



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
Department of Fish and Wildlife



**2026 Endangered Species Conservation
and Recovery Grants (Traditional Section 6)
Proposal Solicitation Notice
February 26, 2026**

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is seeking high quality proposals for projects that will further the conservation and recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered wildlife (including terrestrial and freshwater invertebrates), plant, and freshwater fish species in the state¹. CDFW receives funding for this program through the federal Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act) which provides funding to states and territories for species and habitat conservation actions on non-federal lands. **States and territories (and by extension, applicants) must contribute a minimum non-federal cost share match of 25% of the total project cost.** While these grants are awarded to CDFW and project leads must be CDFW staff, CDFW welcomes collaboration with external partners who may be supported through contracts and payable grants.

Projects proposed for funding may involve management, research, monitoring, and outreach activities or any combination thereof. Additionally, applicants may apply for funding to monitor populations of candidate species, recently de-listed species, and certain [Eligible Unlisted Species](#). Eligible activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Enhancement or restoration of federally listed species' habitat
- Surveys and inventories of federally listed species and/or their habitats
- Introduction of federally listed species into suitable habitats within their historic range
- Propagation of federally listed animals and plants
- Research on the population health and status, genetics, and/or ecology of federally listed species

¹ Projects designed to benefit listed marine species and anadromous fish are funded under separate CDFW grant programs and are not eligible under this program with the exceptions of southern sea otter, sea turtles, and tidewater goby.

- Monitoring populations of federally listed and Eligible Unlisted Species (note: for Candidate, recently de-listed and Eligible Unlisted Species *only* monitoring projects are eligible)
- Public education and outreach activities such as coordination workshops with local landowners, when those activities address a specific threat to an ESA-listed species

Proposals should include clear and specific information about how the proposed work would address federal Recovery Plan goals and contribute to species recovery or prevent the need to list a species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). If no Recovery Plan or Recovery Outline exists for the target species, the proposal must address the conservation objectives of another United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-approved conservation assessment or strategy (e.g., 5-year Review, Species Status Assessment, etc.). Successful applications will demonstrate a direct conservation benefit to the species or its habitat.

Priority will be given to projects designed to have a direct impact on the recovery of federally listed species, prevent extinction of a federally listed species, or prevent the need to list a candidate species. Proposals that involve only research will be prioritized lower for funding relative to management proposals unless they will provide results that can be directly used to prevent listing, recover species, or improve current management strategies for a species. Proposals involving only public education and outreach must address an identified recovery action from a Recovery Plan and tangibly improve the species' recovery prospects.

For the 2026 grant cycle, CDFW will give priority to projects that address the following themes:

- Actions or assessments directly supporting the de-listing of currently federally listed species
- Projects benefitting species listed under both the ESA and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA)
- Projects that identify and implement on-the-ground land, water, and species management practices for the conservation and recovery of federally listed species
- Applied science that reduces the impacts of large high intensity wildfires, drought, and other climate-related stressors on federally listed species or promotes resilience to these stressors in federally listed species or their habitats
- Scientific investigations into the adaptive response of federally listed species to

changing environmental conditions, including prolonged drought, altered water and fire regimes, proliferation of non-native species, and habitat type conversion

- Activities and applied research in natural communities supporting multiple federally listed species

CDFW is responsible for managing native fish, wildlife, and plant species in California, and directs the use of federal Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund resources through this Endangered Species Conservation and Recovery Program (ESCRP) grant in coordination with USFWS. Authority for CDFW to administer the ESCRCP grant is granted through Fish and Game Code §1501.5. Anticipated total funding available for the 2026 grant cycle is estimated to be approximately \$2 million; however, the actual available funding depends on the federal budget allocation of Section 6 funds. Awards generally do not exceed \$400,000 in federal funds per project. Proposals requesting more than \$400,000 in grant funds should include a description of project alternatives with fewer objectives, a narrower scope, or break the project into multiple phases that could be funded with smaller awards.

Applicants are encouraged to review the [2026 USFWS Region 8 Grant Opportunity Notice](#) when it becomes available, and until that time, the [2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#).

