

Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Kathryn Charlton

Initial Selection Panel Review

0083

Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Agricultural Water Management Council

Applicant amount requested: \$197,466

Fund This Amount: \$0

Panel Recommendation:

The proposal lacks key information including: who are the biologists performing the work, what is the experience of the proponents, and what is the project's ability to develop quantitative numbers. Will this project be developing a protocol (s) that already exists? The Panel questions where the project would apply geographically and what the incentive for farmers to participate were. Other concerns included the project's lack of performance measures and reporting and monitoring data. Without an identified need, the Panel was unclear about the use of the proposed protocols.

The panel therefore recommends that this project not be funded.

Do Not Fund

Technical Panel Review

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

Amount Requested: \$197,466

Panel Rating:

Poor - Serious deficiencies.

Panel Summary

The Panel found this proposal to have severe deficiencies. While the concept was good, the project's justification was insufficient in regard to the complex of biotic and abiotic processes involved. The proposal did not adequately demonstrate the ability of the proposed project staff to implement the project. On the positive side, the proposal contains whole-farm planning and farmer engagement in management and monitoring activities. However, there is nothing to suggest that farmers would be motivated or interested in implementing the proposed monitoring activities. The literature citation section of the proposal suggested a lack of insight and research into ongoing and related projects in other farming regions. As it is written, the feasibility and transfer value of the proposal was deemed low. A more limited and focused project based on this proposal could provide a useful addition to California's knowledge base if it is informed by related work taking place in other parts of the country. The Minnesota "Monitoring Toolbox," "IOWATER" program in Iowa, and the "River Friendly Farm Plan" and "Citizen Science" in Kansas could provide some useful templates.

External Technical Review #1

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

Amount Requested: \$197,466

Goals

Rating	very good
Comments	The project goals and objectives are very clearly stated; however, the need for accomplishing these goals is not sufficiently articulated in my mind. While effective measurement and monitoring are important, this project does not necessarily connect project goals with on-the-ground environmental improvement.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	fair
Comments	I found the proposal to be difficult to follow. While I think the effort described in the proposal has merit, I found the description of the conceptual model to be lacking in terms of identifying specific needs and concrete actions. Furthermore, the conceptual model does not articulate any hypothesis (e.g., that conservation farming practices do have environmental benefits).

Approach

Rating	very good
Comments	

External Technical Review #1

The proposal lays out a well-organized sequence of tasks that seems appropriate to accomplishing the stated objectives. However, by stating that "grower participation in the Project is not essential to the Project's completion...", I am concerned that the proponents are not placing sufficient emphasis on on-the-ground implementation of conservation farming practices. Grower participation is essential in my mind, partly because growers will have some sense of the economic costs and benefits of these practices. Furthermore, grower participation is critical in designing monitoring systems that can be effectively and economically implemented by growers. Finally, I am concerned that there is no mention of landowner confidentiality. If the monitoring system developed by this effort includes things like increases (or decreases) in endangered species, landowners will likely want some sort of protection in order to participate in the project. NRCS and UC Cooperative Extension have models for working with landowners while protecting private information. I would have preferred to see some reference to this issue.

Feasibility

Rating	very good
Comments	The project does seem feasible, given the sequence of the tasks described in the proposal.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	good
Comments	The ultimate measurement of success for this project will be whether growers use the monitoring tools designed by the AWMC. While the documentation of the

External Technical Review #1

	benefits of conservation farming practices may be a useful education product, these benefits have been documented by other efforts (at least qualitatively). I would have preferred to see some reference to these past efforts (for example, a publication developed by the California Winegrape Growers Association).
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Proposed Outcomes

Rating	very good
Comments	Depending on the extent of grower participation, I feel that this project is likely to generate useful information and will encourage growers to implement similar practices. However, if the project relies too heavily on agency and academic expertise (while failing to work directly with growers), the products will not be as useful to growers or to agencies.

Capabilities

Rating	very good
Comments	The project team appears to be well-qualified and experienced in managing this type of project.

Cost-Benefits

Rating	fair
Comments	The budget may be reasonable, but I was unable to determine the amount in each budget category in the material presented. For example, I know that the budget for Task 2 is \$11,150, but I have no way of knowing how much is proposed for staffing, contractors, supplies, meetings, etc. To fully evaluate the costs and benefits of the proposal, I would need to see these types of budget categories broken out.

