

FY17-19 Habitat Blueprint – Coastal and Marine Habitat Focus Area Cooperative Agreements

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: FY17-19 Habitat Blueprint – Coastal and Marine Habitat Focus Area Cooperative Agreements

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2017-2005105

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.463, Habitat Conservation

Dates: Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 2, 2017.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind the following information necessary to submit an application on Grants.gov: (1) a free annual registration process in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM) may take between three and five business days or as long as several weeks (see Section IV.G. of this Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO)), and (2) if you submit an application via Grants.gov you will receive a series of e-mail notifications for up to two business days before learning via validation or rejection whether NOAA has received your application.

Funding Opportunity Description: The principal objective of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) FY17-19 Habitat Blueprint - Coastal and Marine Habitat Focus Area Cooperative Agreements solicitation is to identify and support comprehensive and cooperative habitat conservation projects in NOAA Habitat Focus Areas (HFAs) that sustain resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities, and economies. Proposals submitted under this solicitation will be selected based on their ability to demonstrate success in achieving the NOAA Habitat Blueprint's primary goals within nine of the HFAs: Biscayne Bay, Florida; Choptank River, Maryland/Delaware; Kachemak Bay, Alaska; Manell-Geus, Guam; Muskegon Lake Michigan; Northeast Marine Corridor and Culebra Island, Puerto Rico; Penobscot River, Maine; Russian River, California; and West Hawaii, Hawaii. Specific objectives vary from HFA to HFA, and have been selected to effectively protect and/or restore high-priority habitat for managed fisheries, protected species, and other coastal and marine life; foster resilient coastal communities; advance habitat science; and/or lead to increased socio-economic benefits. HFA - specific priorities are identified in this federal funding opportunity, and successful proposals will: 1) address issues/concerns contributing to the loss or deterioration

of coastal or marine habitats; 2) identify the project's outcome(s) and goal(s) and describing in detail the actions and project(s) to be undertaken to achieve those goals; and 3) describe the measurable impact on the issue/concern, including proposed evaluation techniques.

Proposals selected for funding through this solicitation will be funded through cooperative agreements. One to three-year cooperative agreement awards will be considered, and additional releases of funds may be used to fund selected proposals through FY19 without further competition. Awards are dependent upon FY17-FY19 congressional appropriations. Up to \$3.5 million may be available over the next three years to maintain selected awards, dependent upon the level of funding made available by Congress. NOAA will not accept proposals with a Federal request of less than \$50,000 or more than \$250,000 for the first year of funding with no more than \$650,000 for the entire three years. NOAA anticipates the typical federal funding awards will range from \$150,000 to \$600,000 over three years. One to three year proposals will be accepted. Funds will be administered by the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Habitat Blueprint - Coastal and Marine Habitat Focus Area Cooperative Agreements (HFA) solicitation is to support comprehensive and cooperative landscape-scale habitat conservation projects that sustain resilient and thriving marine and coastal resources, communities, and economies. Proposals submitted under this solicitation will be selected based on their ability to demonstrate success in achieving the NOAA Habitat Blueprint's identified objectives/priorities within a defined HFA, as articulated in this federal funding opportunity).

As described in the NOAA Habitat Blueprint (<http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/habitatblueprint/>), healthy habitat is critical to recover and sustain populations of NOAA trust species, and to ensure the resiliency and vibrancy of coastal communities. In order to increase the sustainability and productivity of fisheries and the coastal resources on which our communities depend, NOAA encourages more concerted efforts to protect and restore the habitats that support those resources. The NOAA Habitat Blueprint focuses the efforts of existing NOAA and non-federal conservation programs and prioritizes and guides future conservation and research actions to achieve greater results with existing financial and technical resources. Under this solicitation, NOAA seeks proposals benefitting the species, habitats, and communities within the HFAs defined below in Section I.B. Proposals that do not take place in one of the HFAs defined below, and which do not achieve the objectives/priorities specified, will not be considered for funding.

Applicants are encouraged to develop a landscape-scale or watershed approach for the overall proposal, which links proposed project sites by the habitat-based issues/concern and the overall objectives for the HFA. This may involve identifying multiple projects or project sites within the proposal. Successful proposals will achieve one or several HFA - specific priorities by: 1) addressing an issue/concern contributing to the loss or deterioration of coastal or marine habitats; 2) identifying the project's outcome(s) and goal(s) and describing in detail the actions and project(s) to be undertaken to achieve those goals; and 3) describing the measurable impact on the issue/concern, including proposed evaluation techniques.

B. Program Priorities

The program priorities for this funding opportunity support NOAA's Mission Goals of

“Healthy Oceans” and “Resilient Coastal Communities and Economies”. Under this solicitation, only projects taking place in nine of the HFAs and contributing to accomplishment of the identified objectives/priorities will be considered: Biscayne Bay, Florida; Choptank River, Maryland/Delaware; Kachemak Bay, Alaska; Manell-Geus, Guam; Muskegon Lake, Michigan; Northeast Marine Corridor and Culebra Island, Puerto Rico; Penobscot River, Maine; Russian River, California; and West Hawaii, Hawaii. Each HFA has unique, site-specific objectives and priorities (described below) that proposals should effectively address to be competitive. All HFA projects should support activities that restore degraded or altered marine, estuarine, coastal, and freshwater habitats; protect marine, estuarine, and coastal habits; return target species to their historical habitats; foster resilient coastal communities; advance and/or fill gaps in habitat science; or enhance community support and engagement in habitat restoration and protection. In addition, integrating social science perspectives into the design of HFA projects, where practicable, will help ensure that the project addresses the root causes of habitat degradation and decline and makes an impact that can be effectively measured and communicated.

Below are the objectives/priorities for the nine HFAs. Proposals should demonstrate how each project’s activities contribute to achieving the priorities of the HFA in which they are occurring. NOAA seeks to support projects that will implement on-the-ground projects that advance the objectives and priorities of individual HFAs. Applications should address stated habitat science, restoration, protection and/or management needs and yield significant ecological and/or sociological benefits.

1) Biscayne Bay Habitat Focus Area:

Biscayne Bay is an economic engine for south Florida; supporting recreation, real estate values, and tourism revenue. Water quality issues are a paramount concern for Biscayne Bay, a naturally oligotrophic bay characterized by shallow waters, extensive seagrass cover, and a mangrove fringe along most of its shoreline. The recent appearance and extensive coverage of algal blooms in the southern, most pristine area of the Bay, is troubling. Scientists and resource managers are worried Biscayne Bay may reach a “tipping point” or “regime shift” toward eutrophic conditions and possible attendant widespread loss of seagrass cover (some seagrass loss has already occurred) that would be hard, if not impossible, to halt or reverse.