SOLICITATION PROCEDURE

This document details the ESCRCP grant eligibility requirements, the proposal submission process, proposal review procedures, and other pertinent topics for the 2026 grant cycle. Potential applicants are encouraged to thoroughly read this Proposal Solicitation Notice (PSN) prior to deciding to submit a proposal.

In order to be considered for funding, applications must be submitted by a CDFW employee and include all required elements using the supplied templates linked on the [Section 6 Traditional Grant Information](#) intranet page by **5:00 PM Pacific Standard Time on April 6, 2026**. Project proposals must be uploaded to [O:\Federal Grants and Financial Assistance\Program Uploads\ Uploads\2026 TR Sec6 Uploads](#). Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered for funding.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION AND GRANT REQUIREMENTS

1. **All proposals require a CDFW staff lead.** CDFW may work closely with and provide funds from this program to eligible partners through payable grants or contracts, but a CDFW staff person must submit the proposal, lead the project and

administer any external agreements. Eligible partners include public agencies, state departments, colleges and universities, tribal governments, and nonprofit entities.

2. The proposed project must address the conservation of federally listed, candidate, recently de-listed or eligible unlisted Species that are managed by USFWS and CDFW under the Cooperative Agreement Between CDFW and the USFWS on Endangered and Threatened Fish, Wildlife, and Plants. **Projects targeting marine species and certain anadromous fish (exclusive of southern sea otters, sea turtles, and tidewater goby) are not eligible as those species are not managed by the USFWS.**
3. For candidate, Eligible Unlisted Species, and recently de-listed species only species monitoring projects are eligible.
4. **Proposals must be developed in consultation with USFWS biological staff** Proposals developed without consulting USFWS biologists will not be considered for funding.
5. Funded activities must be completed within the grant performance period which may not exceed 3 years from the project start date. "Pass through" projects providing funding to non-CDFW partner organizations must allow for time within the 3-year performance period for CDFW sponsors to execute and close out payable grants or contracts with the partner organization. Plan to allow at least 3 months between the USFWS grant award and the beginning of project work to execute the payable grant or contract, and at least 3 months prior to the end of the 3-year federal grant performance period to close out contracts and payable grants.
6. A minimum non-federal match of 25% of the total project cost is required and must be provided by applicants. **This means 25% of the sum of the federal amount requested and the non-federal match.** For example, a proposal requesting \$150,000 of federal funding must supply \$50,000 of match (25% of the \$200,000 total project budget). Match must be contributed during the grant term, and applicants must describe in the proposal how the minimum match will be provided, including the match source and amount. Match may include in-kind services of non-federal employees, volunteer contributions, use of donated equipment, or cash funding for the project from a non-federal source. If match will be provided by entities outside of CDFW, a letter on the entity's letterhead indicating their commitment to provide the described non-federal match contribution must be included with the application. Letter templates can be accessed by CDFW grant leads on the [Federal Assistance Services](#) (FAS) intranet site.
7. Grant funds cannot be used for federal compliance or to obtain any federal permits for the project.

8. Grant funds cannot be used to satisfy federal, state, or local regulatory requirements, including mitigation, avoidance, minimization, and monitoring.
9. Funds may be granted for EITHER the planning phase, OR the implementation phase of habitat restoration projects, but not both phases in the same grant cycle.
10. Landowner Permission: For work proposed to be performed on lands not owned or managed by the applicant, written proof of permission to access the land from the fee title owner or land management agency must be supplied. For projects involving multiple landowners, all landowners or appointed designees must provide written permission to access properties and carry out the project. Applicants for projects proposing on-the-ground habitat improvement must submit documentation showing that they have adequate tenure to the properties to be accessed, improved, or restored for at least 25 years. Proof of adequate land tenure includes, but is not necessarily limited to:
 - Fee title ownership
 - An easement or license agreement
 - Other agreement between the applicant and the fee title owner, or the owner of an easement on the property, sufficient to give the applicant adequate site control for the purposes of the project and long-term management
11. Environmental Compliance and Permitting: Activities funded under this program must comply with all applicable state and federal environmental laws and regulations, including California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), CESA, ESA, and other environmental permitting requirements. State Scientific Collecting Permits, CESA Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and federal ESA Recovery Permits must be current for staff identified to conduct work that “takes” or otherwise impacts state or federally listed species, and such authorizations must be in place prior to start of the grant performance period. The applicant is responsible for obtaining all permits necessary to carry out the proposed work. Applicants must identify the project’s expected permitting requirements and state which permits have been obtained and the process through which additional permits will be obtained, including the anticipated timeframe for obtaining each permit. The applicant must coordinate with CDFW prior to proposal submission if CDFW is anticipated to act as the CEQA lead agency for the project. Projects that fail to comply with this requirement will not be eligible for funding.
12. Data and Reports: CDFW’s intent is to improve the management of biological resources over time by incorporating adaptive management principles and processes into conservation planning and resource management. Recipients of ESCRP subgrants or contracts will be required to submit data and information in a

