

Fiscal Year 2020
Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Process
National Guidance
Approved May 29, 2019

Introduction

The delivery of State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs assumes that our collective efforts are most effective when available resources are focused on priority issues and landscapes.

Beginning in FY08, a percentage of the S&PF allocation was invested in projects selected through a competitive process. This process has been administered through a joint effort between state forestry agencies, regional State Forester organizations and USFS leadership in the East, South and West. Each regional State Forester organization (CWSF, NMSFA, SGSF), designed their competitive process to address geographically significant issues and landscapes, as well as the broad themes and direction provided at the national level.

The LSR budget line item was included in the FY14 appropriations bill. Congress approved LSR as the funding mechanism for a competitive process based on the tenants of the S&PF Redesign and focused on the priorities identified in Forest Action Plans. In the past, the funds available for the competitive resource allocation process were constrained by the original Budget Line Item (BLI) authorities and funding levels. With the passage of LSR, the identified sources of funding (SP&F BLI's) are no longer an issue for the competitive resource allocation funds. A portion of the LSR funds will continue to be split among the three state forester regions, 'competed' for via regionally-decided processes and can use all S&PF existing authorities as the foundation.

The 2018 Farm Bill (Section 8102) codifies the State and Private Forestry Landscape Scale Restoration Program and provides direction including eligibility, criteria, and establishment. In response the Forest Service is pursuing administrative changes to the program to implement the changes identified in the Farm Bill. The Fiscal year (FY) 2020 grant cycle is considered a transition year for the Program with full execution of the 2018 Farm Bill beginning with the FY 2021 grant cycle.

Starting in the FY20 cycle, projects should focus on rural forest land which is also considered nonindustrial private forest land¹ or State forest land². For the purposes of this program, rural means any area other than an urbanized area such as a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants ((7 USC 1991(a)(13) Consolidated Farm

¹ The term nonindustrial private forest land means land that (A) is rural, as determined by the Secretary; (B) has existing tree cover or is suitable for growing trees; and (C) is owned by any private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian Tribe, or other private legal entity. (2018 Farm Bill).

² The term State forest land means land that (A) is rural, as determined by the Secretary; and (B) is under State or local governmental ownership and considered to be non-Federal forest land. (2018 Farm Bill)

and Rural Development Act). According to the US Census Bureau, using this definition means that 97 percent of the country's land mass is considered rural³.

FY 2020 Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Process

The regional competitions must be based on this national guidance. The geographic regions are responsible for the establishment of interagency LSR Competitive Allocation Teams and have the flexibility to design and implement a competitive process based on national guidance and regionally specific criteria. The interagency teams in each geographic region will review project proposals and recommend projects for funding to the USFS. Competitive teams are encouraged to diversify their interagency teams to include other governmental entities such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The projects will be reviewed and approved by the leadership in the geographic region. Implementation of approved projects can extend 1-3 years.

USFS Regions and States will work together evaluating LSR Competitive Allocation proposals. USFS Regions and States should coordinate multi-state and cross-regional collaborative opportunities, while ensuring locally-focused cross-boundary projects address program purpose and criteria from the Farm Bill. State and territorial forestry agencies are eligible to submit project proposals.

Regionally recommended projects will be submitted to the USFS Washington Office by December 31 of each year.

When the USFS receives its final appropriation from Congress, the Deputy Chief for S&PF will notify the State Forester regional organizations regarding their final competitive allocation and request their list of approved projects to be funded. The Deputy Chief will allocate the requisite funding to the corresponding USFS Regional Office for grant execution.

Matching requirements for funds awarded through the competitive process may be met through consolidated payments. Cash and in-kind contributions for project elements that do not fall within S&PF program authorities included in the LSR Competitive Allocation may not be used as match. Other "non-match" leveraged funds do not need to meet the same standards (e.g., may include funds for construction, funds from other federal partners). These leveraged funds are important to track and often are the source of a project's success.

Cash and in-kind contributions from other federal sources may not be used as match. The LSR Competitive Allocation grant awards do require a 1:1 match from the grant recipient or a 1:1 match on funds received in excess of \$200,000 for territorial and flag islands.

Identifying sources of leverage and match are important in demonstrating the value of these projects. Information on leverage will be required to be reported to the USFS each fiscal year.

³ United States Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-america.html>.

Examples of successful LSR Allocation projects can be requested from each geographic region LSR Competitive Allocation Team. Evaluating and recommending cross-regional collaborative projects for funding does not call for any new policies or authorities. The appropriate USFS Region is responsible for funding the portion of a cross-regional project involving a state(s) within that Region. As issues arise during the Competitive Grant Area evaluation, teams may make the necessary decisions to resolve them.

LSR Competitive Criteria

The competitive approach is intended to demonstrate that federal funds are being spent on projects that promote collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes, leverage public and private resources and that further priorities identified in each state's Forest Action Plan.

Successful projects are encouraged to be cross-boundary and include a combination of land ownerships. S&PF LSR funds will be spent on non-federal lands based on S&PF authorities. Cross-boundary may include any combination of ownerships including tribal, state and local government, and private. It does not require the inclusion of federal land however coordination with and proximity to other landscape-scale projects on federal or state lands⁴ is encouraged.