The first objective of the Biscayne Bay HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/biscayne-bay-florida/>) is to reduce the frequency, duration, and spatial coverage of algal blooms in Biscayne Bay. To achieve this, NOAA, working with its partners, will help to improve water quality through a variety of activities that build off of past coordination and scientific efforts in the Bay. Applications that support Biscayne Bay HFA

should partner with local municipalities to investigate land-based sources of pollution to canals and ultimately Biscayne Bay. These investigations should lead to actions being taken to reduce nutrient loading to the canals by targeting the most efficient and effective methods to reduce nutrient loading to Biscayne Bay. These efforts to identify and eliminate principal nutrient sources and other factors contributing to bloom conditions could be accompanied by a broader education and outreach effort aimed at reducing nutrient inputs to the Bay.

NOAA will also consider projects that protect and restore seagrass (including Johnson's seagrass, which has been determined to be a threatened species pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973) and hard bottom habitat (soft and hard coral) that sustains the recreational uses of the Bay and economic resiliency of the communities that border the Bay.

2) Choptank River Habitat Focus Area:

The Choptank River complex is located on Maryland's Eastern Shore and includes the Choptank River and its major tributaries. This part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem represents critical habitat for spawning striped bass and river herring, as well as historically abundant oyster reefs. Oysters grow in reefs that provide needed habitat for a range of Bay species, filter water as they feed, and are a valued and historical fishery. NOAA's interest in the Choptank is driven by a significant public and private investment in native oyster restoration in three of the Choptank's major tributaries: the Little Choptank River, the Tred Avon River and Harris Creek. The population of Eastern oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) in the Chesapeake Bay has declined dramatically over the past century due to overfishing, habitat loss (including poor water quality), and disease.

The primary objectives of the Choptank River HFA

(<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/choptank-river-complex-maryland/>) are to restore and protect habitat, conduct science to improve management and increase community resilience. Applications that support the Choptank River HFA should conduct: a) community habitat restoration projects, BMP installation, and citizen science in the water and at the land-water interface (e.g., shoreline restoration, climate adaptation, near-shore monitoring and community oyster restoration); b) critical oyster restoration monitoring before and after restoration efforts take place to effectively and credibly report on the effectiveness of the restoration; and c) nearshore habitat assessment and characterization to identify appropriate nearshore areas for conservation (i.e., acquisition of marsh retreat corridors and identifying green infrastructure to provide habitat and community benefits).

3) Kachemak Bay Habitat Focus Area:

Alaska's coastal and marine resources provide a sustainable food sources for millions, are a major contributor to state and national economies and are critical to maintaining ecosystem

health. There has been mounting concerns regarding the adverse impacts caused by human activities and climate driven environmental change in Alaska. Alaska is on the front lines of climate change, with its coastal and marine ecosystems being significantly affected by large-scale climate variations such as El Nino and the recent dramatic warming across the north Pacific Ocean, as well as by long-term changes from melting glaciers and the spread of invasive species. These changes could have profound impacts on marine and coastal food webs, habitats and commercial, recreational and subsistence fisheries. In Kachemak Bay and Cook Inlet, commercial fisheries for crab and shrimp have been closed due to dramatic population declines and lack of recovery since the 1990s, and recreational fisheries for clams have also been closed recently due to sharp population declines. Both human activities and climate change are thought to contribute to these shellfish declines. Paralytic shellfish poisoning events from harmful algal blooms increased dramatically in Kachemak Bay and across coastal Alaska in 2015 and 2016 in association with warming waters. Increasing shipping associated with cargo, oil and gas exploration, and tourism is also making Alaska coastal ecosystems more vulnerable to the spread of invasive species and increased risk of oil spills.

The primary objective of the Kachemak Bay HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/kachemak-bay-alaska/>) is to help restore depleted shellfish species by developing new information tools for habitat assessment and change, including essential fish habitat (EFH), and integrating those tools into state and federal shellfish management.

Applications to support the Kachemak Bay HFA should address one or more of the following activities: a) leverage previously developed spatial information (NOAA's National Center of Coastal Ocean Science benthic habitat mapping) to continue to build geographic system (GIS) technologies to collect, document, and map geospatial data that could be used to spatially represent human and climate driven stressors on EFH; b) develop a pilot response network through the coordination federal, state, and community efforts to improve the response to and reduce the risk of harmful algal blooms impacting shellfish harvests; and/or c) develop a user-friendly ocean circulation trajectory tool that can be used for oil spill response planning (trajectory analysis planner), assessment of larval transport to support shellfish restoration planning, and assessment of transport to understand spatial variability in harmful algal bloom events.

4) Manell-Geus Habitat Focus Area:

The Manell-Geus HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/manell-geus-guam/>) is located at the southern tip of the island of Guam and contains unique and important habitats such as the island's only shallow lagoon, the Achang Reef Flat Marine

Preserve, and the largest aggregation of sea turtles documented on the island. These resources support a variety of subsistence, cultural, and economic activities. Although Manell-Geus has amazing marine resources, including barrier, fringing, and patch reefs, extensive seagrass beds, and mangrove forest, these ecosystems are impaired by poor water quality. The conditions are a result of hillside and streambank erosion and poor stormwater infrastructure. Wildland fires, feral animals, and off-roading vehicles have accelerated this erosion, which contributes to downstream flooding affecting the communities and the adjacent reef in Merizo. Sedimentation also impacts coral health by increasing susceptibility to disease, decreasing growth rates, and affecting coral settlement. These problems may be exacerbated by outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish (a corallivore), overharvesting of key herbivores, nuisance algae blooms, and coral bleaching events.

The primary objectives of the Manell-Geus HFA are to: a) Improve coral reef ecosystem health and increase resilience through targeted management actions including watershed restoration, reducing fire impacts, and reef response and restoration activities; b) Improve community resilience to climate change impacts; and c) Build community and government capacity to manage coral reefs and coastal and marine resources.

Applications that support the Manell-Geus HFA should include address one or more of following activities: a) restoration in HFA including watershed restoration and/or coral propagation and outplanting using methods that have been vetted with local resources managers and that are in coordination with on-going HFA projects; or projects to remove or control nuisance species such as crown-of-thorns starfish and angel hair algae; b) facilitate improved communication with local residents and resource users and increase community engagement in activities that support the HFA objectives. This could include support for a HFA community coordinator, translation of scientific information into accessible formats, or specific projects or programs to provide opportunities for citizens to actively engage in conservation and management activities within the HFA; and/or c) conduct climate change vulnerability assessments and development of HFA specific adaptation strategies. Projects may take place on land or in coastal waters.