format acceptable to CDFW prior to close of the grant and may be required to enter into a formal Data Sharing Agreement with CDFW. Reports must be compliant with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If wildlife cameras, audio recording equipment, and/or similar equipment is used, raw images, audio files, and the corresponding data shall be submitted to CDFW on an annual basis. Recipients of a grant or contract will be provided with metadata (deployment and project information) and processed data (species identifications) templates by their grant or contract manager, which must be completed, and will work with the manager to determine the best way to transfer photo and sound files.

13. Projects involving translocation will be required to complete evaluations per [CDFW Departmental Bulletin 2017-05 Policy and Procedures for Conservation Translocations of Animals and Plants](#)) prior to implementation. Projects involving captive propagation will be required to complete evaluations per [CDFW Departmental Bulletin 2017-04 Captive Propagation of Fish, Wildlife and Plants for Conservation Purposes](#) prior to implementation. The evaluation(s) and/or plan must be approved by the appropriate Regional Managers, Branch Chiefs, and Deputy Directors prior to project implementation.

2026 GRANT CYCLE TIMELINE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Funds awarded pursuant to this solicitation will likely not be available to successful applicants until early 2027.

Timeframe	Key Steps
Feb. 25 – April 6, 2026	Public Solicitation Period
April 7 – April 9, 2026	Administrative review (pass/fail)
April 10 – May 15, 2026	Responsive proposals ranked by Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Management Advisory Committee (MAC). Director selects CDFW priority projects to forward to USFWS
May 18, 2026 – (TBD)	Applicants work with CDFW Federal Assistance Program to finalize federal grant application packages. Packages submitted to USFWS by the NOFO deadline.
Summer 2026	USFWS reviews and ranks proposals and announces grant awards
Fall 2026	CDFW works with applicants to prepare final Federal Assistance Packages for submission to USFWS
Fall 2026 – Spring 2027	USFWS and US DOI review and approve final Federal Assistance Packages and transmits funds to CDFW

<p>Spring 2027 – Summer 2027</p>	<p>For projects involving external partners, CDFW grant leaders work to execute any necessary payable grants or contracts.</p>
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REVIEW PROCESS

Administrative Review: An administrative review will determine if proposals are complete and meet all the requirements for technical review. This review will use a “Pass/Fail” scoring method based on the criteria presented below. Proposals which receive a “Fail” for one or more of the criteria will be deemed incomplete and will not be considered for funding under this PSN.

Criteria	Score
Proposal was received by the deadline	Pass/Fail
Subrecipients are eligible entities	Pass/Fail
Proposal is for an eligible activity and involves and eligible species	Pass/Fail
Proposal was developed in consultation with CDFW and USFWS staff	Pass/Fail
Applicant identifies CDFW grant sponsor and alternate	Pass/Fail
Proposal approved and signed by Branch Chief or Regional Manager	Pass/Fail
Proposal is responsive to this Solicitation’s priorities and represents an eligible project type	Pass/Fail
Proposal identifies source of matching non-federal funds or in-kind services totaling at least 25% of the total project cost	Pass/Fail
<p>All proposal components have been completed in the required formats, including all proposal forms and associated documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal Narrative using the 2026 template • Budget Worksheet using the 2026 template (must agree with amounts listed in the narrative) • DFW 869 Grant Transmittal Form • Proof of land ownership or landowner permission to conduct work (if applicable) • Match commitment letters (partners) and/or match certifications (CDFW) • Copies of any required permits that are already approved or issued for the project (if applicable) 	Pass/Fail

