



Wildlife Conservation Board Regional Conservation Investment Strategies Grant Proposal Solicitation Notice

The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is seeking high-quality grant proposals for the development of Regional Conservation Investment Strategies (RCIS). California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) RCIS program encourages public agencies to develop regional conservation planning documents using the best available science to identify regional conservation priorities and other actions to help California's species populations that may be vulnerable or declining by protecting, restoring, creating, and reconnecting their habitats. An RCIS is a voluntary, non-regulatory document that provides guidance on actions that, if implemented, would result in effective regional conservation. Any public agency may propose an RCIS that is developed in consultation with local agencies that have land use authority within the RCIS area.

This document provides general eligibility information as well as priorities, pertinent dates, scoring criteria, and important documents specific to WCB's Proposition 68 RCIS funding opportunity. Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to read the [RCIS Program Guidelines](#) (RCIS Guidelines), this PSN, and any associated documents prior to deciding to submit a proposal.

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

It is recommended that applicants use, at a minimum, the following technical guidance documents and sources in the development of the proposal: the Areas of Conservation Emphasis (ACE) biodiversity, connectivity, and climate resilience datasets, the Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS) California Protected Areas Database (CPAD) layer, and State Wildlife Action Plan. Additional resources and links to these sources can be found in the RCIS Guidelines.

1.0 PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

ELIGIBILITY

Public agencies are eligible to submit grant proposals in response to this PSN. However, any entity that has received funding under [Section 800 of the Streets and Highways Code](#) for the preparation of an RCIS is ineligible. If you have question on eligibility, please contact CDFW's RCIS Program team at rcis@wildlife.ca.gov.

2.0 PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The RCIS Grant Program (Program) supports the following priorities:

- Geographic areas lacking an NCCP or regional HCP (i.e., HCP's that focus on regional conservation with large and interconnected reserve systems)
- Geographic areas with a local (non-regulatory) conservation plan or strategy approved or adopted by a public agency
- Proposals with matching funds (including in-kind match)
- Proposals that demonstrate readiness and qualifications, including the following:
 - State support letters likely – grant applicant indicates which state agency(ies) have expressed willingness to write the required RCIS approval request letter and the optional infrastructure mitigation support letter. Letters will not be required during the grant application review process.
 - Demonstrated successful grant management/completion experience

3.0 TIMELINES AND SCORING

TIMELINE

WCB meets four times a year, typically in February, May, August and November. Processing time for applications can vary depending on completeness of the application. Typically, 3 to 6 months is necessary to complete the application review and prepare all necessary materials for presentation to the Wildlife Conservation Board.

WCB accepts proposals on a continual basis, and will notify applicants about whether or not the proposal is acceptable or complete. All proposals will be evaluated with assistance from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. If a proposed project is accepted, and funding is available, a grant agreement or contract will be prepared for the applicant, and the proposal will be scheduled for consideration at a future WCB meeting.

All information requested in this PSN is mandatory unless otherwise indicated. Failure to complete all required application components will make the proposal incomplete. Incomplete proposals will not be scored or considered for funding. Each proposal recommended for Board action will have a summary posted at least 10 days prior to Board approval of the project. Projects funded must be completed and funds expended before March 31, 2025.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The specific evaluation scoring method and evaluation of applications is provided below.

An administrative review will determine if the application is complete and meets all the requirements for technical review. This review will use a Pass/Fail scoring method based on the criteria presented in Table 1. Proposals which receive a Fail for one or more of the Table 2 criteria will be considered incomplete and will not be considered for funding under this PSN.

Table 1: Administrative Review Evaluation Criteria

Administrative Criteria	Pass/Fail
All proposal components have been completed in the required formats.	Pass/Fail
Every question has been answered. N/A is appropriate where a question is not applicable.	Pass/Fail
Applicant contact information, including person authorized to sign grant agreement, is included.	Pass/Fail
Application is signed.	Pass/Fail

SCORING

All complete and eligible proposals will be evaluated and scored by technical reviewers in accordance with the scoring criteria documented in Table 2. Technical reviewers may make narrative comments that support their scores.

Each criterion will be scored by technical reviewers and assigned a point value between zero and five based on the extent to which the proposal addresses the criteria. Each score will then be multiplied by the applicable weighting factor to calculate the criterion score. A total score for the proposal will be generated by averaging the scores from each of the reviewers. Unless otherwise described in Table 2 below, standard scoring criteria are applied, and points are assigned as follows:

- A score of 5 points will be awarded where the criterion is fully addressed and supported by thorough and well-presented documentation and logical rationale.
- A score of 4 points will be awarded where the criterion is fully addressed but is supported by less thorough documentation or less sufficient rationale.
- A score of 3 points will be awarded where the criterion is less than fully addressed and is supported by less thorough documentation or less sufficient rationale.
- A score of 2 points will be awarded where the criterion is marginally addressed or the documentation or rationale is incomplete or insufficient.
- A score of 1 point will be awarded where the criterion is minimally addressed or no documentation or rationale is presented.
- A score of 0 points will be awarded where the criterion is not addressed.