5) Muskegon Lake Habitat Focus Area:

Muskegon Lake is a drowned river mouth of the Muskegon River located on the west shoreline of Michigan's Lower Peninsula and in 1985 was designated an Area of Concern (AOC) due to historic degradation from lumber industry, several other industries located to the area including chemical and petrochemical companies, foundries, a coal-fired power plant, and a paper mill. Since its designation as an AOC, Muskegon Lake has been subject to numerous coordinated habitat restoration and conservation projects under a locally driven action plan.

The primary objective of the Muskegon Lake HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/muskegon-lake-michigan/>) is to increase the level of its involvement in the long-term stewardship of the Muskegon Lake watershed. NOAA intends to achieve this objective by developing collaborative research partnerships that will help the agency fill science information gaps to support ongoing and planned habitat restoration and management activities, in particular monitoring of the effectiveness of the restoration work and its impact on Muskegon Lake, the Muskegon River and the Lake Michigan nearshore.

Applications that support the Muskegon Lake HFA should: a) implement additional long term site monitoring at recently completed restoration projects; b) contribute to the long-term understanding of the ecology of Muskegon Lake through the use of automated remote sensing technologies to measure key biophysical parameters in the lake; and/or c) provide support for the development of a guidance document for future restoration in Areas of Concern once they have been delisted. The goal will be to create a framework for restoration and management for these watersheds to continue restoration work into the future and the framework would be easily transferable to other delisted Areas of Concern in the Great Lakes basin.

Background information on restoration activities in the Muskegon Lake HFA can be found in EPA's Muskegon Lake AOC website (see <https://www.epa.gov/muskegon-lake-aoc>) or Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's website (see http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3677_15430_57395---,00.html).

6) Northeast (NE) Marine Corridor and Culebra Island Habitat Focus Area:

The NE Marine Corridor and Culebra Island HFA

(<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/puerto-rico/>) supports important recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishing; marine transportation; tourism; and threatened and endangered species. However, over the past several decades, the region has experienced a significant decline in coastal and marine habitats (e.g., mangrove, coral, and seagrass) and resources due to coastal development, land-based sources of pollution, unsustainable recreational and commercial use, and climate change impacts such as increasing sea surface temperatures and coral bleaching, and increased intensity and frequency of hurricanes. Natural resource managers are developing management plans for the region that identify threats and prioritize management strategies for abating those threats. By leveraging the numerous partnerships involved in the conservation of the NE Marine Corridor and Culebra Island, this HFA aims to abate habitat threats (e.g., land-based activities, recreational pressure, fishing impacts) and expand Endangered Species Act listed

coral population enhancement efforts to restore degraded reef habitats. The primary goal of the NE Marine Corridor and Culebra Island HFA is to protect and enhance coastal habitats (e.g., seagrass beds, mangroves, coral reefs) and resources (e.g. fish, sea turtles, marine mammals) associated with coral reef ecosystems.

Applications that support the NE Marine Corridor and Culebra Island HFA should address one or more of the following activities:

- a) Implement priority Land-Based Sources of Pollution (LBSP) management actions identified in the HFA Implementation Plan (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Puerto-Rico-HFA-Implementation-Plan.pdf>) and in the Culebra Community Watershed Action Plan for Water Quality and Coral Reefs at http://data.nodc.noaa.gov/coris/library/NOAA/CRCP/project/503_Ferguson/CulebraWAP_final.pdf. For other NE Puerto Rico watersheds, coordination may be conducted with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to identify Land-based Sources of Pollution projects. Other acceptable topics within the HFA are: i) establishing water quality targets to inform LBSP management targets and evaluated LBSP performance, and ii) establishment of a water quality baseline and a long term sustainable monitoring program.
- b) Promote coral ecosystem habitat and resource restoration by expanding ESA coral population enhancement efforts (including nurseries and out-plantings), identifying priority locations for coral population enhancement, and enhancing herbivorous vertebrate and/or invertebrate stocks to increase herbivory and protect coral habitats. Coral propagation projects should follow best practices and the criteria in Acropora coral recovery plan (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected_resources/coral/documents/acropora_recovery_plan.pdf). Projects should be sited to maximize coral survivorship (i.e. avoiding locations impacted by LBSP). Projects under this category should build upon existing efforts and coordinate with ongoing projects to avoid duplication.
- c) Reduce boating and other recreational activity impacts to nearshore habitats through the use of habitat protection measures; installation of mooring and marker buoys that include a maintenance plan and an educational component on their appropriate use; develop and carry out education and outreach activities directed at behavior change. All proposed activities must be conducted in collaboration with the DNER NE Marine Corridor manager and in coordination with other related efforts in the area.
- d) Climate change: Implement recommendations of the Pilot Climate Change Community Adaptation Plan recently developed for Culebra by the Puerto Rico Coastal Zone Management Program. This document can be found at http://www.coris.noaa.gov/portals/pdfs/Culebra_CC_Plan_Sept_2016.pdf.

7) Penobscot River Habitat Focus Area:

The goals of the Penobscot River HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/penobscot-river-maine/>) are to: a) restore multiple diadromous species including river herring, rainbow smelt, and endangered and threatened species (i.e., Atlantic salmon, Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon); b) improve the prey base for multiple offshore species including Gulf of Maine groundfish to support recreational, commercial, and sustenance fishing; c) increase the quantity and quality of accessible habitat in the watershed; d) promote habitat restoration that results in indirect benefits to water quality, watershed-based recreation, and the resilience of coastal communities; and e) increase collaboration across NOAA to meet the needs of constituents for products and information.

In accordance with the implementation plan for the HFA (https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/stories/2016/may/penobscot_hfa_final_implementation_plan_newcover.pdf), the FY17-FY19 priorities will continue to focus on habitat protection and restoration, research and science, and communications and outreach, which are managed as interdisciplinary teams within NOAA as overseen by the HFA's executive committee.

Applications that support the Penobscot River HFA should address the following:

- a) **Habitat Protection and Restoration:** The Penobscot HFA is interested in removing barriers to fish migration and restoring habitat through feasibility studies, final designs, permitting, project implementation and monitoring. Projects may include dam removals, culvert replacements, and fishways, with projects identifiable in the barrier prioritization tool developed by The Nature Conservancy for the Penobscot River watershed (<http://maps.coastalresilience.org/maine/#>). Fish passage projects may benefit multiple diadromous species including endangered Atlantic salmon, a NOAA "Species in the Spotlight".
- b) **Research and Science:** The Penobscot HFA has an ongoing interest in document the environmental benefits of restoration. Activities could include: i) before and after monitoring of restoration projects like dam removals, culvert replacements and fishways; ii) studies to look at the interactions of groundfish with diadromous fish that act as prey species (e.g., river herring and American shad); and iii) studies to document the expanding geographic distribution and population dynamics of diadromous fish throughout the Penobscot River watershed.
- c) **Communications and Outreach:** Using multiple tools (websites, fact sheets, photos and video), the Penobscot HFA seeks to communicate the benefits of habitat restoration to a broad audience, with a special focus on projects successfully completed. Activities can include: i) development of project-specific outreach materials for key projects (e.g., Frankfort dam) that are undergoing feasibility studies for fish passage improvements, ii) outreach, including meetings, could occur with strategic governmental and non-

governmental partners including local municipalities, and iii) development of tools for social science, such as public surveys, that improve messaging about the benefits of habitat restoration to diverse audiences.