LSR projects should focus on priority landscapes which encompass a diversity of ownerships and is the appropriate scale to address the restoration objectives (e.g. water quality and watershed health improvement, wildfire risk reduction, fish and wildlife habitat improvement and rural prosperity) identified in the project.

Projects will be based on an analysis within the state or region that identifies the issue or landscape being addressed as a priority in the Forest Action Plans. In addition, the State may use Forest Stewardship Priority Areas and other state or regional assessments and plans, including those completed by other agencies or partners, to help identify priority issues or landscapes.

Successful projects must be focused on priority landscapes and/or issues identified in the respective State's Forest Action Plans and the regional LSR Competitive Allocation Teams should include this in their scoring process.

Projects funded should consider the following key concepts:

- Purpose Statement – Projects should effectively address the program's purpose statement which is to “*encourage collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes*” and will be consistent with S&PF authorities.
- Project Scale – The project scale shall be a function of the most appropriate size associated with the issue or landscape of priority importance.

⁴ Section (i) Coordination and Proximity Encouraged. – In making grants under this section, the Secretary may consider coordination with and proximity to other landscape-scale projects on other land under the jurisdiction of the Secretary, the Secretary of the Interior, or a Governor of a State including under --”

- Collaboration – Projects should identify partners that are actively engaged and add value towards project planning and implementation. Collaboration may be qualitative in nature, and the contribution of the partners may be more important than the number of partners involved in the projects.
- Outcomes – Projects are encouraged to prioritize funding and other resources towards one or more of the objectives identified below. Successful projects will, in many instances, address multiple objectives. Projects that display how this investment will lead to measurable outcomes on the landscape will be given *preference*.
 1. *Reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires;*
 2. *Improve fish and wildlife habitats, including for threatened and endangered species;*
 3. *Maintain or improve water quality and watershed function;*
 4. *Mitigate invasive species, insect infestation, and disease;*
 5. *Improve important forest ecosystems;*
 6. *Measure ecological and economic benefits including air quality and soil quality and productivity.*
- Integrated Delivery – Projects should seek to improve the delivery of public benefits from forest management by coordinating with complementary state and federal programs and partnership efforts when possible (e.g., Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, landscape areas designated for insect and disease treatments, Good Neighbor Authority, stewardship contracting projects and appropriate State-level programs). Regional evaluation criteria may consider projects that integrate outcomes.
- Leverage – Projects should maximize S&PF funding by using it to leverage contributions from both federal and non-federal entities. Project applications need to clearly identify LSR Competitive Allocation requested funds and associated non-federal contributions and separately document leveraged contributions.
- Influence Positive Change – Projects should describe and quantify outcomes. These landscape scale restoration projects may include a component of outreach, training, lessons learned or related opportunities such that implementation of the project results in skills and capability that extends beyond the life of the project itself.

Reporting and Accountability

All funded LSR Competitive Allocation projects will be required to provide annual accomplishment reporting through the Landscape Scale Restoration (LaSR) database. States are responsible for assuring that all required reporting is complete, correct, and entered into LaSR by the date established by the Regions. All data entries should be fully completed *no later than December 29 of each year*.

Modifications to Grants

Modifications to competitively-awarded grants (whether the project is an individual grant or part of a consolidated payment grant) should be handled between the signatories of the grants (i.e., the State Forester and the USFS Regional Office in question).

Geographic Region Requirements:

In order to ensure the LSR Competitive Allocation process is transparent and fair, the geographic regions shall implement the following measures:

1. The LSR Competitive Allocation Teams will:
 - a. consist of an equal number of Forest Service and State representatives with diverse skills,
 - b. develop a process to ensure consistency in proposal evaluation,
 - c. identify rotation and duration of terms for team members,
 - d. address possible conflict of interest (such as having each State representative not score his/her own projects), and
 - e. ensure projects are consistent with S&PF authorities.
2. Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) that includes:
 - a. an overview of the review process,
 - b. composition of the review team,
 - c. scoring guidance- which requires an explicit tie to Forest Action Plan identified priorities, focuses on outcomes as well as regional strategic objectives, and provides weights for each selection criteria,
 - d. a standard proposal template, and
 - e. for those Geographic Regions that require States to rank proposals, the RFP shall provide information explaining how the rankings will be applied during the competitive process.
3. Each geographic region shall designate a point of contact to answer questions and concerns, as well as share and coordinate information to ensure consistency and clarity.
4. The State Forester regional organizations shall coordinate when evaluating cross-regional issues and projects, and will submit cross-regional projects to one geographic region, rather than submit them separately to each geographic region. These projects should be prioritized by the LSR Competitive Allocation Teams. State Forester regional organizations shall collaborate during the respective evaluation process for multi-region proposals and the USFS Regions will work with the State Forester regional organizations to ensure cross-regional issues and projects are able to be funded if successful in the completion.
5. Multi-year projects should be fully funded in one year. If not possible, each subsequent phase will need to compete on its own.