Categories with special scoring criteria are identified within Table 2 below.

Table 2: Technical Review Evaluation Criteria

Category	Technical Review Criteria	Weight Factor	Point Value	Max. Criteria Score
Applicant Qualifications	<p>The extent to which a proposal demonstrates that the applicant has the appropriate experience to successfully manage a grant.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Applicant team that demonstrates successful completion of previously funded grants will receive 4-5 points. · Applicant team that has had some problems with successful completion of previously funded grants will receive 2-3 points · Applicant team that has had many problems with successful completion of previously funded projects will receive 0-1 point 	2	0-5	10
Stakeholder Support and Collaboration	<p>The extent to which a proposal demonstrates that the project has broad-based public and institutional support at the local, regional, or larger scale and that the local community and other stakeholders are engaged in project delivery.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	1	0-5	5
Geographic Area	<p>The extent to which a proposal includes a detailed description of the RCIS geographic area, including sufficient rationale for the size and location of the RCIS.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	1	0-5	5
RCIS boundary	<p>The extent to which the RCIS area is contiguous or the proposal provides a clear ecological justification for excluding areas within the RCIS boundary.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Proposals for which the RCIS area is unfragmented or includes a detailed ecological justification for excluded areas that is considered compelling will receive 5 points · Proposals for which the ecological justification for excluded areas contains moderate detail and is considered reasonable will receive 3-4 points · Proposals for which the ecological justification for excluded areas lacks sufficient detail and is considered weak will receive 1-2 points · Proposals for which the ecological justification for excluded areas lacks sufficient detail and is considered implausible will receive a score of zero. 	1	0-5	5

Category	Technical Review Criteria	Weight Factor	Point Value	Max. Criteria Score
Overlap with NCCPs or Regional HCPs	<p>The extent to which an RCIS falls within an area that does not, or is not expected to, provide regional conservation planning or guidance through a draft or final NCCP or regional HCP.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · An RCIS area that does not overlap with an NCCP or regional HCP will receive 5 points · An RCIS area that overlaps minimally with an NCCP or regional HCP will receive 3-4 points · An RCIS area that overlaps significantly with an NCCP or regional HCP will receive 1-2 points · An RCIS area that overlaps completely with an NCCP or regional HCP will receive a score of zero. 	1	0-5	5
Conservation Planning	<p>The extent to which an RCIS falls within an area that has a local (non-federal, non-state) conservation plan that is underway or has been completed.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria (this is considered beneficial)</p>	1	0-5	5
Disadvantaged Communities	<p>The extent to which a project falls within and/or provides direct, meaningful, and assured benefits to one or more disadvantaged community.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Projects that are located within and provide direct benefits to one or more disadvantaged community will receive 5 points · Projects that are either located within but do not provide direct benefits to a disadvantaged or low-income community, or are not located within a disadvantaged community but provide benefits to one or more disadvantaged communities will receive 3 points · Projects that are not located within a disadvantaged community and do not provide benefits to a disadvantaged community will receive a score of zero 	1	0-5	5
Need	<p>The extent to which a proposal includes a detailed description of the RCIS purpose and background, including sufficient rationale to demonstrate the need for an RCIS within the RCIS area (e.g., anticipated conservation, land planning, or other uses and users).</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	3	0-5	15

Category	Technical Review Criteria	Weight Factor	Point Value	Max. Criteria Score
Ecological Values	<p>The extent to which the proposal identifies preliminary ecological values anticipated to be covered by the RCIS, including areas of high biodiversity, wildlife/habitat connectivity, climate change resilience and, at a minimum, a few of the focal species and other conservation elements that are expected to be included.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	2	0-5	10
Timelines and Deliverables	<p>The extent to which a proposal demonstrates a logical sequence and timing of project tasks, with reasonable milestones and appropriate deliverables, and that aligns with the tasks in the project narrative.</p> <p>The extent to which the proposal demonstrates the means by which data and other information generated by the project will be handled, stored, and made publicly available. Projects must be completed and funds expended before March 31, 2025.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	2	0-5	10
Project Readiness	<p>The extent to which a proposal demonstrates that the public agency proponent is confirmed, state support letters are likely, and stakeholder involvement plans are sufficient for prompt project (i.e., RCIS development) implementation.</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p> <p>Scoring: standard scoring criteria</p>	2	0-5	10

Category	Technical Review Criteria	Weight Factor	Point Value	Max. Criteria Score
Budget	<p>The extent to which a proposed budget and justification are appropriate to the work proposed, cost effective, and sufficiently detailed to describe project costs, and are consistent with the tasks shown in the project narrative and schedule.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Proposals for which the budget is detailed, accurate, and considered reasonable will receive 5 points · Proposals for which the budget appears reasonable, contains moderate detail, inaccuracies or unspecified lump sums of up to 20 percent of the total budget will receive 3 to 4 points · Proposals for which the budget lacks sufficient detail, includes; many inaccuracies, unspecified lump sums of 20 to 50 percent of the total budget, or inappropriate costs will receive 1 to 2 points · Proposals for which the budget lacks sufficient detail, is inaccurate, contains unspecified lump sums exceeding 50 percent of the total budget, or is not cost effective will receive a score of zero. 	2	0-5	10
Cost Share	<p>The extent to which a project provides secured federal, State, private, or local cost share. All fund sources, including in-kind match, must be identified.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Non-Program cost share of >40% will receive 5 points · Non-Program cost share of 31-40% will receive 4 points · Non-Program cost share of 21-30% will receive 3 points · Non-Program cost share of 11-20% will receive 2 points · Non-Program cost share of 1-10% will receive 1 point · Non-Program cost share of 0% will receive a score of zero. 	1	0-5	5
Maximum Score				100

