Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program Panel Scoring Guidance

Rank each application based on the following four criteria. If there are additional notes or justifications for your score specific to the project, please include that feedback on each criterion, or the project as a whole, in your score sheet/notes. Our intent is to share general and specific feedback with applicants to develop interest and the size and quality of the future applicant pool.

Additional consideration will be given to projects that provide direct benefits to historically underserved communities. The National Review Panel will be provided information on community demographics such as socioeconomic status and racial diversity. The panel will also consider climate resiliency for each proposed project. Tools used during project evaluation may include the EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening Tool, the CDC’s Social Vulnerability Index or The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Land Mapping Tool.

Additional resources, including the application guidance, can be found at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/community-forest/program. Comments regarding the process should be directed to Margaret Haines at 202-384-7192.

1) **Community Benefits:** Use a score of 0-20 to rate community benefits, where 20 is reserved for projects that have all the attributes (economic, environmental, educational, recreational) and provide exceptional benefits that are specific and planned in each attribute *and supported by data, evidence and/or local knowledge*. It may be easier to think of the scale as 0-5 for each of the suggested benefit attributes of a community forest including, but not limited to:
   a) Economic benefits
      i) Timber
      ii) Non-timber forest products resulting from sustainable forest management
      iii) Other economic benefits such as recreation, tourism, cultural resources, public health, and other activities that accrue benefits to the community.
   b) Environmental benefits
      i) Clean air and water
      ii) Stormwater management
      iii) Wildlife habitat including for threatened and endangered species
      iv) Protection of culturally important resources
   c) Forest-based learning
      i) K-12 conservation education programs
      ii) Vocational forestry/environmental science education programs
      iii) Replicable model of effective forest stewardship for private landowners
      iv) Traditional Ecological Knowledge
      v) Connection to other environmental, cultural, or historical education programs or experiential learning opportunities
   d) Recreational benefits through public access
      i) Hiking
      ii) Fishing
      iii) Hunting
      iv) Enhanced recreational opportunities through connection to other publicly accessible conserved lands

2) **Public Participation:** Use a scale of 0-10 to rate the public participation currently being
undertaken and planned for the life of the community forest. Use the Spectrum of Public Participation where the most participatory is “Empowered,” meaning the public is directly involved in the final decision, followed by collaboration, involvement, and consultation as lesser forms of participation. The least participatory is “Informed,” which is telling the public what was decided. Participation and engagement may occur at different stages including planning the project, management of the project, and/or determining access and use of the forest. A score of 10 is reserved for projects that show a direct benefit to and/or intentional engagement of diverse, underrepresented groups that is supported by data and/or specific examples.

3) **Strategic Contribution and Connection**: Use a score of 0-5 to rate the community forest’s strategic contribution and connection to broader landscape initiative(s), which may include
   a) Being an integral part of a comprehensive management plan at the locality, state, Tribal, or regional level
   b) Identifying connections to landscape conservation initiatives as well as environmental justice initiatives such as creating access to green/open space where there is none, providing critical green infrastructure, or contributing to local food production.

4) **Threat**: On a scale of 0-5, rate the threat or likelihood that the project land would be subdivided or converted to non-forest use, where 5 is exceptionally threatened and 0 is no threat/impossible. Pressure of conversion to non-forest use may be driven by residential or industrial development, agricultural expansion, installation of wind or solar technology, or other uses that substantially remove or fragment forest cover. Attributes to consider when evaluating threat include adjacent land use characteristics, landowner circumstances, lack of temporary or permanent protections, and attributes of the property that may facilitate development.