Request for Proposals
For Community Based Habitat Restoration Projects in the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership Region

RFP RELEASED: November 8, 2004

PROPOSAL DUE: Close of Business February 11, 2005

Please submit applications **via email** when possible to:

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INTRODUCTION

The Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership (Estuary Partnership) has been awarded a National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) Community-based Habitat Restoration Regional Partnership grant to increase the funds available under its habitat restoration grants program. NOAA's grant is the start of a new three-year national cooperative agreement between the Estuary Partnership and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Restoration Center. ***In a unique joint venture, the Estuary Partnership is making restoration funds available to projects developed within the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership's (TEP) study area, which includes Tillamook County's five major estuaries and their associated watersheds.*** Both designated National Estuary Projects, the Estuary Partnership and TEP seek to enhance and protect the Columbia and Tillamook Bay estuaries, respectively.

Projects within the Estuary Partnership and TEP study areas are eligible to compete for grants to restore or enhance estuarine, marine, and anadromous species and the habitats which sustain them. The objective of the Estuary Partnership and NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is to bring together citizens, public and non-profit organizations, watershed groups, industry, corporations and businesses, youth conservation corps, students, landowners, and local government, state, and federal agencies to implement habitat restoration projects to benefit NOAA trust resources (anadromous, estuarine, and marine species and their habitats). This program recognizes the significant role that partnerships can play in making habitat restoration happen within communities, and acknowledges that habitat restoration is often best implemented through technical and monetary support provided at a community level. (For more information http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/)

FOCUS AREAS – TILLAMOOK ESTUARIES PARTNERSHIP

The TEP concentrates on four "priority problems." Applications submitted under this RFP will address any or all of these problems, which are defined in the *Tillamook Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* as the following:

- Loss of key habitats
- Degradation of water quality
- Sedimentation of Tillamook County estuaries and their tributaries, and
- Negative impacts of flooding

Subject to requirements presented throughout this RFP, any projects which address the four priority problems above are eligible for funding. *Within these broad approaches, proposals supporting two focus areas will receive particular consideration: 1) projects that restore or enhance tidal wetlands, and 2) projects that improve water quality in the Tillamook River.*

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

Projects under this RFP must be located in the National Estuary Program boundary of the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership. This area includes Tillamook County's five major estuaries and their associated watersheds.

In addition to meeting technical criteria, organizations receiving funds must be positioned to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in disbursement of the Estuary Partnership funds. Specific non-technical criteria include:

Organizational Capacity: The organization receiving funds from the Estuary Partnership must provide evidence of their administrative and managerial capacity to administer grant funds and meet project objectives.

Demonstration of Collaborative Effort: Developing partnerships among communities, organizations, individuals and agencies is a critical element to long term estuary restoration success. Projects that are supported by more than one entity will be ranked higher during the Estuary Partnership project review process.

Percentage of Total Project Funds Secured: The Estuary Partnership will place a priority on funding projects that otherwise meet all criteria when other funds are being contributed in addition to required match.

FUNDING

The total amount of funds available is $330,000 for this year, and proposals between $25,000 and $150,000 will be considered. The project period can be up to 24 months. At least one project will be located within the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership study area and one in the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership study area.

Community-based Habitat Restoration project expenses are reimbursable. Payment will be made to contractors when they invoice the Estuary Partnership for work completed. Payment schedules are determined in the contractor's scope of work written after the project has been selected.

This will be a competitive review process. We are soliciting a wide array of proposed projects for community-based restoration of habitats. We always encourage applicants to note multiple benefits to many species, habitat, and ecosystems of any proposed project.

Match Requirements

The Estuary Partnership Habitat Restoration Fund provides seed money to individual restoration projects that benefit living marine resources. These funds are intended to help project sponsors leverage funds and other contributions from the public and private sector to implement locally significant projects. Applicants must provide a 1:1 match with non-federal funds. The project match can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include in-kind goods and services. ***Note however that neither Federal funds nor Federal funds passed through state agencies are eligible to be used as matching funds.***

Project Period

Projects must begin within six months of contract execution and completed by April 30, 2007. Awards are expected to be made in April, 2005.

TYPES OF HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECTS CONSIDERED UNDER THIS RFP

Projects considered under this RFP will address any or all of TEP's priority problems through the enhancement, restoration or protection of critical habitats and natural systems. These are defined as follows:

Habitat Enhancement. Habitat enhancement entails the improvement of a targeted ecological attribute and/or process. Several groups are implementing enhancement projects to improve different elements of the ecosystem including: riparian plantings and fencing; tide gate or culvert removal or replacement; invasive species removal; and stream bank stabilization.

Habitat Restoration. Restoration means the return to a previously existing ecological condition. This can involve more intense modification and manipulation of site conditions than enhancement. As a result, restoration projects typically require more careful planning, design, and maintenance than enhancement projects. Miles of habitat can be gained by reconnecting tidal channels that have been cut off by tidewaters, dike construction, and placement of fill material for land-use activities.