Technical Review: CDFW’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will evaluate and score proposals using these criteria:

1. Need:

Points from the single highest scoring criteria below awarded:

- If the project is urgently needed to avoid imminent extinction of a

federally listed or candidate species up to 20 points may be awarded in the Need category.

or,

- If the project is necessary to avoid a significant decline in a federally listed or candidate species' population, distribution, or range; or to avoid or reverse a significant reduction in habitat quality up to 15 points may be awarded in the Need category.

or,

- If the project generates scientific information needed to support recovery planning, management, and conservation actions of federally listed, candidate, or recently recovered species up to 15 points may be awarded in the Need category.

2. Relationship to Recovery Plan (or other USFWS-approved recovery document):

Points from the single highest scoring criteria below awarded:

- If the project is, or supports, the last action required to meet federal recovery plan goals up to 20 points may be awarded in this category.

or,

- If the project is the necessary next identified step from the species' federal recovery plan up to 20 points may be awarded in this category.

or,

- If the project implements a priority action from the species' federal recovery plan up to 18 points may be awarded in this category.

or,

- If the project implements an identified recovery action from an effort other than a federal recovery plan up to 15 points may be awarded in this category.

or,

- If the project implements an important recovery action, although the action has not been identified in an existing plan up to 10 points may be awarded in this category.

3. Project will increase the statewide population, distribution, or range of federally listed, candidate, at risk, or recently delisted species. (up to 10 points)

4. Project actively restores, enhances, manages, or preserves a substantial

portion of a federally listed, candidate, at risk, or recently delisted species' habitat. (up to 20 points)

5. Proposal demonstrates substantial benefits to multiple Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in the [State Wildlife Action Plan](#) (see Appendix C). (1 point per additional SGCN up to a maximum of 5 points)
6. Project objectives include the following “SMART” elements: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. (up to 10 points)
7. Proposal identifies appropriate, defensible, and achievable scientific and procedural methodology. (up to 10 points)
8. Project includes an education and/or outreach effort identified in an approved Recovery Plan AND the proposal demonstrates how the education or outreach will substantially benefit one or more federally listed, candidate, or recently delisted species. (up to 10 points)

Management Review: TAC proposal scores will be provided to CDFW’s Management Advisory Committee (MAC). The MAC will then rank the proposals based on a combination of considerations, including: TAC scores, responsiveness to the priorities identified in this PSN, project budget, cost share, and past performance of grantee (if applicable). The list of proposals recommended for funding is then based on a combination of TAC and MAC ranks, as well as other factors such as the final Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund apportionment to California, relative distribution of funds between priorities and geographic provinces, and other regional and statewide management considerations that extend beyond technical scientific and conservation benefit. The Director of CDFW, or his designee, has the discretion to adjust project ranks or recommended funding levels in order to address any conservation issues critical to the state at the time. A list of the highest ranked proposals is then conveyed to the USFWS.

USFWS Review and Award: (Note: USFWS Merit Review Criteria is subject to change. Please review the 2026 USFWS Grant Opportunity Notice when released for current year information.)

USFWS Regional Office Traditional Section 6 Program staff will review CDFW’s list of proposals to ensure they meet the eligibility requirements of the federal program and to confirm USFWS Field Office staff were consulted by project proponents to identify priority species recovery actions. The USFWS Regional Director then makes the final selection of proposals based upon Merit Review Criteria listed in the 2026 federal NOFO and consideration of CDFW’s ranking. The USFWS Regional Office forwards the selected grants to USFWS headquarters for approval. When approved, the USFWS Regional Director will issue a letter to CDFW announcing which

proposals have been awarded funding. The number of proposals selected will be determined by the size of the federal allotment and the budgets of the top ranked proposals.

