**Section 1523.110 Review of** **Ecosystem Project Grant** **Applications**

a) Applications meeting the requirements set forth in Section 1523.100 will be provided to the appropriate Ecosystem Partnership for the LPC to review, score and provide recommendations for funding according to procedures outlined in the Ecosystem Partnership bylaws. The LPC shall evaluate Ecosystem Project Grant applications based upon: criteria as set forth in the definition of Program Guidance; and goals and objectives of the Ecosystem Partnership including the Vision Plan. In the review, each LPC will provide a score to the Department based upon a consistent statewide numeric standard procedure provided by the Department.

b) Department staff will also make recommendations for funding to the Director based on a review process and the collective evaluation of the following:

1) The ratio of matching dollars and value of in-kind services to the requested Conservation 2000 dollars.

2) The project's Natural Resource Evaluation. The Natural Resource Evaluation is designed to assess the relative natural resource benefit of a project using the criteria set forth in the definition of Program Guidance within each of the 6 Ecosystem Project categories: Habitat, Research, Outreach/Education, Resource Economics, Planning and Land Acquisition/Easement.

A) The Natural Resource Evaluation for Habitat and Land Acquisition/Easement projects will take into consideration:

i) Appropriateness of the project as reflected by the project's relationship to existing plans, Department policies and objectives, and current scientific understanding.

ii) The duration of the habitat protection or improvement practice, and potential cumulative benefits in relation to previously funded practices.

iii) The ecological ramifications of a project. For example, use of exotic species detracts from the ecological benefits of a project; use of native species enhances the ecological benefits of a project; multi-species benefits increase overall ecological benefits; and projects that address restoration of ecosystem functions offer the greatest benefits.

iv) Relative cost effectiveness.

v) Follow-up monitoring of effectiveness of a project. Projects including follow-up monitoring will receive greater consideration.

B) The Natural Resource Evaluation for Research projects will take into consideration:

i) The degree to which the proposed research helps formulate or advance partnership goals and any existing watershed management goals or plans.

ii) Validity of the research design and methodology.

iii) Expertise of the investigators.

iv) Appropriateness of the budget, given the scope and time line for the project.

v) Availability of the research results. The results of the investigation must be made available to the Ecosystem Partnership and the Department, at a minimum, in a timely manner after completion of the research.

C) The Natural Resource Evaluation for Outreach/Education projects will take into consideration:

i) Relationship to a resource management plan or, in the absence of a plan, the Department's educational and/or resource management goals.

ii) The breadth of the audience to be reached.

iii) The quality of the educational materials to be produced or utilized in the outreach effort.

iv) Measures included to ensure technical accuracy of written materials and consistency with stated Department policies.

v) Efforts to assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

D) The Natural Resource Evaluation for Resource Economics projects will take into consideration:

i) The relationship between the proposed project and the Ecosystem Partnership's goals.

ii) The relationship between project cost and direct economic benefits to be generated.

iii) Validity of models and statistical techniques employed in forecasting economic benefits.

iv) The potential applicability of project results to other Ecosystem Partnerships.

E) The Natural Resource Evaluation for Planning projects will take into consideration:

i) Quality and validity of the planning effort with respect to the diversity and breadth of stakeholder involvement.

ii) Quality of the planning effort with respect to the degree the natural resource inventory information (particularly the quality, quantity and distribution of native habitat information) has been inventoried and incorporated as green infrastructure and a framework for planning.

iii) The relationship between the Ecosystem Partnership's currently proposed planning effort and its past planning efforts and past performance. (What was the success of past planning? Is this planning effort building upon earlier planning; i.e., Vision Plan?)

iv) The potential applicability to other Ecosystem Partnerships as a planning process.

3) The project's Ecosystem Partnership Performance Evaluation. The Ecosystem Partnership Performance Evaluation is based upon the relationship of the proposed project to the Ecosystem Partnership's:

A) Stated goals and any published watershed plan endorsed by the Ecosystem Partnership.

B) Planning efforts that meet the standards of Section 1523.60.

C) Use of volunteers (whose efforts have not been included as in-kind match) in implementation.

D) Participation of multiple partners with a high level of coordination between partners.

E) Past grant performance, if the applicant has previously received funding under this program.

F) Potential for educational interpretation of amenities to be developed as part of the project.

G) Consistency of the application with the Program Guidance.

H) Ability to integrate research and data collection efforts with statewide data collection, management storage and retrieval systems.

4) Results of the Department's Comprehensive Environmental Review Process (CERP). The CERP assesses the potential for negative natural resource impacts and project conformance with other natural resource regulatory statutes.

5) Other factors, such as the criteria set forth in the definition of Program Guidance, special funding, relationship to Departmental initiatives and plans including the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, potential value to other Ecosystem Partnerships, etc., will be considered, when applicable, to the selection of projects.

(Source: Amended at 27 Ill. Reg. 1144, effective January 9, 2003)