External Technical Review #1

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	good
Comments	While I think this proposal has merits, I am concerned by the lack of detail in the budget. Furthermore, I found the proposal somewhat confusing. This lack of clarity concerns me in terms of grower implementation.

External Technical Review #2

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

Amount Requested: \$197,466

Goals

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The proposed project aim is to provide farmers with technical assistance to monitor and document implementation of conservation-based farming practices. The proposal is generally vague and often inconsistent in elaborating tasks and approach under the broad technical assistance goal. In places the proposal states that technical assistance will be provided to measure and monitor -implementation- of practices, and in other places the proposal states that -conservation effects and outcomes- and -performance of conservation farming- will be the product of data collection protocols. The endpoints or performance standards are to be obtained from ERP and CALFED so this key aspect is undefined. An example cited describes relating agricultural actions to increases in species abundance, and another invokes fall flooding and the new habitats being created. Both examples imply quite sophisticated analyses likely beyond the capabilities of involved farmers. I conclude that the proposal authors do not realize the challenges in their higher aims, and practical constraints will force them to fall back to implementation documenting. At this level, the project would not provide much advancement over farming practice reporting rather than achieve farmer monitoring of restoration progress.</p>

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	good
Comments	The method used to select farmers and farm study cases is not given. Two conceptual approach charts are provided, but they mainly identify project tasks and linkages. No specific hypotheses are given in the context of testing - the proposed project would be a collection of case studies (e.g., farms). A central element - restoration goals and measures - would be obtained from the ERP/CALFED as part of the project work. An explanation how and if this is feasible is not provided. Aside from studying literature and interviews/discussions, the data and understanding to link farming practices to restoration gains is not provided.

Approach

Rating	good
Comments	Only generalities are given for how information will be obtained, synthesized, and organized. The AWMC has conducted similarly aimed efforts for water conservation and efficiency documentation. The new proposal portrays monitoring and documenting restoration progress as similar to water conservation and use efficiency. I do not believe the two endeavors are close on scope, complexity, and the technical expertise needed. Thus I feel the proposed approach is too simplistic to achieve the higher aims described.

Feasibility

Rating	good
Comments	I judge the likelihood of achieving the more ambitious aims as poor. As noted above, measuring and documenting restoration progress is much more challenging than documenting conservation practices. I expect the project

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	would end up addressing the implementation of conservation practices and not their success in advancing restoration. It seems feasible to achieve the implementation documentation but this may not satisfy needs of farmers and the ERP/CALFED.
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Performance Evaluation

Rating	fair
Comments	Many of the above comments address performance documentation issues. A key need for success and project performance is knowing the restoration benchmarks or documentation expectations. This is not given but instead will come from meetings and discussions in the work. Something could have been provided to show proper information will emerge in the work.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	good
Comments	The anticipated products would be valuable to farmers and the conservation agencies. However, feasibility of attaining them is a concern. The proposed communication and extension tools - reports to databases - could be good if knowledge and inputs support their content.

Capabilities

Rating	good
Comments	The AWMC has done a similar type of farmer assistance project on much more narrow and well understood topic - water conservation and use efficiency. I sense the proposal authors assume ecosystem restoration will be similar in the scale of challenge. This suggests they do not appreciate the technical challenge and may not

External Technical Review #2

	be ready to solve easily anticipated problems.
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Cost-Benefits

Rating	good
Comments	This is a costly project if only the lower aims -documenting farm practice implementation- are achieved. However, if protocols for farmer measured restoration progress can be delivered it would be a very good deal in terms of cost and gains. It is not clear what scale of accomplishment to expect.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	good
Comments	The proposed project aim is to provide farmers with technical assistance to monitor and document conservation-based farming practices. The proposal is generally weak on elaborating tasks and approach. A central element - restoration goals and measures - would be obtained from the ERP/CALFED as part of the project work. An explanation how and if this is feasible is not provided. Aside from studying literature and interviews/discussions, the data and understanding to link farming practices to restoration gains is not explained. At the lower level of suggested accomplishment - documenting practice use - the project would not provide much advancement over farming practice reporting. I feel the proposed approach is too simplistic to achieve the higher aims described. The proposed communication and extension tools - reports to databases - could be good if knowledge and inputs support their content.

