

SECTION 9:

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY THROUGH THE SALMON RECOVERY GRANT PROGRAM

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board's Salmon Recovery Grant Program has been instrumental in funding over 60 completed habitat protection and restoration projects within the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity (Lead Entity). Habitat projects using these funds have addressed a multitude of limiting factors and protected a number of key habitat areas in many subbasins of WRIA 22-23.

Because applying for project grant funding through the Salmon Recovery Grant can be both competitive and somewhat complicated for many new project sponsors, the intent of this section is to provide guidance in navigating the application process and preparing a successful application. This section will also be useful for prospective project sponsors by making them familiar with the technicalities and procedures of the program before fully developing a project.

The information below is a summary of the major points contained in Salmon Recovery Funding Board Manual 18, the official guidance on the Salmon Recovery Grants program. It also outlines the established operational procedures used by the Lead Entity in submitting project lists to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board. First-time and repeat project sponsors are encouraged to review Manual 18 before submitting an application. The Recreation and Conservation Office updates Manual 18 annually and is available at:

http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/manuals&forms/Manual_18.pdf.



The Salmon Recovery Funding Board Overview

The Washington State Legislature created the Salmon Recovery Funding Board in 1999 to provide grants for salmon habitat restoration and protection projects and other salmon recovery activities. The Board resides within the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office and has staff to support its function.

The mission of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board is to “provide funding for elements necessary to achieve overall salmon recovery, including habitat projects and other activities that result in sustainable and measurable benefits for salmon and other fish species.”¹ The Salmon Recovery Funding Board does this through implementation of the Salmon Recovery Grant Program.

Salmon Recovery Grant Profile

The Salmon Recovery Grant Program funds projects supported by lead entity strategies that:

- Protect existing, high quality habitats for salmon,
- Restore degraded habitat to increase overall habitat health and biological productivity, and
- Assess the feasibility of future projects and other salmon related activities

There are five basic categories of eligible projects:

1. Acquisition, which includes the purchase of land, access or other property rights
2. Restoration projects that assist in the recovery of degraded, damaged, or destroyed habitat conditions
3. Non-capital projects consisting of assessments, project designs, inventories, and studies that do not directly result in on-the-ground restoration or acquisition projects
4. Design-only projects that lead to preliminary design (30 percent) or final design
5. Combination acquisition projects that include different restoration elements or assessments and studies

¹ <http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/strategy/srfb-strategic-plan.pdf>

Projects may include the actual habitat used by salmon and the land and water that support ecosystem functions and processes important to salmon.² The SFRB will closely review if a project clearly links with the goals and subbasin priorities of this strategy.

Entities eligible for Salmon Recovery Funding Board funding include:

- Local agencies (defined as any "city, county, town, federally recognized Native American tribe, special purpose district, port district, or other political subdivision of the state providing services to less than the entire state if legally authorized to acquire and develop public open space, habitat, farmlands, riparian habitat, or recreation facilities"³)
- State agencies
- Tribes
- Private landowners
- Nonprofits
- Conservation districts
- Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups

While grants must be greater than \$5,000, there is no grant cap except for design-only projects, which have a \$200,000 ceiling. In all practicality, however, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board allocates a set dollar amount for grants available to each of the eight salmon recovery regional organizations in the state. The Grays Harbor County Lead Entity is one of four lead entities that are members of the Washington Coastal Sustainable Salmon Partnership (WCSSP), the regional organization responsible for four WRIs along the coast. Working through WCSSP, the four lead entities use a formula to distribute the WCSSP allocation amongst them.

Generally, there is a 15 percent match requirement for all grants with the exception of design-only projects, which are exempt. Projects satisfying a Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP) have a required 35 percent match for fish passage projects and a 50 percent match for sediment reduction projects. Match may consist of cash or appropriations, bonds, donations, grants, and an applicant's labor, equipment, and materials.

² <http://www.rco.wa.gov/grants/salmon.shtml>

³ http://www.rco.wa.gov/grants/sal_rec_grants.shtml

Understanding Roles in the Salmon Recovery Grant Application Process

The Salmon Recovery Grant Program application process is unique in the distinct roles played by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity, the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership, and the individual project sponsors. The diversity of the players in this process reflects how the Salmon Recovery Grant Program is a bottoms-up driven process. Understanding these roles and responsibilities is critical to understanding how the process works.

The Project Sponsor

At the core of the Salmon Recovery Grant application process are the entities eligible to apply – the Project Sponsors. The Project Sponsor develops an eligible project, prepares the application, and if successfully funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, implements the project. Project Sponsors must submit their applications for funding under the Salmon Recovery Grant Program through the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity.

The Grays Harbor County Lead Entity

The Grays Harbor County Lead Entity is the local organization responsible for developing and implementing a salmon habitat recovery and protection strategy within Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) 22 and 23. It is also responsible for evaluating and ranking grant applications submitted by project sponsors before submitting them for funding under the Salmon Recovery Grant Program. The grant applications submitted by the Lead Entities during an annual grant cycle is a project list.

