

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Commodity Credit Corporation
Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Jersey Wildlife Habitat Partnership Contracts Fiscal Year 2007

SUMMARY: NRCS is requesting applications for Partnership Contracts (PC) under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) in New Jersey to stimulate cooperative partnerships that create or enhance habitat for target species and habitat types. Partnership Contracts can provide up to 50% of the eligible and reasonable costs for the implementation of qualified wildlife habitat on non-federal lands. Applications are accepted for projects located in New Jersey only. Applicants must comply with all WHIP program rules and eligibility requirements. For FY 2007, we anticipate up to \$750,000 will be available for the NJ-WHIP-PC program. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive process.

There are four funding areas available in FY 2007: Early Successional Habitats, which includes pollinator species habitat and grassland bird habitat; Wetlands, which includes coastal mud flats and wetland forests; Disturbance Dependent Habitats, which include fire-dependent forests and scrub/shrub habitats; and Bog turtle habitats.

Applications for these five-year contracts are requested from eligible government or non-government organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of awards. All contracted work must be completed within the first four years; all practices implemented must be maintained for their practice lifespan. Annual reviews will be made by NRCS throughout the life of the contract. Additional eligibility criteria for projects and associated instructions needed to apply are below.

PROPOSAL DUE DATE AND ADDRESSES: Proposals must be received in the NRCS NJ state office by 3 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on December 22, 2006. The address for hand-delivered applications or applications submitted using regular mail, express mail or overnight courier service is: WHIP Partnership Contracts; c/o Gail Bartok, Acting ASTC-P; Natural Resources Conservation Service; 220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor; Somerset, NJ 08873.

Applications may not be submitted electronically.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) [16 U.S.C. 3836a, 7CFR Part 636 (CFDA 10.914)] is authorized under Section 387 of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 and was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171). Through Partnership Contracts, the Secretary of Agriculture may share in the cost of projects that serve a mutual interest of the parties in carrying out NRCS programs, with both parties contributing resources to carry out the program activity. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of WHIP to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is vice president of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The Chief in turn delegated authority for each state to the State Conservationist for the administration of individual contracts and agreements.

B. Overview

Under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for creating, enhancing and maintaining wildlife habitat on non-federal lands. The State WHIP plan identifies priority wildlife habitat categories. The purpose of NJ's WHIP Partnership Contracts is to stimulate interest and focus projects on these wildlife categories, leverage Federal investment in wildlife habitat enhancement and protection, and build cooperative partnerships to further conservation goals.

NJ-NRCS will accept applications for projects from eligible entities, including Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals, for projects benefiting or located on lands in New Jersey. Successful applicants will receive up to 50% of the eligible and reasonable costs of a qualified project through the Partnership Contract.

New Jersey WHIP Partnership Contract projects are expected to provide increased public awareness and concern for threatened, endangered and at-risk species, while helping to increase the populations of these species. Applications are solicited for the full range of wildlife concerns detailed in this notice.

Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive process. Proposals will be scored based on the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified in this notice, and awards made based on available funds and project score.

C. Funding Priorities

NJ selected four wildlife concerns for potential funding through WHIP Contract Agreements for fiscal year 2006:

(1) Early Successional Habitat

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for a variety of native pollinators and/or ground nesting birds that are declining in population due to habitat loss. Typically this involves seeding native grasses and forbs and maintaining the areas with appropriate mowing techniques. Applications that create suitable habitat in more than one location or with more than one landowner will be considered for funding.

(2) Wetlands

The objective of this wildlife concern is to implement projects that restore or enhance wetland wildlife areas, including coastal marshes, vernal pools, saturated meadows, or forested wetlands. Restoration can include removal of invasive species and the establishment of native species. Existing saturated and previously drained meadows can be manipulated to provide depressions required by obligate vernal pool species for various parts of their life cycle.

(3) Disturbance Dependent Habitat

The objective of this wildlife concern is to provide for the management of declining wildlife species that are dependent on habitats that require occasional disturbance to be maintained, such as pitch pine forests that require fire or scrub/shrub areas that would naturally transition to woodland without management. Species such as American woodcock and Bobwhite quail fall into this category.