External Technical Review #3

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

Amount Requested: \$197,466

Goals

Rating	excellent
Comments	The clearly stated objectives show how this project will achieve ERP goals as it relates to agriculture and ecosystem restoration. Implementation of this project will allow farmers and CBDA to better understand the results of actions taken within agricultural landscapes that help the bay-delta.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	very good
Comments	<p>The conceptual model that was presented does a good job at explaining how the improvement projects within the agricultural landscape (and how this project) would assist the environment, farmers, and CBDA.</p> <p>The applicant does not explicitly state a hypothesis that will be tested. The project is to develop the monitoring system for agricultural improvement projects. The applicant's unstated hypothesis is that this system will be a benefit to all users and meet many needs. This hypothesis will NOT be tested. It could be tested with follow up surveys.</p>

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	<p>The applicant does assumes that full-scale rollout of the proposed monitoring system is the best approach. A pilot project could be helpful.</p> <p>The rating given is Very Good, because of the stong justification of the overall project within a solid conceptual model.</p>
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Approach

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The approach is clearly described and understandable. The overall approach is reasonable. However, too little effort is allocated to workshops with user groups, there is too little outreach after the project is complete to assist in training farmers, and finally a pilot project would be a useful task.</p> <p>This project has utility to all aspects of CBDA. If the proposed system does become practical and consistent as the objectives suggest this project would also be very useful to farmers.</p>

Feasibility

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The project approach is technically feasible. It is highly likely that the project would be completed as proposed. However, the overall effectiveness would be enhanced by the following elements (which could be considered missing): a sort, early pilot project to test a prototype system; more workshops with the farming community; and more training.</p>

Performance Evaluation

Rating	excellent
Comments	

External Technical Review #3

	<p>This proposal received an excellent rating not because it will test the unstated hypothesis within the proposal, but that this project will allow for better management within agricultural landscapes. This project is proposing to develop a monitoring system for most of the agricultural actions proposed by CBDA. This will be highly useful.</p>
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Proposed Outcomes

<p>Rating</p>	<p>excellent</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>If the objectives are achieved the outcomes could be of excellent value to farmers, CBDA, and the environment.</p>

Capabilities

<p>Rating</p>	<p>good</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>It is not clear from the proposal that there is sufficient expertise within the two people assigned to this project to complete the effort. There is no resume provided by the soil scientist on the team. The project manager received a BS four years ago and may not have enough practical experience in all of the necessary fields to produce an excellent product. With that said, the project manager has worked on similar projects for the same group within the agricultural community.</p> <p>A larger team of experts should have been included on the project, including a statistician.</p>

Cost-Benefits

<p>Rating</p>	<p>good</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>The budget for the proposed work is adequate and reasonable, however this project should have a larger</p>

External Technical Review #3

budget and more tasks. These tasks could include an early pilot project, more workshops with farmers, and more training on the system (at a minimum fully train Ag Extension field agents).

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	very good
Comments	This is an excellent project with a clear nexus to CBDA needs. Overall feasibility could be enhanced by increasing the budget and tasks. A good product could arise from this project, but a truly CBDA foundational monitoring program will require more training and more interaction with farmers on a shorter timeframe.

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Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

This proposal attempts to meet the ERP goals by identifying agricultural land use and conservation practice impacts that best match program objectives to implement water use efficiency improvements and foster adoption of wildlife friendly agricultural practices. The method of implementation is to catalog and interpret existing information and perform outreach to growers who would implement the practices and perform the monitoring. While voluntary participation by stakeholders is a good fit for working with growers, it is difficult to determine from the proposal whether the information collected would meet CalFed science standards. The applicants do not clearly define the scope of the monitoring framework development that is proposed. A single example of a BMP, reduction of tailwater, and its impacts is given. The proposal states that "AWMC will identify the potential effects by reviewing pertinent literature, conducting interviews (NRCS and universities), and surveying the AWMC membership". The important step of determining the appropriate metrics, community and habitat indicators, or surrogates of effects is not discussed at all. The process of refining the protocols over time, which has proven to be the challenge in the field of effects measurement, is also neglected. If a complete analysis, verification and refinement of monitoring methods were to be done for the universe of agricultural practices, one would expect to see more discussion of the work and a larger budget than presented by this proposal.