Since Grays Harbor County is the administrative entity responsible for the Lead Entity, the Board of County Commissioners acts as the formal decision making body for the organization. A county staff person serves as the Lead Entity Coordinator, who is responsible for the day-to-day administrative duties. The Lead Entity Coordinator coordinates the Salmon Recovery Grant at the Lead Entity level.

The Habitat Work Group is a committee within the Lead Entity consisting of local technical experts and citizens. This group acts as the steering body for Lead Entity; it

develops and administers the strategy, helps recruit prospective project sponsors, and provides technical assistance to project sponsors as they develop their projects.

A subcommittee of the Habitat Work Group, the Local Review Team, prepares a recommendation for the Board of County Commissioners that evaluates and ranks projects for submission to the Salmon Recovery Grant Program. The Local Review Team consists of both technical experts and citizens; this blend of participants allows the Lead Entity to evaluate projects from an integrated approach that includes scientific, social, economic, and cultural factors.

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board consists of ten members; five gubernatorial appointees and five representatives from five state agencies. This board is responsible for setting program policy and awarding grants for project lists submitted to the Salmon Recovery Grant Program by the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity.

Assisting the Salmon Recovery Funding Board in evaluating the technical merits of project lists is the Technical Review Panel. This body consists of a variety of technical experts in the field of salmon recovery.

Coordinating the administrative duties of the program as well as providing technical assistance is the role of staff grant managers.

The Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership

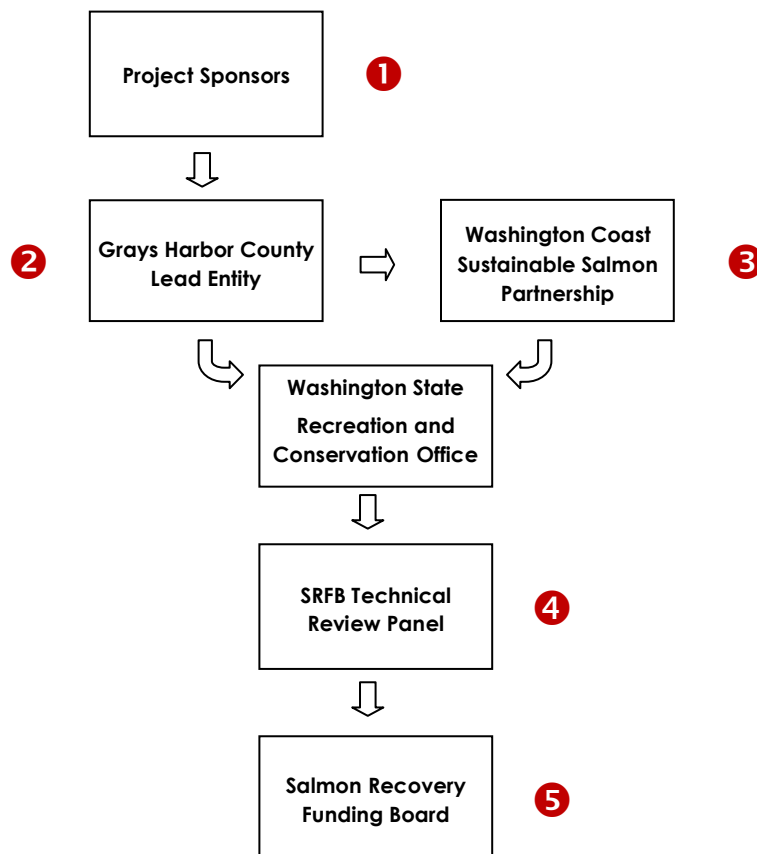
To coordinate salmon recovery efforts within watersheds bordering the Pacific coastline, the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office encouraged the formation of the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership (WCSSP). WCSSP is one of eight regional organizations in the state dedicated to preparing and implementing salmonid recovery plans. The WCSSP regional organization roughly corresponds to the Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESU) for coastal salmonids. In addition to the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity, other WCSSP members include the North Pacific Coast Lead Entity, the Quinault Indian Nation Lead Entity, and the Pacific County Lead Entity.

Under the Salmon Recovery Grant Program, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board provides a set funding allocation for each regional organization; currently, 9 percent of its funding goes to WCSSP. The lead entity members of WCSSP in turn distribute funding amongst themselves based on an internally agreed formula.

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board requires WCSSP to provide a regional assessment of the project lists submitted by its member lead entities. The assessment examines how the projects tie into regional plan strategies.

The Salmon Recovery Grant Application Review Process

The review process for Salmon Recovery Grant applications submitted by Project Sponsors begins at the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity Level and ends with the Salmon Recovery Board. The diagram below is an illustrated overview of the process. The numbers correspond to the description of the steps that follow.



Step 1

Most prospective Project Sponsors have completed extensive groundwork for a project by January of each year. Project sponsors have selected ideas based on having a high benefit to salmon, high certainty of success, and a close fit to goals and general actions of the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity strategy. (Appendix H in Manual 18)

Restoration and acquisition projects will need commitment forms signed by the time the Lead Entity accepts applications. Many of these tasks can take up to a year or more to obtain.