(4) Bog Turtle

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for the bog turtle, which is listed by New Jersey as a state endangered species and is also listed as a federally threatened species. Open herbaceous meadows having clear, slow moving streams with soft muddy bottoms serve as optimal habitat. Bog turtle habitat is degraded when the open herbaceous meadows succeed into young scrub/shrub or forested wetlands. Various types of woody vegetation management can be employed to maintain open herbaceous meadows.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Fund Availability

The CCC, through the NJ-NRCS WHIP program, will provide up to \$750,000 for WHIP Contract Agreements for fiscal year 2007 in New Jersey. Actual funding will be based on final program budget allocations.

B. Project Timing

Contracts are anticipated to be obligated by and work may commence on March 1, 2007. Project implementation should be completed by March 31, 2011. Contracts will run through March 31, 2012.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Organization or Individual Eligibility

A WHIP Partnership Contract applicant must be a Federally-recognized Indian Tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or individual. The applicant will be responsible to obtain binding agreements with landowners on whose property the project will occur to (1) authorize the applicant to implement the project work and (2) provide for required maintenance of the projects once installed. The applicant must provide a minimum of 50 percent of the total project implementation cost in non-federal funding. The applicant will be responsible for providing the technical

assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project unless a separate agreement for technical assistance funds has been requested and approved.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible, projects must involve land suitable for the habitat or species identified in the project description, be located in New Jersey, and be managed by WHIP eligible entities.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. How to Obtain Application Materials

All forms and materials needed to complete an application are posted on the following website: www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/partnership. Alternately, a request for this information can be made to the NJ-NRCS State Office at 220 Davidson Avenue -4th Floor, Somerset NJ 08873, (732) 537-6041 or by email to gail.bartok@nj.usda.gov.

B. Proposal Content and Format

Applications must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for funding. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applications must be submitted in the following format:

Applications are to be typewritten on 8½" x 11" white paper, double spaced, and on one side only. The text of the proposal must be typewritten in a font no smaller than 11-point, with one-inch margins.

Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described below; incomplete applications will not be considered. Information not requested will be discarded. If submitting proposals for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project.

1. Application Forms: Applicants must use Conservation Program Application form NRCS-CPA-1200 as the cover sheet for each project proposal. In addition, two other forms must be included in each application package; the Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (AD-1026), and the Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification (CCC-526). All forms are available at www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/partnership.

2. Project Abstract: Each proposal must contain a summary of not more than two pages that provides the following:

- a. Project title;
- b. Project duration (beginning and ending dates);
- c. Name, address, telephone, e-mail, and other contact information for the project director;
- d. Names and affiliations of project partners;
- e. Project objectives and wildlife concern(s) to be addressed;
- f. Summary of the work to be performed (number of sites and/or acreage involved);
- g. Total project cost; and,
- h. Total Federal funds requested.

3. Project Description: Each project must be completely and accurately described in no more than 6 typewritten, double-spaced pages, and include the following:

- a. Project background: Describe current habitat situation on the lands proposed for funding;
- b. Project objectives: Be specific, using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals;
- c. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project;
- d. Location and size of project or project area: Describe the location(s) of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, types, etc.) of the project area. Maps, if provided, can be in addition to the six (6) page project description;
- e. Project Plan of Work: Provide a table with the following columns of data: project action, timeframe, measurable milestone, and implementation cost.
- f. Project management: Provide information on how the project will be organized and managed. Include a brief list of key project personnel and their anticipated contributions to the project. Identify specifically who is authorized to sign financial reports, requests for payment, project updates, and who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project;
- g. Benefits or results expected: Identify the specific results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities in terms of the target priority area.
- h. Project evaluation: Describe how the project will be evaluated to quantify the results for the final report.

4. Certifications: All applications must be signed by an authorized representative of the applicant or organization. Proof of authorization should be included. If funded, applicant will be required to sign the Appendix to Form NRCS-CPA-1200 which spells out the contract guidelines and is available for viewing at www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/partnership.

C. Proposal Submission

Applicants must submit one signed original copy of each project application, accompanied by an electronic copy of the project description on a 3½-inch diskette or compact disc (CD). Electronic files must be Microsoft Word (doc), Microsoft Excel (xls), or Acrobat (pdf) files. Applications submitted via facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted.