8) Russian River Habitat Focus Area:

The Russian River watershed system once boasted one of the world's premier coho salmon and steelhead trout runs and was recognized internationally as a recreational fishing destination. One hundred years ago, as many as 20,000 salmonids returned to the Russian River each year. By 2000, coho salmon were virtually extinct from the river and steelhead and Chinook salmon were threatened due to habitat loss, modified hydrology, and non-point source runoff. In addition, communities in the lower Russian River are affected by frequent floods, and other water management issues abound.

The primary objectives of the Russian River HFA (www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/russian-river-california) are to rebuild endangered coho and threatened Chinook salmon and steelhead stocks; improve frost, rainfall, drought and river forecasts; and increase community and ecosystem resiliency to flooding and drought.

Applications that support the Russian River HFA should include activities that:

a) conduct on-the-ground habitat restoration such as instream habitat/floodplain/side-channel habitat implementation; b) develop floodplain enhancement designs; c) increase knowledge of where water will come from, how it can be best conserved and how the environment will respond, expand on existing models (e.g., Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) viability study) and evaluate/recommend, select, and install appropriate water quality monitoring equipment for local settings that support FIRO (e.g., in-reservoir and in-stream measuring devices for flow and temperature, dissolved oxygen, nutrients, and turbidity); and d) increase community and ecosystem resiliency under extreme climatic events (examples include installation of water conservation storage tanks and or merging sea level rise/coastal storms data with water quality conditions within the Russian River estuary to increase knowledge of the impact of salt water intrusion and to provide short and long-term habitat enhancement recommendations.

9) West Hawaii Habitat Focus Area:

The northwest coast of the island of Hawaii is a unique habitat known for its clear waters and vibrant coral reefs. West Hawaii contains one of the state's longest contiguous coral reefs, supporting an abundance of corals and fish, and is home to several endangered or threatened species, such as Hawaiian monk seals, humpback whales, and green sea turtles. The coastal zone includes unique features such as traditional Hawaiian fishponds and anchialine pools in Hawaii, as well as several ecosystem types converge in this area

including lava fields, small sand beaches, coastal estuarine habitat and lowland dry forests. However, a variety of factors have led to habitat loss and degradation over the past several decades including, climate change, erosion and sedimentation, eutrophication, wildlife interaction pressures, and fishing pressure.

The primary goal of the West Hawaii HFA (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/habitat-focus-areas/west-hawaii/>) is to work with local communities to restore and maintain critical marine ecosystems (e.g., coral reefs, traditional fishponds, anchialine pools) and their function (e.g., resiliency to stressors, supporting fisheries, cultural tradition, biodiversity).

Applications to support the West Hawaii HFA should address the following objectives: a) improve coral health through the reduction of the delivery land-based pollutants, such as sediments and nutrients; b) reduce vulnerability of communities and natural resources to the localized effects of climate change (e.g., sea level rise, ocean warming, and ocean acidification); c) Ensure that communities are informed and contribute to the sustainable use and restoration of natural resources; and d) Provide better management tools and easily accessible information to promote informed decisions.

A more complete description of the West Hawaii Habitat Focus Area can be found in the Implementation Plan (<https://www.habitatblueprint.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/West-Hawaii-HFA-Implementation-Plan.pdf>). The HFA seeks projects that will emphasize the linkages between land and ocean while integrating and recognizing the needs of the local communities and affiliated resource managers.

C. Program Authority

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the following statutes to provide grants and cooperative agreements for habitat restoration and conservation: Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. § 661, as amended by the Reorganization Plan No. 4 of 1970); Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 (16 U.S.C. § 1891a); and Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. § 1535).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

One-year or multi-year awards up to three funding years will be considered, and additional releases of funds may be used to fund selected proposals through FY19 without further competition. NOAA anticipates typical federal funding awards will range from \$150,000 to \$650,000 over three years. NOAA will not accept proposals with a Federal

request of less than \$50,000 or more than \$250,000 for the first year of funding with no more than \$650,000 for all three years. NOAA anticipates up to \$1.5 million will be available in the first year with up to \$1 million for the second and third years each to fund awards under this competition. Funds will be administered by the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation.

The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Multi-year funding requests are expected to be funded based on progress towards milestones and availability of funding. Any funds provided to successful applicants will be at the discretion of the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation and the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD).

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs, including if programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific award or to obligate any available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all recommended applications. NOAA cannot guarantee an award will be made for each of the HFAs listed in this funding announcement. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested for HFA activities, the merit and ranking of the applications, and the amount of funds made available by Congress in FY17 and subsequent fiscal years. Dependent on the level of funding made available by Congress, NOAA anticipates approximately \$3.5 million may be available over the next three years (FY17-FY19) to maintain selected awards and establish new awards.

B. Project/Award Period

Applications should cover a project period of one to three years. These one to three-year cooperative agreements are expected to be funded incrementally on an annual basis. Once awarded in FY 2017, recipients of the multi-year cooperative agreements will not need to compete for funding in subsequent years. The earliest start date for projects will be September 1, 2017.

If an application is recommended and approved for funding under this cooperative agreement, NOAA has no obligation to provide additional funding in connection with this cooperative agreement in subsequent years. A recommendation to the NOAA GMD to continue an award for a cooperative agreement in subsequent years, or to extend the period of performance, is at the total discretion of the Federal Program Officer. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond that stated in award documentation is at the discretion of NOAA and should be requested in writing at least 30 days in advance of an award's expiration date.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will be funded through cooperative agreements, as described in 2 C.F.R. § 200.24, meaning that NOAA expects to be substantially involved in many aspects of the awards. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to, collaboration on the scope of work, providing assistance with technical aspects of the project, review and comment on design plans, review of procurement materials to the extent authorized by 2 C.F.R. § 200.324, and tracking the progress towards the successful completion of the project.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, non-profits, commercial (for-profit) organizations, U.S. territories, and state, local and Native American tribal governments. Applications from federal agencies or employees of federal agencies will not be considered. Federal agencies are strongly encouraged to work with states, non-governmental organizations, municipal and county governments, and others that are eligible to apply.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

There is no statutory matching requirement for this funding. NOAA typically leverages its federal funding with matching contributions from a broad range of sources in the public and private sectors to implement coastal and marine habitat restoration. To this end, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate partnerships and some portion of non-federal match (suggested at 1:1) with NOAA funds requested to implement the proposed project. Applications with less than 1:1 match will be considered, however, applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered in Evaluation Criterion #4 "Project Costs" (Section V.A.4.). Cost sharing will not be waived for Territories of the United States; the Omnibus Territories Act does not apply.