USFWS MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA

- A. The listing status of the species. Federally listed species will be prioritized. Applications to monitor candidate, at-risk and recently delisted species will be a lower priority for funding consideration.
[Scoring = 5-20 points, where, for example, 5 = recently delisted species, 10 = candidate or at-risk species, 15 = threatened species, 20 = endangered species.]
- B. Whether or not the project will accomplish tasks identified in a final or draft Recovery Plan, Recovery Outline, or similar conservation strategy or management plan, or recovery activities identified in a Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS). Applications addressing listed species for which the Service has released a draft or final Recovery Plan and RIS should indicate how the project would address one or more of the recovery actions or activities identified and what priority level the actions are assigned. If a species does not have an approved recovery plan in place, the proposed activities should be described in the recovery outline, 5-year review recommendations, post-delisting monitoring plan, or other conservation or management plan for the species.
[Scoring = 0-15 points, where, for example, 0 = no contribution to identified actions, 7 = contributes to an identified action but additional projects are necessary to complete the task, 15=completes an identified action.]
- C. Importance/relevance and applicability of the application to the program goals. Reviewers will consider whether applications clearly identify project goals and objectives and whether those goals and objectives are applicable to conservation and recovery of threatened or endangered species, candidate or at-risk species, or delisted species. Reviewers will consider whether the application is designed to have a direct impact on species recovery as a result of implementation of management actions. If the application addresses the continuation of previously funded or ongoing work, reviewers should consider whether the applicant provides an adequate justification for the continuation of the same work (e.g., what benefit would additional results have?).
[Scoring: 1-35 points; where, for example, 1= no importance/relevance to the program goals or objectives, very limited potential to contribute to species recovery, no implementation of management actions: 15= moderately important/ relevant, reasonably likely to make some meaningful contribution to

species recovery; 20= moderately important/relevant, reasonably likely to make some meaningful contribution to species recovery; 35= extremely important/relevant, extremely likely to make a significant contribution to recovery of a threatened or endangered species, involves implementation of significant management actions, addresses a high priority recovery plan action.]

- D. Technical/scientific Merit. For applications including management and outreach, this criterion addresses whether the activities and approach described in the project narrative is appropriate for achieving the stated goals and objectives, result in successful execution of the project, and if the anticipated results can be achieved in the timeline specified. Reviewers will consider whether sufficient information is provided to evaluate the design of the project relative to the stated goals/objectives. For applications including research and monitoring, reviewers will consider the sufficiency of information to evaluate the project technically, the strengths and/or weaknesses of the technical design relative to securing productive results, and the inclusion of quality assurance considerations for data collected.

[Scoring: 1-20 points; where, for example, 1 = completely unsound or unlikely to meet the stated objectives, and information insufficient to evaluate project design; 10 = intermediately sound, or reasonably likely to meet the stated objectives; 20 = extremely sound and highly likely to meet the stated objectives.]

- E. Project costs. Reviewers will evaluate the budget to determine if it is sufficiently detailed, realistic and commensurate with the project needs and timeframe. Reviewers will consider whether sufficient detail was provided to evaluate how costs were estimated.

[Scoring: 1-10 points; where, for example, 1 = unrealistic and lacking sufficient detail; 5 = adequately detailed and realistic; 10 = extremely detailed and realistic.]

Final Approval Process: Once the final list of projects to be awarded is announced by the USFWS, CDFW prepares a Federal Assistance Application (FAA) package for submittal to USFWS. CDFW grant sponsors are responsible for managing the grant from start to finish, including all sub-grants or contracts. The CDFW grant sponsor will work with any payable grant or contract awardees and CDFW's Federal Assistance Section to prepare the required elements of the FAA. At this time in the process, the grant proposal and budget may be updated to reflect current project status, current state overhead and salary rates, and the approved funding level; however, significant changes in scope and funding are not allowed. The FAA is then submitted to USFWS for their review and approval. Once the grant is approved and funding is obligated by USFWS, CDFW commences processing any payable grant or contract associated

with the project. Funding is not available for use by non-CDFW applicants until a payable grant or contract is fully executed.

Proposal Forms and Templates

Download [2026 Traditional Section 6 Narrative Template](#) and [2026-2029 Multi-Year Budget Template](#) from the Federal Assistance Services Section 6 Traditional Grant Information intranet page:

<https://intranet.wildlife.ca.gov/portal/BusinessOperations/FederalAssistance/Section6TraditionalGrantInformation/tabid/2768/Default.aspx>

For questions regarding this PSN or the ESCRП program, please contact Daniel Applebee at Daniel.Applebee@wildlife.ca.gov .