Project nominations for FY 2024 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) land acquisition projects are now being accepted. Land acquisition provides a vital opportunity for the Forest Service to protect important lands to support wise stewardship of National Forests and Grasslands. Congress recognized the importance of this program by permanently authorizing the LWCF and increasing funding through the Great American Outdoors Act. The Fund is a key part of the Administration’s America the Beautiful initiative to preserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

Land acquisition is a key strategic tool for furthering Agency and Administration initiatives, particularly for recreation and public access, rural prosperity and economic development, and restoration and watershed protection. It is also part of the larger strategy to create a resilient system of forests and grasslands that provide economic and environmental stability to communities across America. Our work with partners and our neighbors is central to the success of the Agency and of LWCF. More than ever, the support of landowners, Tribes, local elected officials, stakeholders, and the public is vital to ensure the success of any proposed land acquisition. All information regarding the FY 2024 prioritization process will be available at: https://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/LWCF/.

Please see the Pinyon folder (https://usfs.box.com/s/tjdwv0stqadm066w82dh0a2lns7nk7e9) for the LWCF Criteria and Guidance document, the Land Acquisition Proposal Template, and a version of the proposal template with instructions. Project submissions must include maps which meet the legislative mapping requirements outlined in interim directive 1510-2011-1. Updated project lists and support letters from members of Congress, local officials, partners, Tribes, and stakeholders are strongly encouraged for the national competition. Although optional, it is strongly suggested that one page of photos is provided within the project submission. If videos of the project area are available, regions may put a hyperlink to the video into the nomination form (however, projects will not be penalized if there is no video available). Regions will be invited to upload completed proposals to a Pinyon folder to be shared later.

For each criterion that requires a written narrative, information should include how the tract(s) proposed for acquisition supports the USDA and Forest Service Goals and the scoring criteria laid out in the referenced guidance document. Of importance for the FY 2024 nomination process is demonstrating that land acquisitions are supported by Tribes; local communities; partner organizations; and local, state, and congressional elected officials. Please address how proposed projects contribute to local economies and advance equity, especially as it relates to benefiting underserved communities. Please also address how proposed projects increase or enhance recreation access, contribute to effective and efficient stewardship of national forests, and increase climate resiliency. Consult with the WO about the need to submit or resubmit tracts or projects from previous years, given the status of the proposed land acquisition budget.
The FY 2024 LWCF evaluation process is a two-stage process which is competitive and merit-based. Using the LWCF Criteria and Guidance, regions first evaluate projects and then send projects in ranked order to the WO for review by the national panel. The national panel, which is comprised of an interdisciplinary team with expertise in the criteria, will review each Region’s nominated projects using the National Scoring Criteria (which will be posted at the LWCF website referenced above) to create a prioritized project list. This project list is reviewed by Agency leadership, the USDA, and the Office of Management and Budget. After the list is approved by the Administration, it will be presented to Congress as part of the annual President’s Budget.

As you develop your nominations, consider the following Agency objectives and policy concerning landownership adjustment. For guidelines refer to FSM 5402 (Objectives), 5403.1 (Policy - National Forests), 5420.2 (the Objective), 5420.3 (Policies) and 5421.34 (Criteria for Land Acquisition Proposal), including:

1. Give priority to acquisitions that would consolidate National Forest System lands within existing National Forest boundaries (FSM 5403.1, Policy 1 and 11); providing there is no indication of opposition to the acquisition of the property.

2. Nominate properties as free of encumbrances as possible. Avoid acquisitions subject to special conditions or covenants that limit the rights of the U.S. to manage the lands for National Forest purposes (FSM 5403.1, Policy 22).

3. Acquisitions should meet goals and objectives of Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (FSM 5403.1, Policy 11).

4. Nominations with outstanding mineral estates must be identified in the fact sheet.

FY 2024 LWCF land acquisition project nominations are due to the WO by October 14, 2022.

Please carefully review each project nomination to ensure the accuracy of the data in the submission.

Submitting accurate and thorough project nomination information ensures the Forest Service land acquisition program’s continued credibility with Congress and our stakeholders. For additional information, please contact Barbara A. Johnson, National Land Acquisition Program Manager at (202) 380-7270.

Signed by: SANDRA WATTS
CHRISTOPHER B. FRENCH
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

cc: Regional Directors of Lands; Greg Smith; Barbara Johnson