Federal sources cannot be considered for matching funds, unless authorized by law, but can be described in the application's budget narrative to demonstrate additional leverage. Match to NOAA funds can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include third party in-kind goods and services and volunteer labor. Refer to 2 C.F.R. § 200.306, available at <http://go.usa.gov/ca5j5>, for cost sharing or matching policies. Applicants are permitted to combine contributions from non-federal partners, as long as such contributions are not used to match any other federal funds and are available within the project period stated in the application. Applicants with approved indirect cost rates planning to provide cost sharing may find it convenient to propose a portion or all of their indirect costs as match, since the

valuation of such costs has already been federally approved and documentation is readily available.

Refer to Section IV.B.6 for information on indirect costs. Applicants whose proposals are selected for funding will be bound by the percentage of cost sharing reflected in the award document signed by NOAA's Grants Management Division, unless amended based on extenuating circumstances. NOAA is under no obligation to amend the matching contributions once agreed to by the recipient. Successful applicants should be prepared to carefully document matching contributions, including the overall number of volunteers and third party in-kind participation hours devoted to habitat restoration projects. Letters of commitment for any secured resources that will be used as match for an award under this solicitation should be submitted as an attachment to the application (see Section IV.B.4).

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

NOAA will not accept proposals with a federal funding request of less than \$150,000 or more than \$650,000 over three years. Applications must be submitted by the due date and time provided in Section IV.D. Late applications will not be considered for funding. Submission time will be documented by electronic submission to Grants.gov, a U.S. Postal Service postmark, or a delivery service receipt. Information regarding electronic submission through Grants.gov is contained in Section IV.G. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. Applications submitted via the U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. Applications received later than ten business days following the closing date will not be accepted. All applications MUST contain ALL required forms; if these forms are not signed via the www.Grants.gov application process, they MUST be signed in ink (SF-424, SF-424b, CD-511). Failure to submit necessary signed forms will result in disqualification from this competition. Paper applications should also be accompanied by a CD or DVD with the entire application as one Adobe PDF file

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Complete application packages, including required federal forms and instructions, can be found on www.Grants.gov. If a prospective applicant is having difficulty downloading the application forms from www.Grants.gov, contact www.Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov. Instructions for these forms are available at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions.html>.

B. Content and Form of Application

The application process for this grant competition requires submission of a standard NOAA financial assistance application package on or before the submission date and time listed above. All application materials should use a legible 12-point font with 1-inch margins on all sides. For each application, the information provided in elements 1-4 (described below) may not exceed 40 pages total; the 40-page limit does not apply to required federal forms and other documentation (elements 5-7 below). Applications that exceed the 40-page limit will be shortened by removing pages before it is forwarded to merit reviewers. Pages excised from lengthy applications will not be reviewed and any activities described therein will not be eligible for funding consideration. Applications that are incomplete, unclear, or contain numerous typographical errors, may not be understood effectively by the reviewers, leading to lower evaluation scores; so, applicants are advised to review their application materials closely before they are submitted to the agency for consideration. Applications submitted through www.Grants.gov should have no more than three attachments in addition to the Federal Forms: 1) Cover page and project narrative (elements 1-2 below), 2) Budget table and budget narrative (element 3), and 3) all additional information (elements 4-6) combined into one file. Applications submitted in electronic format should be either Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) or Microsoft Word files (Adobe Acrobat is the preferred format). The total electronic file size of the proposal narrative and appendices combined shall not exceed 5 megabytes in storage space. Files that are larger than five megabytes may not be properly downloaded, uploaded, or received by the agency or the reviewers. Files that cannot be opened or downloaded will not be reviewed.

Applications should follow the format described below; failure to follow these requirements may result in the application being eliminated from the competition.

1. Project Summary (2 page limit):

--Applicant Organization

--Project Title

--Federal Funding requested and Matching Funds for each year, and Overall Request.

--Site Location – HFA (s) in which the work will take place with geographic coordinates for site specific projects.

--Brief Project Description/Executive Summary: Briefly describe the activities that will achieve one or several HFA-specific priorities with the requested funds by: a) identifying an issue/concern contributing to the loss or deterioration of coastal or marine habitats; b) identifying the project's outcomes and goal(s) and describing in detail the actions and project(s) to be undertaken to achieve those goals and; c) describing the measurable impact on the target species or resource, including proposed evaluation techniques.

--Project Performance Measures and Outcomes - Examples of the types of performance measures sought include, but are not limited to: the number of acres to be restored or stream

miles to be made accessible to diadromous fish through the proposed activities; a metric related to coastal resiliency or other anticipated long-term ecological and socioeconomic outcomes; or a metric indicating the value of a publicly available decision-support tool.

--Project Time Line, including an Implementation Start Date (not proposed award start date)

--Permits and Approvals - identify and list all consultations, permits, and regulatory approvals necessary for the proposed project(s) and their status (e.g. not applied for, pending, secured)

-- Project partners, including land owners - name and address (if privately owned) or public agency contact

2. Project Narrative:

The Project Narrative should be the majority of the application and should include a clear and thorough description of the proposed work including a timeline with milestones. Each task should be completely and accurately described. Sufficient detail should be provided to enable reviewers to evaluate the relevance and applicability of proposed work to program priorities described in Section I.B. of this announcement; to determine the technical/scientific merit of the proposed work; to adequately review the qualifications of the applicants; and to assess whether the proposed scope of work raises any concerns with regard to federal policy considerations, such as those related to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act, Historic Preservation Act, and Marine Mammal Protection Act (see Section V.A. Evaluation Criteria). Applicants should clearly describe how the project will directly benefit the HFA implementation efforts.

