraction³ (except as it supports the community forest management and operations – i.e. small gravel borrow pits for roads, trails, etc.)*
- *Permanently selling or severing water or mineral rights*
- *Activity that significantly reduces or alters the percent of forested land on the property*

Use of Income

his policy has been adopted from the RCO's standard Income Use policy in [Manual 7](#), p. 7. (WAC [286-13-110](#)) *It is revised specifically for the community forests program.*

Regardless of whether income or fees in a project work site (including entrance, utility corridor permit, cattle grazing, timber harvesting, farming, etc.) are gained during or after the reimbursement period cited in the agreement, unless precluded by state or federal law, the revenue must first be used to offset:

- The expense of operation, maintenance, stewardship, monitoring, or repair of the Community Forest assisted by the funding board grant.
- The expense of operation, maintenance, stewardship, monitoring, or repair of other community forest properties in the sponsor's system.

If the income exceeds the system's operation, maintenance, or monitoring costs, it must be used to further the public benefits identified in the sponsor's community forest plan. Expenses may include current and future operational costs, establishing a reserve or endowment for future management and operational costs, or payment of debt incurred to cover expenses the forest is not yet able to fund. Such debt may not be secured by a lien on the grant-funded property.

Accounting Assurances

The sponsoring organization must maintain financial oversight of the community forest regardless of community engagement, governance and decision-making structure. Transferring property and financial oversight responsibilities to another eligible sponsor is allowed upon approval by RCO.

All project sponsors must follow and comply with generally accepted accounting principles, financial reporting, and audit requirements for their organizational structure. Sponsors must ensure accounting practices for community forests allow for the tracking of revenues and disbursements to ensure funds will be used to further the public benefits identified in the community forest plan. For the first five years after establishment of a new community forest, and once every five years thereafter, sponsors must submit to RCO a copy of the annual financial report for the community forest which includes an accounting of all income, expenditures and transfers of revenue from the community forest during that reporting period.

³ See disclaimer on exercise of mineral rights by a third-party, pg. 9



Other Considerations

Administrative Rule Exceptions

The following Recreation and Conservation Office administrative rules do not apply to the Community Forests Program:

[286-13-040](#) Grant Deadlines

[286-13-045](#) Matching Resources⁴

[286-13-110](#) Income, Income Use⁵

Policy Addendums for the first grant cycle

Application Deadlines

For the first grant cycle, because of the compressed timeline for the application and review period, the following application deadlines are extended. Applicants must satisfy these requirements prior to RCO issuing a project agreement.

- Executed agreement between state agencies and local entities to fulfill the “working directly” policy requirement.
- Request for Waiver of Retroactivity for property currently held by an eligible applicant.
- Satisfying the Local Jurisdiction Review requirement.

Property already owned by an eligible project applicant

Since applicants did not have the benefit of requesting a Waiver of Retroactivity prior to the budget proviso directing RCO to develop the Community Forests Program, RCO may issue a waiver of retroactivity on property already owned by an applicant. This would “grandfather” in properties previously acquired for inclusion in a community forest and allow them to be eligible for grant funding. The director has the authority to issue a waiver of retroactivity on property purchased for a community forest or for conservation easements acquired to satisfy the match requirement within the last four years. The property would then remain eligible for funding in the next two grant cycles.

Project Evaluation

Evaluation process

The project proposals will be evaluated by the Community Forest Advisory Committee using materials submitted through PRISM, and written responses to the detailed evaluation questions. Applicants must provide a map and photos of the project location and responses to the detailed evaluation questions. The map, photos, a project summary, including budget and timeline, and the responses to the evaluation questions will be provided to the committee during the project review period and used to score the projects. Individual evaluator scores to these criteria will be compiled and a project’s averaged score is used to create the ranked project list. The ranked list will be provided to the RCFB and the legislature. Scoring is by confidential ballot.

The director provides the preliminary ranked list to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to review. RCO then submits the ranked list to the Governor and Legislature as part of RCO’s budget request. After the Legislature authorizes funding, RCO awards grants to the projects in ranked order.

⁴ Administrative rule was used as the basis for policy specifically developed for the Community Forests Program, see pg. 10.