Habitat Protection. Habitat protection projects can involve a variety of approaches. One option is to invoke land use regulations in the form of zoning designation and/or protection ordinances, such as defined riparian setbacks and designation of critical areas. Land use regulations that can be applied are included in comprehensive plans, shoreline management master programs, floodplain management plans, and coastal zone management plans. ***note:** *Land/easement acquisitions are **not** eligible for these contracts. Funds from this program are intended for on-the-ground restoration – most habitat protection measures would need to be completed prior to an award of NOAA funds.*

Priority Restoration Activities

Activities like those above are the cornerstone of the CCMP, and applications submitted under this RFP must fall into at least one of these categories. Through its Environmental Restoration Program, TEP has raised millions of dollars to acquire almost 400 acres to restore the function of tidal and freshwater wetlands; implement a riparian enhancement program on rural residential properties; and undertake an aggressive effort to prioritize and replace failing culverts that impede the migration of anadromous salmonids. Projects considered under this RFP will undertake similar activities and further TEP's successful Restoration Program.

Estuary restoration activities that will be considered for funding include restoration of estuarine, tidal and diked slough habitats, dendritic drainage networks, and diked and tidal wetland habitats through:

- Breaching or removing levees
- Improving wetlands and nearshore aquatic plant communities in tidal areas
- Reestablishing flow patterns that have been altered by causeways, pile dikes, and tide gates
- Restoring shallow channels in inter-tidal areas
- Restoring and enhancing connections between lakes, sloughs, side channels, the floodplain, and the main channel
- Removing "derelict" fishing gear or marine debris

Grants can be awarded to contractors, agencies, organizations, and individuals that propose to implement CCMP projects of the types listed above within the Tillamook Study Area. Design and engineering activities are eligible for grant funding if required for project implementation.

Restoration Funding Priorities

The Tillamook Bay Comprehensive and Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) identifies four priority problems, which the TEP is responsible for addressing. These include the loss of key habitats (particularly for salmonids), the degradation of surface water quality, sedimentation of Tillamook County estuaries and their tributaries, and the negative impacts of flooding. Within these broadly-stated priority problems, TEP is placing particular focus on two areas of concern within its study area:

- **The loss of tidal wetlands**. Since European settlement, roughly 85% of Tillamook Bay's inter-tidal wetland habitats have been lost due to diking, draining, and filling to accommodate agriculture and urban development. The loss of inter-tidal wetlands has significantly impacted fish and wildlife habitats, while limiting water quality and increasing the potential for catastrophic flood events. Proposals seeking to restore and enhance inter-tidal wetlands are encouraged for submittal.
- **Water quality in the Tillamook River.** The TEP volunteer water quality monitoring program has revealed that the Tillamook River consistently exhibits the highest concentrations of bacteria within TEP's study area. In 2002, TEP *initiated Tillamook River Solutions* to identify on-the-ground projects and other activities to improve the Tillamook's water quality. Proposals seeking to undertake projects that address water quality in the Tillamook River are encouraged for submittal.

Elements of Successful Project Proposals

Appropriate projects meeting the minimum requirements shown above (project location, match, and type) are encouraged to submit a proposal. Prior to proposal submittal, potential applicants are encouraged to contact TEP staff to discuss the project (503-322-2222). Successful project proposals will demonstrate, at a minimum, the following:

- Full alignment with Tillamook Estuaries Partnership *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan*.
- Tangible restoration of specific resources, including anadramous and marine species and their habitats. Proposals should address at a minimum reversing the impacts of habitat loss, degraded water quality, sedimentation, and/or flooding.
- Project provides benefits to multiple marine species or habitats; benefits are not limited to anadromous fish. Potential target species include: Anadromous fish, coastal pelagic fish (including sardines, anchovies, etc.) groundfish and rockfish, shellfish, and marine mammals. Potential target habitats may include: Salt marshes, tidal flats, wetlands; submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), including eelgrass and kelp; oyster, crab and other shellfish habitat; and estuaries and rivers
- Significant community engagement and support for the project.
- Realistic and clear project goals and objectives.
- A clear work plan, which describes the tasks to be accomplished and the time frame. Projects involving collaboration between stakeholders and agencies will be given preference over single-party projects.
- 1:1 non-federal match. Match beyond the minimum 1:1 is highly desirable. Cash match is encouraged, but up to 100% in-kind match is acceptable.
- A method for evaluating the immediate and long-term effects of the project including short and long-term measures of success.

CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING & PRIORITIZING HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION PROJECTS (Full description of all criteria available from the Estuary Partnership.)