The elements of a good project narrative include:

a) Introduction: Provide a brief summary of relevant background information that justifies the need for the proposed project or task. Identify the problem/issue the project intends to address and describe its significance to the HFA's objectives and priorities. Identify the specific objective, listed under Section I.B., to which the project's objective(s) corresponds. Objectives should be simple and understandable, as specific and quantitative as possible, and attainable within the proposed timeframe, the described budget, and the human resources available. Projects should be accomplishment-oriented and identify obtainable goals, outcomes, and products.

b) Project Description: The project narrative is the scientific or technical plan of activities that are to be accomplished to meet the project objectives, and must be written with sufficient detail to allow a review of suitability of the proposed work and the likelihood of successful completion in the stated timeframe. Please ensure your project narrative includes detailed descriptions of each activity, including the rationale for the activity, how it will be accomplished, specific milestones, and expected products. The narrative should include information on dissemination of the findings/results to resource managers, local

communities, and other stakeholders as appropriate. The project narrative also needs to include information on how the project will be evaluated for success. If the work is one component of a larger project (or the activity is a pilot project for a larger initiative), and proposed activities will continue after the end of the grant period, describe future activities and potential future funding sources (and other mechanisms) to continue the work. If the goal of the project is to build capacity for improved conservation, describe proposed plans to ensure the activities continue into the future and how success will be evaluated.

c) **Timeline:** A description of specific activities and associated timelines necessary to meet them. Describe the timelines in increments (e.g., month 1, month 2, etc. or 1st quarter, 2nd quarter, etc.), rather than by specific dates.

d) **Table of Products/Outputs and Outcomes**

A table that summarizes the specific products/outputs and outcomes produced under the award. All products resulting from Federally-funded awards must be provided to NOAA within 90 days of the end of the award period and should be of publishable quality. NOAA may make award products available to the public, so recipients are encouraged to omit sensitive information (i.e., budget or salary information) from products submitted to NOAA. All products must explicitly acknowledge the support of NOAA.

e) **Project Management/Personnel:** Describe how the project will be organized and managed, and include the qualifications of the principal investigator(s) through a summary of professional backgrounds, which may be supplemented by short biographies, curricula vitae, or resumes in Element 4 below, Supporting Documents. The principal investigator may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the principal investigator, there should be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and principal investigator (e.g., the applicant may be responsible for managing the grant funds and the principal investigator will be responsible for completing the work). Please also include information about the specific responsibilities of other personnel funded through the proposal, including the technical and administrative points of contact as appropriate.

3. Project Budget Narrative and Justification

The narrative budget justification must include a detailed breakdown by category of cost (object class) separated into federal and non-federal shares as they relate to specific aspects of the award, with a detailed narrative justification for both the federal and non-federal (if applicable) shares. The object classes should match those found in the From SF-424A. If requesting funds for a multi-year proposal, award costs should be broken into annual/interim funding requests up to three years in duration, based on logical breaks in the implementation plan. For instance, a proposal might include a project's design and pre-project monitoring costs in year one and implementation costs in years two and three. Another example would be a project that requested restoration costs for distinct sites in each of the three years. One to three year proposals will be accepted.

If funding will be used to complete part of a larger project, a budget overview for the entire project to demonstrate how the NOAA request relates to the overall project budget and outcomes should be provided. If the project has been submitted for funding consideration elsewhere, the amount(s) requested or secured from other sources, and whether the funds requested/secured are federal or non-federal should be included.

Additional budget development guidance is available at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>. The NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation and GMD staff will review budget information in recommended applications to determine if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and realistic. The narrative budget justification should be sufficiently detailed to enable a clear understanding of the cost breakdown and calculations used to derive the line item subtotals in each object class of the SF-424A budget form. A Form SF-424A for each year of requested funding will be required prior to award, but not as part of the initial application.

4. Supporting documents

This section includes the qualifications of the primary project personnel, letters of support, letter of funding commitment, project designs for restoration activities, site location map such as a US Geological Survey topographic quadrangle map or aerial photo with site location(s) highlighted, and any other supporting materials.

5. Data Sharing Plan

The data sharing plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The plan is required as part of NOAA's data sharing policy described in Section VI.B below, and will be reviewed as part of the Evaluation Criteria under Section V.A Examples are provided at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>.

6. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable)

The proposed budget may include an amount for indirect or Facilities and Administrative costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., utilities, rent, and insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and, therefore, cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. See 2 CFR §§ 200.56-.57 and 2 CFR §§ 200.412-.415.

A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect cost agreement with the federal Government should be included with the application package. If an award recipient has never established an indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimus rate described at 2 CFR § 200.414. Non-federal entities that have never received a negotiated indirect (F&A) cost rate elect to charge a de minimis rate at 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). The de minimis indirect cost rate should be used for all federal awards. Non-federal entities may use this rate indefinitely, but may choose to negotiate an indirect (F&A) cost rate at any time. This de minimis rate option is not available to state and local governments, and Indian tribes.

If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate and plans to establish a new negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, documentation necessary to establish a rate must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award. See Section IV.F.1 for more information on indirect cost rates and establishing a new indirect cost rate with the DOC.

7. Federal Forms

A complete standard NOAA financial assistance application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. Each application must include the application forms from the SF-424 form family:

- Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424 (7/03 version or newer)
- Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: SF-424A (prior to award, an SF-424A for each year of funding will be required)
- Assurances for Non-construction Programs: SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)

C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Applicants should: 1) Be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting an application; 2) provide a valid Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number on an application; and 3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. The federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the federal awarding agency is ready to make a federal award, the federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Applicants should allow a minimum of five days to complete the SAM registration; registration is required only once but must be periodically renewed. Applicants can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or online at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>. Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be (1) received and validated by Grants.gov; or (2) postmarked or provided to a delivery service that provides a tracking number and receipt on or before the deadline of 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, on February 2, 2017. Regardless of the method of transmission, applications received more than 10 business days after the deadline will not be reviewed.

Applications submitted via U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. Applications submitted by mail must include a SF-424 form with original ink or valid electronic signature and date from an authorized recipient organization representative.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind the following information necessary to submit an application on Grants.gov: (1) a free annual registration process in the electronic SAM may take between three and five business days or as long as several weeks (see Section IV.G. of this FFO), and (2) if you submit an application via Grants.gov you will receive a series of e-mail notifications for up to two business days before learning via validation or rejection whether NOAA has received your application.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this competition are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." It is the state agency's responsibility to contact their state's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the state's process under EO 12372. To assist the applicant, the names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed on the Office of Management and Budget's website www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

F. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Costs

If an award recipient has not previously established an indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimus rate described at 2 CFR § 200.414, as described in Section IV.B.12 of this Announcement. Alternatively, the negotiation and

approval of a new rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the DOC. The U.S. DOC, Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions require that recipients within 90 days of the award start date, submit to the address listed below documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review.

