

FY 2017 Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Process National Guidance

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Introduction

The delivery of State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs assumes that our collective efforts are most effective when available resources are focused on issues and landscapes of national importance. The Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Process (LSRC) prioritized landscapes of national importance, using the Forest Action Plans and the national themes (specifically the National Themes/Priorities identified in the Farm Bill consistent with P.L. 110 234 Section 8007) to focus competitive Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) budget line item funds on priority areas, challenges and opportunities.

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 the state forestry and USFS leadership in the Northeast, South and West. Each geographic region (NE, S, W), based on the regional State Forester organizations, 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. In FY16, a portion of the LSR funds will be split between the three state forester regions, 'competed' for via regionally-decided processes and can use all S&PF existing authorities as the foundation.

It is important to note that the LSR Competitive Processes for FY14 and FY15 were interim as the State & Private Forestry Board worked to finalize performance measures to ensure that the tenants of Redesign and LSR are met, with the ultimate goal of creating a final LSR competition that addresses priorities in Forest Action Plans by funding the best cross-boundary, landscape-scale projects that are innovative, meet priority needs, and are outcome driven. Performance measure work will be continuing into FY17 so final performance measures may be incorporated into the FY18 guidance.

FY 2016 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 for the design and implementation of 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. The projects shall be reviewed and approved by the leadership in the geographic region.

The LSR Competitive Allocation process shall operate in such a timeline that the recommended projects are 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/Area Office for grant execution.

Matching requirements for dollars awarded through the competitive allocation process may be met through consolidation as currently handled through consolidated payment grants (CPG). 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.

LSR Competitive Criteria

The competitive approach is intended to demonstrate that federal funds are being spent on projects that address priorities, as described by the National Themes and identified in each state’s Forest Action Plans.

Projects should be cross-boundary, on any combination of land ownerships, although S&PF LSR funds should be spent on non-federal lands, as appropriate based on S&PF authorities. Implementation may extend from 1-3 years. USFS Regions/Area and States shall work together when identifying and evaluating possible LSR Competitive Allocation proposals. USFS Regions/Area and States should coordinate multi-state and cross-regional collaborative opportunities, while ensuring locally-focused cross-boundary projects address the National Themes in identified priority areas. State and territorial forestry agencies are eligible to submit project proposals.

The LSR Competitive Allocation projects should include a focus on priority landscapes and cross-boundary projects should be encouraged in the regional competitions. Cross-

boundary” is meant to be defined broadly. It could include any combination of boundaries – multiple private landowners; private and State landowners; State and local landowners; multiple local landowners; State and Federal landowners; State and State landowners; State and Tribal landowners; as well as projects that cross types of lands – rural/urban for example. It does not **require** the inclusion of federal lands.

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/Area is responsible for funding the portion of a cross-regional project involving a state(s) within that Region/Area. As issues arise during the Competitive Grant Area evaluation, teams may make the necessary decisions to resolve them.

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 Spatial Analysis Project assessments and other state or regional assessments and plans, including those completed by other agencies or partners, to help identify priority issues or landscapes.

The 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 purpose statement which is to “*shape and influence forest land use on a scale and in a way that optimizes public benefits from trees and forests for both current and future generations*” and will be consistent with S&PF authorities.
- National Relevance – Projects should be focused on issues or landscapes of national importance as identified by the National Themes, and addressed within the state’s Forest Action Plan.
- Project Scale – The project scale shall be a function of the most appropriate size associated with the issue or landscape of priority importance.
- Collaboration – Projects should identify partners that have demonstrated a commitment 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 should prioritize funding and other resources toward the achievement of national themes identified below. Projects that display how

this investment will lead to a specific, quantifiable, cost effective, replicable benefit in one or more of the outcomes below will be given preference.

Conserving and Managing Working Forest Landscapes

Protect Forests from Threats

Enhance Public Benefits from Private Forests

- 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. 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. They should 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

Performance measures are essential to demonstrating outcomes and to communicating the results of federal investments. The State & Private Forestry Board of Directors concluded that there should be **one core set** of measures that relate to the National Themes and Objectives to tell the story of **all SPF work** at a national level. While these measures have been approved for use, not all are currently being implemented. Reporting for the “New Measures” will not begin until additional work is completed. States and the FS will continue to report on “Current Measures” as is currently required. The framework also includes “Pilot Measures.” These measures will be phased in over time as data becomes available.

All funded LSR Competitive Allocation projects will be required to provide spatial data through the LaSR system. Reports will be requested of the States by the Forest Service in mid-January 2017, and each January through the end of the project.

Modifications to Grants

Modifications to competitively-awarded grants (whether the project is an individual grant or part of a CPG) 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. help 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, focused on the National Themes, Objectives, and Outcomes, as well as regional strategic objectives, and 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/Area 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.