AWCM proposes to develop a framework that will address not just grower monitoring needs but also agency performance monitoring needs. Such an inclusive scope is quite ambitious

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but the cursory treatment given to effectiveness monitoring in this Proposal is no match for such a broad scope. The low budget and brief discourse on measurement methodologies suggest that the applicants do not have a firm grasp of the enormous commitment to biological monitoring that would be required to validate methods to capture the status and trends of species and habitats that would be necessary components of the monitoring framework. While it may be true that stock methods exist and can be applied to the domain of habitats encompassed by agricultural conservation activities, discussion of such an integration of methods with ag practices should be presented in the proposal. The proposal would be more convincing if the problem area and work were better constrained and described.

In the task breakout section of the Proposal there is a dangling task that may be a computer formatting affect or simply an omission on the part of the applicant. On p.6, we see the heading "Develop Monitoring and evaluation protocols"; and there is a brief description of why such work is important; but, there is no substantive description that provides the reviewer with a sense of how the protocols will be developed and at what funding level. That the most crucial component of this project is assigned neither a task number nor a budget amount is a concern for this reviewer.

If the proposed work could successfully predict the impacts to ecosystem restoration due to the implementation of specific conservation practices, then species recovery objectives would benefit from project funding. Stated ERP water use efficiency objectives might best be served by other work which AWMC performs under other funding arrangements.

In its present form the proposal does not appear to have the potential to contribute significantly to regional restoration goals. Perhaps the applicants could resubmit a modified and more detailed scope of work if there are resubmit provisions in the guidelines for this grant.

It may be possible that a "survey, categorize and interpret" approach to ag conservation practices impacts on habitat

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restoration would have some benefit to the ERP, but more information on the scope of such work is needed.

notes:

The proposal describes a large multi-region project. The project would best work in a limited scope, but this is not defined.

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Conducting studies to identify conservation practices consistent with the concept of wildlife friendly agriculture is a priority for the ERP. Such studies are important to Region III but it is a serious omission that the other ongoing studies and programs that deal with wildlife friendly ag in this region are not explicitly acknowledged. The proposal makes no mention of other project performance work, such as that developed by CalFed, DFG and the Water Board, as a resource for the continuing development and adaptation of effectiveness measurement concepts for ERP. Neither are other regional based grower certification programs with a longer track record acknowledged. Fish Friendly Farming, though largely focused on viticultural operations, very effectively covers a range of conservation practices that would likely be included in the cataloguing proposed by this project. The CALFed EWA planning and implementation would also seem to figure prominently in any monitoring framework for ag conservation practices. It is surprising to see no direct mention of the EWA program which would certainly have some bearing on ag conservation practices and impacts to species and habitats.

The proposal discusses formation of a team to include agency representatives and has an outreach component. Projects aspiring to be a model for restoration investments should use the grant proposal to clearly articulate the services to be rendered. AWMC could have given more emphasis to describing

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the coordination mechanisms that lead to the development and distribution of conservation practices and monitoring protocols.

notes:

Other monitoring protocols administered by DFG, NRCS, and RCD are not referenced or acknowledged here.

3. Local circumstances.

The proposal is written in very general, workplan or outline format. A set of assumptions, outcomes and processes specific to the work of developing a monitoring framework related to local conservation practices and habitat was not presented by this project. How are protocols selected or reworked? How are practices assessed? How will agency and grower coordination mechanisms work?

The proponents have a history of working locally through central valley water districts. They would probably be well suited to implementing the type of voluntary participation in implementing wildlife friendly practices and self monitoring. However, the proposal does not specify the level of technical performance sought for the monitoring. Collection of baseline data for concurrently funded projects is mentioned. The proposal does mention that the protocols would include a recommendation that growers hold off project implementation until one year of baseline data has been collected. In general, scheduling baseline monitoring for projects concurrent with the proposed work would seem problematic given the technical nature of determining species and habitat status and trends.

A key assumption underlying feasibility is not discussed in sufficient detail. While AWMC has a good track record with its water plans with districts, the willingness of the growers to participate is conveyed by lone statement that growers will do

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the work if they have the protocols and the forms. Is that claim substantiated by some initial outreach done by the proponents or is it just an opinion? What are the incentives for them to change practices? To then monitor the effects (should the project come up short of performance criteria)?

The proposal does not define the work adequately. If the proposal is for a broad cataloging of practices and performance assessment, then it is underfunded and not staffed by enough field and scientific staff. If it is less ambitious, the scope must be better constrained by discussion of local circumstances. As written, the project feasibility is questionable.

notes:

The requested funding does not seem adequate to address all elements included in the proposal.