Lamar Revis, Grants Officer
NOAA Grants Management Division
1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Lamar.Revis@noaa.gov

Indirect-cost-rate-agreement documentation is not required for sub-awardees, however indirect cost rates at the negotiated levels should be paid by the primary awardee. Under 2 CFR § 200.414 “Indirect (F&A) Costs,” any applicant that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs which may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both pursuant to 2 CFR § 200.403 “Factors affecting allowability of costs.” If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a cooperator chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-federal entity may apply to do at any time. The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the DOC Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06.

2. Ineligible Projects:

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable in this program, however, pre-award costs may be considered and may be discussed during pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Incurring pre-award costs before the NOAA GMD provides an award document (generally via NOAA Grants Online on Form CD-450) is at the applicant's own risk. The earliest date for receipt of awards for this funding opportunity is anticipated to be September 1, 2017.

3. Cost Principles

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are limited to costs necessary and reasonable to achieve the approved goals and objectives and are determined by reference to relevant Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements.

Recipients are subject to the 2 CFR 200, Subpart E “Cost Principles and as well as any Department of Commerce implementing regulations that may be in effect at the time of

award. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as the costs are determined to be necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the award.

4. Other

Expenditures on large equipment and/or infrastructure are not a priority for funding under this program.

G. Other Submission Requirements

The standard NOAA funding application package is available at www.grants.gov (Grants.gov); and application packages, including all letters of collaboration, shall be submitted through the apply function on Grants.gov. Applicants must register with Grants.gov before any application materials can be submitted. To use Grants.gov, applicant must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number and be registered in the SAM. Allow a minimum of five days to complete the SAM registration. (Note: Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form). An organization's one time registration process may take up to three weeks to complete so allow sufficient time to ensure applications are submitted before the closing date. The Grants.gov site contains the application package (forms) and submission directions, and is also where the completed application is submitted.

The Grants.gov site contains directions for submitting an application, the application package (forms), and is also where the completed application is submitted. Applicants using Grants.gov must locate the downloadable application package for this solicitation by the Funding Opportunity Number or the CFDA number (11.463). Applicants will be able to download a copy of the application package, complete it offline, and then upload and submit the application via the Grants.gov site.

After electronic submission of the application through Grants.gov, the person submitting the application will receive within the next 24 to 48 hours two email messages from Grants.gov updating them on the progress of their application. The first email will confirm receipt of the application by the Grants.gov system, and the second will indicate that the application has either been successfully validated by the system before transmission to the grantor agency or has been rejected because of errors. After the application has been validated, this same person will receive a third email when the application has been downloaded by the Federal agency.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to applications ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below. Applications that best address these criteria will be most competitive.

1. Importance and Applicability (20 points): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state or local activities. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on how clearly the habitat issue to be addressed relates to the relevant HFA objectives and goals, and how great the potential is for the project(s) to achieve those goals. Reviewers will consider to what extent the proposal describes the habitat issues, species listed under the Endangered Species Act, or other managed species (e.g. Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, state/territorial fisheries species, or species of concern) being addressed and the extent to which the project will benefit the targeted species, habitats, or communities within the HFA (5 points); to what extent does the proposed project align with project priorities listed in Section 1. B. Program Priorities (5 points); and to what extent will the proposed work deliver tangible, specific results that supports management, conservation, and/or restoration in the HFA (10 points).

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (40 points): This criterion assesses whether the project activities or approach is technically sound, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear goals and objectives. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the extent to which the applicant has described a realistic and thorough implementation plan that demonstrates logical achievement of HFA priorities. Reviewers will consider whether the project is feasible from a social marketing, biological, scientific, and/or engineering perspective, and whether the proposed approach will result in tangible outcomes that will benefit the HFA. Reviewers will consider clarity of proposal objectives, extent the proposed work (including design, permitting, environmental compliance [National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, essential fish habitat, National Historic Preservation Act, etc.], restoration, research, etc.) is feasible to reach those milestones within the proposed award period (within the one or two year award period and how realistic is the implementation plan (10 points); to what extent is the project's overall technical approach feasible including whether the approach is technically sound, uses appropriate methods that are likely to achieve project goals and objectives on both an ecological and community stewardship level (10 points); to what extent are there effective mechanisms to evaluate project success the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results in the time line specified in the statement of work (10 points); and are the products, deliverables, data sharing plan (if applicable) suitable for the type of work, including applicability to relevant audiences, innovativeness, extent of redundancy with previous work, and what is likelihood of producing high quality results and outcomes that benefit HFA stakeholders and

ecosystems (10 points).

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicant (10 points): This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to support the proposed award. Reviewers will consider an applicant's capacity/knowledge to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as demonstrated by attached resumes, past project experience, and accomplishments of key technical and financial staff (5 points) and to what extent are the facilities, equipment and administrative resources available to support and successfully manage the project work and responsibilities of the award (5 points).

4. Project Costs (20 points): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project(s) needs and time-frame. Reviewers will evaluate the completeness of the full project budget (including non-federal sources) and the context of the amount requested from NOAA (especially important if funds are requested for partial support of a larger project or for a project with multiple sites or phases). Multi-year or multi-phase award requests should also include annual/interim milestones that correspond to logical funding increments (5 points). Reviewers will evaluate to what extent the budget costs are realistic and reasonable based on the applicant's stated objectives, time frame, and budget breakdown by SF424A object classes (10 points). The budget will also be evaluated to determine whether the proposed non-federal match meets or surpasses the suggested 1:1 level, and is confirmed or pending (no match or leverage proposed will be worth 0 points; a match that meets suggested 1:1 non-federal match ratio will be worth 2.5 points; and a match well over 1:1 confirmed/documented non-federal match will be worth 5 points).

5. Outreach and Education (10 points): NOAA assesses whether the award can deliver a focused and effective education and outreach strategy to protect the nation's coastal and marine resources, in line with NOAA's Mission Goals (see I.B). Reviewers will consider the extent in which the information on the project goal and results will be disseminated to local stakeholders and the potential for the proposed project to encourage future conservation (5 points) and the extent to which there is support or collaboration from relevant government agencies (federal, state, local), non-governmental agencies, and/or community groups (5 points).

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will undergo an initial administrative review to determine if they are eligible and complete. NOAA, at its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured. Eligible applications will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process to determine how well they meet the program priorities and evaluation criteria of this solicitation and the mission and goals of NOAA.

Eligible applications will be evaluated by three or more merit reviewers as part of a technical review based on the Evaluation Criteria listed above. After the technical review, a panel will meet to make final recommendations to the Selecting Official regarding which proposals best meet the program objectives and priorities (Sections I.A. and I.B.). The panel will be comprised of federal employees and may convene in person or by teleconference, video conference, or other electronic means to discuss applications.