Submit written proposals to:

NJ-WHIP Partnership Contracts
Assistant State Conservationist for Programs
NJ-Natural Resources Conservation Service
220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor
Somerset NJ 08873

D. Proposal Due Date

Proposals must be received in the NJ-NRCS State Office by 3 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on December 22, 2006. A proposal's postmark date is not a factor in whether an application is received on time. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in proposal delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

E. Acknowledgement of Submission

Receipt of all applications will be acknowledged by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate and legible e-mail addresses. If the applicant does not receive an acknowledgment within 60 days of the submission deadline, please contact the program manager.

F. Funding Restrictions

WHIP-PC funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the award;
- c. Costs incurred after the expiration date of the agreement (including any approved no-cost extensions of time).
- d. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
- e. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- f. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- g. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours; and,
- h. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the contact person above.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW

A. Proposal Review and Selection Process

Prior to technical review, each application will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications and those that do not meet the provisions of this notice will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be e-mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the provisions of this notice will be scored against the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation listed below. The Program Manager will certify the rankings and ensure that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Program Manager will make recommendations to the State Conservationist for final selection and funding decisions.

B. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

The following criteria will be used to evaluate project proposals. The weight of each criterion in the evaluation is listed in parentheses.

- a. Number of sites and/or acres of habitat developed (10%);

- b. Number of partners contributing financial support (10%);
- c. Applicant contribution to the total cost (20%);
- d. Project location on public, private, or private preserved land (10%);
- e. Likelihood of project success (10%);
- f. Public access (10%); and
- g. Importance of habitat development proposal to existing at-risk species populations (30%).

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NJ-WHIP-PC awards are anticipated to be announced on or before February 1, 2007.

VI. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected will be notified by the State Conservationist by mail within 15 business days of the final selection. Selected applicants will not have the authority to begin project work until (1) the Plan of Work based on the submitted goals and objectives and allowable/fundable costs is finalized; and (2) the Partnership Contract is signed by both a NRCS authorizing official and the authorized representative of the contract participant. All projects will be authorized by March 1, 2007.

NRCS will designate a Technical Representative to provide technical oversight for each project receiving funding and an Administrative Representative to provide contract oversight. These contacts will be named in the award letter.

Applicants whose proposals have not been selected will be notified by official letter within 15 business days of the final selection.

B. Partnership Contract

The CCC, through NRCS, will use a Partnership Contract to document participation in the WHIP program. Under the Contract, selected applicants may receive reimbursement of costs of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost.

The Contract will include:

- CCC-1202 – Project Contract Agreement;
- CCC-1155 – Practice Schedule of Implementation and Costs;
- Appendix to form CCC-1202 – information concerning reimbursement processing, contract modifications, and other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States.

Neither the approval of any application nor the award of any contract commits or obligates the United States to provide further support of a project or any portion thereof or implies any endorsement.

C. Reporting Requirements

Award recipients are required to comply with the implementation schedule in the approved contract, or request changes in advance through a justification letter submitted to the Administrative Representative.

Project work items may be submitted for reimbursement as they are completed. All requests will be made to the Technical Representative and will be accompanied by documentation supporting the costs incurred and reflecting the project work completed. The Technical Representative will prepare the Payment Request Form (CCC-1245) for signature by both parties, and reimbursement will be through electronic funds transfer.

NRCS recommends that the grantee work closely with the Technical and Administrative Representatives throughout the course of the project. The award recipient must comply with any requests for information from these individuals.

Upon passage of the completion date of the project, a final report must be submitted within 90 days detailing project activities, funding received, funding expended, and results achieved.

VII. NJ-WHIP-CA CONTACTS

For programmatic questions or administrative questions, please contact:

Gail Bartok, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Natural Resources Conservation Service

220 Davidson Ave, 4th floor, Somerset NJ 08873

Phone: (732) 537-6042

facsimile: (732) 537-6095; Subject: WHIP Partnership Contract

e-mail: gail.bartok@nj.usda.gov; Subject: WHIP Partnership Contract

Additional information about NJ-WHIP-PC is available on the NJ programs webpage: www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/partnership.

Signed in Somerset, NJ on November 9, 2006.

JANICE REID

Acting State Conservationist

Natural Resources Conservation Service