4. Local involvement.

AWMC is a stakeholder based organization that could likely transfer its operational model from its central valley based center of operations to Region III. The public outreach provisions are adequate. The outreach tasks are the best developed portion of the proposal, and interestingly, one of the least costly.

However lack of mention of initial outreach is a concern. Reviewers have no way to gauge grower commitment to what could presumably be years of intensive biological monitoring.

notes:

Public involvement takes place early and seeks to involve stakeholders at an early point in the project.

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5. Local value.

While information on the effectiveness and impacts of ag conservation practices is an ERP priority, there are other projects underway in the region that have come a long way in in terms of identification of practices.

Quantification of effects is an ongoing need. Region III is already involved in some documentation of effects for its watershed projects. If this project were funded, the value to the Region would be directly proportional to the degree of coordination with agency protocols and data needs. However the proposal does not do a good job of describing the complex nature of developing a monitoring framework and states that the direct participation of agency is not essential to the task.

The highest value to the region would be a project that convinced large numbers of growers to make lasting commitments to significantly improved ag land use practices. Ideally extensive monitoring and reporting on restoration and practice outcomes would be performed by trained biologists. That is not to foreclose the possibility that motivated growers could not work with simplified protocols specific to their operation. However the value, in analytical terms, of the volunteer, self-monitoring effort should be questioned. If the outreach is targeted at growers that are already motivated to participate and are convinced of the value of using conservation practices the benefit of having growers onboard for continuing updates of practice and effectiveness information would seem to have been obtained without the additional expense of this project. More discussion of the outreach would strengthen the proposal. Perhaps it would be more cost effective to spend a greater effort on conversion of practices and recruit monitoring volunteers from a smaller subset of growers.

The proposal should refine its scope to be of value to the region. Opportunities to coordinate with agency and other ongoing projects should be specified. The description of

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development of the monitoring framework is inadequate and suggests there is a low likelihood that valuable monitoring information would result from funding this project. The most likely deliverable would be a partially completed plan for monitoring. Actual implementation funding is not sought and not described in even a conceptual context. Such implementation would require substantial funding commitment and a program level commitment to coordinate with the ERP. A funding commitment to such phased, comprehensive work would have to be based on more information than presented in that proposal.

notes:

This project has the potential to be very useful, but the content is difficult to assess without further information on the proposed process to identify conservation practices, impacts and effectiveness indicators.

6. Applicant history.

The website for AWMC has information on the entities mission and accomplishments. It has assisted with the development of numerous water district farm water management plans. It seems that continued funding for AWMC's beyond 2005 is uncertain. Whether this is a reflection on the performance of their work or not can only be guessed.

notes:

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

The proposal is strong on process and public involvement, but does not contain enough information on the scope of a monitoring framework. Other issues include the scientific

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quality and transparency of data collected by participating growers. In addition, there are existing monitoring protocols already available in the Bay Region.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Fair

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

Medium

notes:

Delta Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

Project does not adequately reflect understanding about current priorities and implementation of ERP. Unclear about scope of project. Is this for all growers or for growers who are involved with their PSP? Project also does not adequately reflect understanding of issues and dynamics surrounding conservation in the field. "Growers will participate in monitoring programs if they are given clear and concise directions of what to monitor and how". Given my experience, I would say that growers will participate if they have an incentive or are required.

notes:

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Project does not continue or expand upon prior restoration actions. Project is to build database and protocols.

notes:

3. Local circumstances.

Appears feasible.

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notes:

4. Local involvement.

Does not demonstrate local partnerships or support. Project wants to partner with "CALFED and state".

notes:

Local involvement is weak.