The panel will be presented with the top-ranked applications, per the results of the technical review, technical review scores, and comments for each application. The panel will rate all top-ranked proposals on the following scale:

3- Excellent-- Application exceptionally addresses program priorities outlined in Sections I.A. and I.B., and was highly responsive to Evaluation Criteria;

2-Good-- Application partially addresses program priorities outlined in Section I.A. and I.B. and was strongly responsive to Evaluation Criteria; or

1-Fair-- Application marginally addresses program priorities outlined in Section I.A. and I.B. and was moderately responsive to Evaluation Criteria.

This rating will be presented to the Selecting Official for funding consideration and will be the primary consideration of the Selecting Official in deciding which applications will be recommended to the NOAA GMD, pending the application of selection factors below.

C. Selection Factors

The final panel ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Competition Manager will make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

(1) Availability of funding;

(2) Balance/distribution of funds:

a) Geographically;

b) By type of institutions;

c) By type of partners;

d) By research areas; and

e) By project types;

(3) Duplicity with other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies;

(4) Program priorities and policy factors as set forth in Section I (A and B) of this announcement;

(5) Applicant's prior award performance.

- (6) Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups.
- (7) Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NOAA will attempt to notify highly-ranked applicants by April 29, 2017. The earliest anticipated start date for awards will be September 1, 2017, but awards could go out as late as October 1, 2017. Applicants that initiate award activities in anticipation of federal funding do so at their own risk, and are advised not to begin award-related work until a notice of award is received electronically from the NOAA GMD in Grants Online, NOAA's online financial assistance management system.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities including monitoring, the award duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each Habitat Blueprint - Coastal and Marine Habitat cooperative agreement award will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA GMD, and NOAA staff that will administer these HFA awards.

The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, issued by the NOAA Grants Officer electronically through NOAA's Grants Online system. The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the authorized representative identified by the applicant on the SF-424. It is also available at <http://go.usa.gov/SNMR>. The Internet Explorer browser should be used with Grants Online

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements, contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), are applicable to this solicitation. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXC7A>.

2. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements at 2 C.F.R. 200, implemented by the Department of Commerce at 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, apply to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXCJQ>.

3. The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will

apply to awards in this program. A current version of this document is available at <http://go.usa.gov/hKbj>. In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including requirements for submitting progress reports and conditions that limit the use of funds for construction activities prior to the completion of outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis. These award conditions are subject to change prior to award but examples are provided at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>.

4. NEPA Requirements- NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts for individual projects as required by NEPA. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, and the Council on Environmental Quality's implementation regulations. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under the description of their activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, safety concerns, 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, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems).

Applicants are encouraged to consult with NOAA as early as possible on proposed projects to discuss NEPA considerations, and should review the restoration-specific environmental compliance documents available at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>. Funds will not be released until NOAA completes the requisite NEPA analysis and documentation. Funds may be withheld by the GMD under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental law compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of impacts that the award may have on the environment.

Applicants proposing activities that cannot be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis, that are not covered by existing NOAA programmatic NEPA documents, or whose activities are not covered under another agency's NEPA compliance procedures, which can be analyzed and adopted by NOAA, will be informed after the technical review stage. Such applicants may be requested to assist in the preparation of an EA prior to an award being made, or provide for NOAA review a copy of an EA/EIS that covers proposed activities if one exists. Awardees will be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposed sub-award or sub-contract projects, especially for projects requiring NOAA to consult under the ESA. Failure to agree to do so shall be grounds for not awarding funds or for terminating

an award.

5. NOAA's Data Sharing Policy- Environmental data and information collected and/or created under NOAA grants/ cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security requirements. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) must be made publicly available at the time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions. More information about the Data Sharing Policy is available on NOAA's Environmental Data Management Committee website at: www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.DSP.php.

6. Certifications Regarding Tax Liability and Felony Criminal Convictions- When applicable under appropriations law, NOAA will provide certain applicants a form to be completed by the applicant's authorized representative making a certification regarding federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any federal law.

7. Limitation of Liability- Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of Federal appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not yet have been appropriated for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Recipients and sub-recipients are subject to all federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to federal financial assistance awards.

8. Confidentiality and Access to Information

Application materials may be considered public documents and may be released to individuals outside the agency pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act. OHC reserves the right to share application materials with relevant individuals and organizations as authorized for the purposes of improved coordination and collaboration. However, OHC will not ordinarily release the names of applicants submitting proposals unless ordered by a court or requested to do so by an appropriate NOAA official and administrative protocol. Applicants can use a NOAA public search feature to find out information about NOAA

awards (<https://grantsonline.rdc.noaa.gov/flows/publicSearch/begin.do>) or go through the Freedom of Information Act process to request more information about grant competitions. More information about NOAA's freedom of information process is online at <http://www.noaa.gov/foia/>.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC § 552) (FOIA) and DOC's implementing regulations at 15 CFR Part 4 set forth the rules and procedures to make requested material, information, and records publicly available. Unless prohibited by law and to the extent permitted under FOIA, contents of applications submitted by applicants may be released in response to FOIA requests. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked by applicants as "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information." Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

C. Reporting

Award recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) reports in accordance with 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.327-329 and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. Progress reports shall use the NOAA Restoration Center's progress report narrative format and form approved by OMB under control number 0648 0472. This form will be provided to awardees by the NOAA Federal Program Officer. In addition, award recipients proposing multiple site locations may be required to complete individual reports for each site, or provide a project/site list including status and expenditures.

Narrative progress reports shall be due on the same fiscal year schedule as financial reports (Oct. 30 and April 30) covering April 1-September 30 and October 1-March 31, respectively. A comprehensive final report covering all activities during the award period is required and must be received by NOAA within 90 days after the end date of this award.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. § 6106 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards of \$25,000 and over.

VII. Agency Contacts

For administrative or technical questions regarding this announcement, contact the competition manager: Liz Fairey. She can be reached by phone at 301-427-8632, by fax at 301-713-1594, by email at Liz.Fairey@noaa.gov or by mail at: Liz Fairey, NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation, 1315 East West Highway, SSMC3, 14224, Silver Spring, MD, 20910.

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact NOAA before submitting an application to discuss their NOAA Habitat Blueprint - Coastal and Marine Habitat Focus Area Cooperative Agreements ideas with respect to technical merit and NOAA's Habitat Blueprint/HFA objectives and priorities. NOAA will make every effort to respond to prospective applicants on a first come, first served basis. These discussions will not include review of draft proposals or site visits during the application period.

VIII. Other Information

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out an award. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment and supplies, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable" specifically for the purpose of the award. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Guidance at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, codified by the Department of Commerce at 1327.101. All cost reimbursement sub-awards (e.g. subgrants, subcontracts) are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular type of organization concerned.