⁵ Administrative rule was used as the basis for policy specifically developed for the Community Forests Program, see pg. 12.



Evaluation criteria

Community Forest Program Evaluation Criteria			
All criteria scored by the Advisory Committee			
Topic	Elements	Project Type	Maximum Score
1. Forestland Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest resources • Property features • Landscape context • Threat 	All Projects	15
2. Public Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic benefit • Recreational and cultural benefits • Environmental benefits • Income use 	All Projects	15
3. Stewardship and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation and management • Future development and restoration • Risk assessment • Organizational experience 	Acquisition Projects	15
		Combination Projects	12
4. Development and Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development or restoration goals • Budget and timeline • Risks 	Combination Projects	3
5. Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement process • Governance structure • Organizational capacity • Support and partnerships 	All Projects	15
Maximum Possible Score			60

Detailed Evaluation Questions

1. Forestland Benefits – 15 points

What are the specific forestland values this project will protect? Please describe in detail the characteristics of the property to be acquired, current land uses, zoning and land use restrictions, how much of the property is forested, and whether any property rights were previously severed or will be reserved by the seller. Include all the following in your description:

- A summary of the timber and non-timber forest resources on the property, their condition, and the potential of the property to support future forests.
- A summary of other features of the property such as wetlands, streams, buildings, roads, and other notable natural or manufactured elements and their condition.
- A summary of the landscape surrounding the project area including non-forest land uses and connectivity to other working forestlands, protected habitat lands, or public recreation opportunities.
- A summary of the threat the property faces of being fragmented or converted to uses other than forestland and why this project should be prioritized at this time.



2. Public Benefits – 15 points

How will the community forest be developed or maintained to provide public recreational, educational, cultural, environmental and economic opportunities? Please provide a socioeconomic description⁶ of the community that will primarily benefit from the community forest and describe:

- How the project area will provide economic benefits including anticipated financial returns (and timing), job creation, and how the project area will support infrastructure critical to the forest products industry, tourism, and other public services.
- How the public will experience the project area including opportunities for recreation, hunting and gathering, environmental education, and cultural enrichment.
- The project's anticipated environmental benefits including how the project area will benefit ecosystem services, water quality, and other sensitive natural resources, or how it supports the goals of a state or local climate action plan or wildlife habitat plan.
- How any income that exceeds the costs of on-going operation and management of the community forest will be redistributed to benefit the public.

3. Stewardship and Management – 15 points (12 points for combination projects)

What are the primary anticipated management objectives for the community forest and how will they likely be funded and achieved? Please include an assessment of:

- The ongoing stewardship, operation and maintenance needs on the property, the associated costs, and anticipated funding sources.
- Future anticipated restoration or development needs including forest health treatments, upgrades to fish passage and other infrastructure, forest road improvements, and any other development to facilitate public access, and how these activities will be funded.
- The risks to achieving the stated uses or management objectives. Risks may be posed by changing economic conditions, land use planning and development, increases in public use, fire, insect infestation or other changing environmental or climate conditions.
- The expertise and capacity of the applicant's organization for long-term management of the site including staff, volunteer, and financial resources, and any other relevant factors.

4. Development and Restoration – 3 points (scored for combination projects only)

What are your plans for development and/or restoration activities on the property acquired? Include in your description details about:

- The development and/or restoration project goals
- A budget narrative and timeline
- Anticipated risks to achieving the project goals
- How the development and/or restoration activities will support the forest's economic and community benefits

5. Community Engagement and Support – 15 points

What was the community engagement process used in the development of this project and how will the community continue to participate in future decisions on the management and use of forest resources? In the response please describe:

⁶ Applicants may use RCOs [Grant Application Data Tool](#) as a starting reference point for describing the community socioeconomic conditions.



- How residents, elected officials, tribal governments, and community organizations were engaged, and how their input was incorporated in developing the project.
- Strategies used to seek input from segments of the population that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented in land use management decision making.
- The anticipated governance structure of the community forest and who will have final decision-making authority over the community forest management.
- The capacity and experience within the applicant’s organization that will be dedicated to facilitating continued, long-term governance and community engagement activities.
- Community support or partnership commitments you have secured for this project.

DRAFT