5. Local value.

Relatively low local value. CALFED has other tracking monitoring, added value from this effort would be relatively low. PI has been involved with WUE but has no track record with wildlife friendly farming or CALFED WLS.

notes:

6. Applicant history.

No knowledge.

notes:

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

This project is unclear in scope. It appears to be of poor

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applicability to CalFed and to the needs of growers. The applicant expresses little understanding of the ERP. The proposed work is weakly linked to other restoration activities and would not include an on-the-ground component. It is not clear what specific goals will be addressed by this work or what questions they intend to answer through their database development. There is no supporting literature review and their proposal does not reflect understanding of science or local restoration concerns.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Poor

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

Low

notes:

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

Project would not directly contribute to the CALFED and/or ERP goals and objectives but could be argued that it would indirectly contribute by providing a consistent monitoring protocol and increased understanding of the benefits of conservation-based farming.

notes:

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Does expand on past and current restoration investments from the standpoint of developing a mechanism to evaluate the benefits of those investments. Could be a model of sorts that would apply to future work in the area (standard template for conservation-based farm monitoring).

notes:

3. Local circumstances.

Project is probably feasible but there may be problems in drawing any consistent and accurate conclusions regarding the effects of conservation-based farming.

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notes:

Not clear how the proposal corresponds to farmers or ecological restoration.

4. Local involvement.

Public outreach is acceptable. Not clear how applicant will get landowner buy in so as to monitor and evaluate C based farm benefits. Seems somewhat theoretical (i.e. not sure how real data will be gathered to document benefits and validate the monitoring protocols).

notes:

Outreach activities are not well developed.

5. Local value.

Again, theoretical. If the monitoring protocol and the results produced are valid, then the project seemingly would be of value.

notes:

Not clear what area the project covers, and not well-integrated with regional restoration activities.

6. Applicant history.

I have no knowledge about past performance of this applicant.

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notes:

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

The panel felt that an additional, isolated layer of performance monitoring measures, and the development of standard monitoring protocols, are not needed for regional restoration projects. The geographic focus of the proposal is not clear.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Fair

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

Low

notes:

San Joaquin Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

This project will contribute to understanding the relative effectiveness of different conservation-based farming practices and systems, and their contribution to larger restoration efforts. This project will help answer the question, "are these practices really beneficial and do they move the needle toward accomplishing the ERP goals?" Quite frankly, if the practices do not make a contribution toward accomplishing the ERP goals, then farmers will not adopt them. Therefore, it is essential to assess the ability of the listed practices to accomplish the ERP goals. This grant request addresses the evaluation of the conservation practices and does it using the adaptive management model. It will further the understanding of the relationship between conservation-based farming activities and restoration efforts. This project is also designed to provide growers appropriate and consistent measuring tools and procedures to prove agricultural contributions to CALFED projects.

notes:

2. Links with other restoration actions.

The application did not indicate a specific region, so the answer to this question is not clear to me. However, CALFED will commit Prop. 50 grant funds to projects that assist growers in integrating agricultural activities with ecosystem restoration. This project seems to largely include the

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activities under Prop 50 grant funds, with the intent to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects.

notes:

Farmers are already implementing conservation practices; it is important to make these actions more transparent with the use of tangible performance measurements.

3. Local circumstances.

Did not detect any.

notes:

An impediment may be lack of clear direction (performance standards) from CALFED.

Panel members also questioned if the proposers have the skills and expertise to accomplish their stated objectives.

4. Local involvement.

The Ag Water Management Council has the network and connections to be involved "locally and get participation by farmers and other landowners, county ag commissioners resource conservation districts , ag extension, farm organizations and other community organization, etc.

notes:

This project allows for grower input/buy-in. Provides an important feedback mechanism to answer effectiveness and

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ability to meet objectives.

5. Local value.

Agricultural activities will be implemented and replicated if they contribute to the local and regional environmental and economic sustainability. This project is designed to determine whether the conservation practices contribute at this level.

notes:

The project could build a bridge between farmers and CALFED but Deliverables are difficult to assess from the proposal.

6. Applicant history.

They have not applied for an ERP grant before, but do know that Mike Wade is respected in the agricultural community, as is his organization. He has the network to connect with growers to get this project done.

notes:

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

The panel feels that the development of performance measures to assess farming conservation practices is imperative. These measures are in development by CALFED and DFG, but there is no indication of when these might be published. In many contexts, farmers have little incentive to implement conservation activities as there is no uniform institutional yardstick with which to acknowledge or assess their efforts.

The proposal offers an adaptive management approach, informed

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by unique input from the growers themselves, to monitor farming conservation practices. The proposing organization is a group that farmers trust. The selection panel acknowledges that the low funding request of this proposal is a good value in comparison to the large potential effects throughout the region and in the broader scope of the PSP's objectives. If the project could expedite the completion of performance targets and/or measures by CALFED and tie the agricultural community to restoration activities, this proposal would be a high regional priority. The proposal does clearly delineate what the end product would be, and how the performance measures would be formulated.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Fair

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

Very High

notes:

Environmental Compliance Review

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Is compliance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) required for this project?