SELECTION PROCESS AND APPROVAL

WCB and CDFW will convene a Selection Panel to review the scores and comments from the Technical Review process. The Selection Panel will generate the initial funding recommendations. When developing the funding recommendation, the Selection Panel will consider:

- Technical Review scores and comments;
- Input from CDFW Regional Managers and Staff;
- Balance/distribution of funds by program priorities, within program priorities, and by geographic area;
- Program purposes. The Selection Panel may recommend modifications, such as reducing requested grant amounts to meet current and potential future program priorities, funding targets, and available funding limitations; and
- Once all due diligence is complete, the project will be scheduled to be presented at a future public WCB Board meeting. WCB's voting members have sole and absolute discretion to approve or reject a project for funding.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

All parties undertaking the development of an RCIS agree to and understand all requirements and responsibilities as outlined in Section 4 of the RCIS Guidelines. Additional requirements for grant proposals are outlined below.

4.0 BUDGET

ELIGIBLE COSTS

Only project-related costs associated with an eligible project activity incurred during the project performance period specified in the Grant Agreement may be funded. All such costs must be supported by appropriate invoices, purchase orders, canceled warrants, and other records.

1. Salary and Wages

Services of the Grantee's employees who are directly engaged in project execution, are eligible costs. These costs must be computed according to the Grantee's prevailing wage or salary scales. College or graduate student time may be included as hourly wages, but tuition for students is not eligible and will not be reimbursed or otherwise directly paid. Costs charged to the project must be computed on actual time spent on a project, and supported by time and attendance records describing the work performed on the project. Overtime costs may be allowed under the recipient's established policy, provided that the regular work time was devoted to the same project.

2. Fringe Benefits

Fringe benefit costs include vacations, sick leave, social security contributions, etc., that are customarily charged to the recipient's various projects.

3. Contractual Services

Costs of consultant or subcontractor (including stakeholder) services necessary for the project are eligible. If there are multiple consultant employees, list the contract costs separately.

4. Incidental but Directly Related Costs

(alternatively known as Administrative Costs, Indirect Costs or Administrative Overhead). Incidental cost rates are limited to 20 percent of the total direct WCB award to the grantee, minus subcontractor costs. Any amount over 20 percent will not be funded but may be used as cost share. Indirect costs include but are not limited to: workers compensation insurance, utilities, office space rental, phone, and copying which is directly related to completion of the proposed project. Costs for subcontractors cannot be included in the calculation of indirect costs in the overall project budget. The applicant must explain the methods used to determine the rate and provide detailed calculations in support of the indirect cost rate.

INELIGIBLE COSTS

The following are costs that are ineligible for reimbursement through an awarded grant:

- All costs incurred outside of the grant agreement term
- All costs related to the preparation and submission of the grant proposal
- Costs not specifically identified in the grant budget

COST SHARE

Cost share is the portion of the project cost not funded by WCB and is provided by the applicant and/or other sources (e.g., private companies, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and/or other entities). Proposals with higher proportions of secured cost share contribution towards total project cost will receive higher scores during the proposal evaluation process. Proposals providing cost share in the form of cash or other resources (in-kind services) for the support of the project must specify the source and dollar amount of all proposed cost share. Points will be awarded to proposals that are responsive to the Scoring Criteria, where cost share is:

- Used to support the proposed project
- Spent between grant award and end of the proposed WCB funded project term
- Secured prior to application submission

Where applicable, cost share agreements or funding assurances will be required prior to grant execution. Applicant must also indicate if any cost share is being used as match for other grants or entities and whether they intend to leverage other funding programs as match, if awarded.

5.0 PROPOSAL GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

Award of a grant does not guarantee an approved RCIS. Requirements of an RCIS as identified in Section 4 of the Guidelines (linked below) and of Fish and Game Code section 1854 are mandatory for an RCIS to be approved. Applicants should use the resources provided below during preparation of the proposal application.

- The most current Regional Conservation Investment Strategies Program Guidelines, posted to the [RCIS Program page](#)
- Geospatial information from [Areas of Conservation Emphasis \(ACE\)](#) and [Biogeographic Information and Observation System \(BIOS\)](#) tools

For questions regarding this PSN, please contact Scott McFarlin at scott.mcfarlin@wildlife.ca.gov. General information about the RCIS Program can be accessed on the [RCIS Program web page](#) or for questions regarding the RCIS Program, please contact the RCIS Program team at rcis@wildlife.ca.gov.