Ecosystem Criteria

a. Habitat Connectivity
b. Areas of Historic Habitat Type Loss
c. Improvement in Ecosystem Function
d. Adequate Size and Shape
e. Level of Complexity
f. Accessibility For Target Species
   - Is the project area Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as identified by NOAA Fisheries, or areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
   - Is the project area identified as critical habitat for federally or state listed estuarine and marine species
   - Is the project area identified as important habitat for marine mammals and turtles
   - Is the project area identified as important nursery habitat

Implementation Criteria

a. Use Natural Processes to Restore and Maintain Structure over Habitat Creation
b. Community Support and Participation
c. Potential for Self Maintenance and Certainty of Success
d. Potential for Improvement in Ecosystem Function While Avoiding Impacts to Healthy and Functioning Ecosystems
e. Avoid Sites Where Irreversible Change Has Occurred
f. Capacity of Sponsor/Partnership
g. Project Context within Broader Management and Planning Objectives

Monitoring Criteria*

a. Monitoring and Evaluation with Relationship to Stated Goals and Objectives
b. Linkages to Reference Site(s)
c. Transferability of Results

*The Estuary Partnership and NOAA will work together with the project sponsors to determine monitoring parameters and performance targets for successful applicants based on the NOAA Restoration Center Minimum Monitoring Requirements:

Before the project begins:

1. Develop at least one clearly stated goal (i.e., large scale, idealistic, long-term)
2. Develop at least two objective statements related to the project goal; one each for *structural* and *functional* elements of the project (i.e., realistic, measurable)
3. Select one parameter to be evaluated (i.e., thing to be measured) for each objective statement
4. Define a target value for each parameter (i.e., a realistic value that represents success for the defined objective)
5. Define a reference value for each parameter (i.e., a value that represents ideal conditions)

To conduct the project evaluation:

1. Measure each selected parameter as often as necessary to meet the intent of the objective, including one sampling date before the beginning of the project work
2. For each sampling date (minimum of one in addition to the pre-project sampling), indicate whether the target value was reached for each measured parameter

For more information see: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/partners_funding/project_reports)

Scoring Criteria for Proposals in the TEP Study Area:
Grants will be awarded based on a competitive process, and a wide array of projects for community-based restoration of habitats will be presented. Proposals will be evaluated and compared to those received in both the Tillamook and Lower Columbia NEP study areas. Applicants are encouraged to note multiple benefits to many species, habitat, and ecosystems of any proposed project:
Projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Consistency with the *Tillamook Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* and extent to which project benefits TEP's three focus areas (Consistency with North Coast Basin TMDL and North Coast Basin Agricultural Water Quality Area Management (SB 1010) Plan will also be considered);
- Extent to which project benefits critical aquatic and terrestrial habitats and the marine resources that depend on them over the long-term;
- Technical merit and project feasibility, including whether NEPA, ESA, or other regulatory compliance issues may reasonably be raised, and how likely they are to be expeditiously resolved to allow project implementation to begin shortly after receipt of funding;
- Project readiness to proceed;
- Budget justification, detail, and cost-effectiveness including local match; and
- Adequacy of monitoring and evaluation techniques and consistency with NOAA Restoration Center Principal Evaluation Requirements : (http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/partners_funding/ProjectEvaluation.pdf)

Preference will be given to projects benefiting:

- inter-tidal wetland habitats;
- water quality on the Tillamook River, and
- Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as identified by NOAA Fisheries, and areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

Compliance with Federal Laws: Applicant's Permit Requirements
Applicants must provide where relevant a list and status (obtained, application filed, when anticipate obtaining approval, or have not applied) of all necessary federal, state, tribal and local permits required to complete the project and the appropriate regulatory agency contact (name, title, phone) for each permitting agency. The Estuary Partnership will require copies of permit and compliance documentation once the documentation is secured.

Contractors will be required to satisfy all financial and programmatic requirements and meet all local, state and tribal environmental laws and Federal consistency requirements before project implementation.

National Environmental Policy Act Requirements. All proposals will be reviewed for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance by NOAA Fisheries. All projects must comply with NEPA. For more information on NEPA, please visit NOAA's website at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov.

Applicants will be required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, the presence of historic structures, and impacts to coral reef systems) in order for NOAA to make a NEPA determination on each proposal.

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required (if one does not already exist for the proposed activity). Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Application materials are available from the Estuary Partnership and must be used when submitting an application for funding. The completed application will include:

1. Background and Project Description (not to exceed 2 pgs)
2. Project Narrative (not to exceed 6 pgs)
3. Project Budget
4. Three examples of relevant work which should include a description of the type of work performed and relevance to this solicitation.

Materials should be developed single spaced, with no less than one inch margins and 11 point font.

Project Evaluation and Selection

The Estuary Partnership Science Work Group working with the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership staff and NOAA staff will review projects for their technical merit and to ensure that all technical aspects of the application process have been met. The project review team will make final recommendations to the Estuary Partnership staff.

Administrative and Reporting Requirements

Upon award notification, projects will be informed as to financial and programmatic reporting requirements. Progress reports will be filed according to NOAA Electronic Report Format Form: **www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/partners_funding/project_reports.** This information will assist the Estuary Partnership in meeting Federal guidelines for reporting expenses and project status on a semi-annual basis.

After the selection process and before work begins, the selected contractors will work with Estuary Partnership staff to create a Statement of Work that includes a payment schedule, description of tasks, outlined deliverables and itemized budgets.

Contractors are also required to have a safety plan in place for any volunteers working on the project (e.g. liability waivers).