No.

2. Is compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) required for this project?

Yes.

3. Does this project qualify for an Exemption or Exclusion under CEQA and NEPA, respectively?

Yes.

Comments

Research

4. Did the applicant correctly identify if CEQA/NEPA compliance was required?

Yes.

5. Did the applicant correctly identify the correct CEQA/NEPA document required for the project?

Yes.

6. Has the CEQA/NEPA document been completed?

Does not apply.

7. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough time to complete the document before the project start date?

Does not apply.

8. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough funds to complete it?

Does not apply.

Environmental Compliance Review

9. Did the applicant adequately identify other legal or regulatory compliance issues (Incidental Take permits, Scientific Collecting permits, etc.) that may affect the project?

Yes.

10. Does the proposal include written permission from the owners of any private property on which project activities are proposed or, if specific locations for project activities are not yet determined, is it likely that permission for access can be obtained?

Yes.

Comments:

Will work with willing participants.

11. Do any of these issues affect the project's feasibility due to significant deficiencies in planning and/or budgeting for legal and regulatory compliance or access to property?

No.

Budget Review

Proposal Number: 0083

Proposal Name: Conservation Based Farming Practices Monitoring and Evaluation Project

Applicant Organization: Agricultural Water Management Council

1. Does the proposal include a detailed budget for each year of the requested support?

No.

2. Does the Budget Form include a detailed budget for each task identified on the Task and Deliverables Form and in the proposal text?

No.

If no, please explain:

Just the summary sheet was provided. No detail sheets.

3. Are the costs associated with each task and deliverable reasonable costs for performing the services?

No.

If no, please explain:

Could not evaluate, hours and rates were not provided.

4. Is each person (employee, consultant, subcontractor, etc.) identified on the Personnel Form also included on the Budget Form?

No.

If no, please explain:

No detail provided.

5. Are there estimated hours and an associated hourly rate of compensation for each person identified on the Personnel, Tasks and Deliverables, and Budget forms?

No.

If no, please explain:

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Budget Review

No detail provided.

6. Does the budget include the benefit rate for all personnel identified on the Personnel and Budget forms?

No.

If no, please explain:

Not enough detail to evaluate.

7. Are the proposed labor rates comparable to state rates?

No.

If no, please explain:

No rates provided.

8. Is more than 25% of the work proposed to be performed by subcontractors?

No.

If yes, what is the exact percentage to be performed by subcontractors?

Not enough detailed info. to evaluate.

9. Are project management expenses appropriately budgeted?

No.

If no, please explain:

Not enough detail to evaluate.

10. Does the proposal clearly state the type of expenses encompassed in indirect rates or overhead costs? Are indirect rates, if used, appropriately applied?

No.

If no, please explain:

No info. provided.

11. Does the proposal adequately explain major expenses? Are the labor rates and other charges proposed reasonable in relation to current state rates?

Budget Review

No.

If no, please explain:

No info. provided.

12. For equipment \geq \$5,000, was a separate worksheet filled out?

Please note: No overhead or indirect rate charges are allowed on the equipment purchases

No.

13. Is the purpose for all travel clearly represented in either the proposal itself, or in the Tasks and Deliverable Form?

Please note: Recurring travel costs for a specific task or subtask may be combined into one entry on the Budget Form, but the number of trips and cost for each trip must be clearly represented.

No.

14. Are travel and per diem at rates specified by the California Department of Personnel Administration for similar employees?

No.

15. Are other agencies contributing or likely to contribute a share of the projects? costs?

Yes.

If yes, when sufficient information is available, please total the amount of matching funds likely to be provided:

Not enough detail provided to evaluate.

16. If the applicant identified cost share or matching funds, are they also described in the text of the proposal?

No.

17. Does the applicant take exception to the standard grant agreement's terms and conditions? If yes, are the approaches the applicant proposes to address these issues a reasonable starting point for negotiation a grant agreement?

Budget Review

No.

If no, please explain:

No exception is taken to the std T's &C's.

18. Are there other budget issues or "red flags" that warrant consideration?

No.

19. Provide revised amount requested based upon your review:

\$