Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program Panel Review Guidance

Rank each application based on the following four criteria. If there are additional notes or justifications for your score specific to the project (some piece stands apart as key to your score), 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.

The Review Panel is interested in projects that provide benefits to historically underserved communities and 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 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 Scott Stewart at 202-205-1618.

1) **Community Benefits:** Use a score of 0-20 to rate community benefits, where 20 is reserved for projects that have all attributes (economic, environmental, educational, recreational) and have exceptional benefits that are specific and/or planned in each attribute. 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, and public health
   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 plants and wildlife
   c) Forest-based learning
      i) K-12 conservation education programs
      ii) Vocational forestry/environmental science education programs
      iii) Connection to other environmental, cultural, or historical education programs or experiential learning opportunities
      iv) Replicable model of effective forest stewardship for private landowners
   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 0-5 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,” followed by collaboration, involvement and consultation.
as lesser forms of participation, and the least participatory is “Informed,” which is telling the public what was decided. Engagement may include planning the project, management of the project, and/or determining access and use of the forest. Of particular interest is capturing the meaningful participation of groups that may have been historically marginalized or underserved, in the planning and management of the forest.

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 five is exceptionally threatened and 0 is no threat/impossible.