Step 2

The Salmon Recovery Grant process officially begins in January of each year when the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity sets the process and announces the review schedule for receiving applications under the program. The Grays Harbor County Lead Entity Coordinator is a central figure in managing this process.

Other tasks that the Lead Entity is doing in January include:

- Informing prospective grant applicants about the program and revisions, if any, to Manual 18
- Announcing the submission date in April for the Early Application Form
- Recruiting members for the Local Review Team, who will review and recommend ranking of the projects later in July. Members of the Habitat Work Group, invited members of the Chehalis Basin Partnership, RCO staff, WDFW staff, local citizens, and other salmonid experts typically comprise the Local Review Team.

Between the beginning of February and early April, potential project sponsors are preparing their Early Application Form, including entering materials into PRISM (PProject Information System)⁴, which later allows the Salmon Recovery Funding Board Technical Review Panel to comment on the application.

The Early Application Form, which the potential Project Sponsor turns into the Lead Entity during the first working day in April, is a “working draft” that must contain:

- A project location/vicinity map, a detailed site or parcel map
- Site or aerial photos, if available
- Design plans or sketches that convey the intent of the project
- A detailed project description
- Estimated budget

⁴ http://www.rco.wa.gov/prism_app/about_prism.shtml

- Evidence that the project is a high priority within the Lead Entity Strategy
- Comment on whether the Salmon Recovery Funding Board has reviewed any part of this project previously, including discussion on how it is different⁵

The Early Application Form is available on the Grays Harbor County Lead Entity website.

Soon after receiving the Early Applications, the Lead Entity's Habitat Work Group discusses and provides feedback on the proposals to the project sponsors at their April meeting. The remainder of April is devoted to organizing site visits and/or presentations that happen in May.

Site visits usually occur around mid-May. The Lead Entity Coordinator, the grant manager from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, and members of the Local Review Team attend these visits and/or presentations. Two weeks later the Salmon Recovery Funding Board Technical Review Panel forwards their initial evaluation of each project to the sponsor and the Lead Entity coordinator.

Project sponsors use this feedback opportunity to improve their applications. If Salmon Recovery Funding Board Technical Review Panel has concerns about any project, they will "flag" it and encourage the project sponsor and the lead entity to go through additional review to improve the project. The Technical Review Panel will meet in person or by conference call to assist individual Project Sponsors with comments.

Project Sponsors also must attend a scheduled Salmon Recovery Funding Board application workshop before submitting a final draft application, known as a Project Proposal, to the Lead Entity. There are three types of Project Proposals:

- Restoration, Acquisition, or Combination Restoration and Acquisition Projects
- Planning (Assessment, Design, and Study) or Combination Planning and Acquisition Projects
- Barrier Inventory Projects

Section 4 in Manual 18 provides a description of what material goes into a Project Proposal.

The third Friday in June marks the deadline for final Draft Project Proposals and the beginning of the Lead Entity review process. Members of the Local Review Team each receive complete copies of the applications before coming together on the second Friday in July for an evaluation and ranking session.

⁵ Section 3, "How to Apply," Manual 18.

The Local Review Team relies on Appendix H of Manual 18 as the basis for its evaluation of each application. This Appendix sets criteria for evaluating projects on a high, medium, and low scale in terms of benefit to salmon and certainty of project success. In addition, the Local Review Team examines each project in its fit with the strategy and the partnerships/ outreach efforts it incorporates.

After the Local Review Team completes scoring each Project Proposal, the highest scored project takes on the highest rank, with the other projects following suit. Depending on the amount of money allocated to the Lead Entity, there will be a cut-off point as to which projects move forward within a recommended project list that the Local Review Team forwards to the Grays Harbor County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). The BoCC will then review the recommended project list during and take appropriate action at one of their latter July meeting dates.

From July until the approximately the second week of August, project sponsors will polish their applications and update PRISM accordingly before the Lead Entity Coordinator formally submits its project list and accompanying application materials to the Recreation and Conservation Office during the last week of August. This submittal point marks the start of the formal Salmon Recovery Funding Board review process. After checking each project application for completeness, RCO staff forwards the Lead Entity's project list to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board Review Panel for its consideration.

Step 3

The Washington Coast Salmon Sustainable Partnership, in its capacity as the Regional Organization, also prepares and submits to the Recreation and Conservation Office in mid-September its regional assessment of the Lead Entity's project list.

Step 4

During the latter part of September, the Technical Review Panel convenes a regional project meeting, which WCSSP and each of the Lead Entity Coordinators presents the regional project list. This meeting is an opportunity to discuss any problem areas and to exchange information. After the conclusion of this meeting, the Technical Review Panel prepares evaluation forms to forward to the full Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

While the Technical Review Panel does not rate, score, rank, or advocate for projects, it does assess them for technical merit. The Technical Review Panel examines each project to determine if there is a low benefit to salmon, a low likelihood of success, and if the costs outweigh the anticipated benefits. Projects that show any of these problems receive a "project of concern" designation.

During the month of October, the grant manager with the Recreation and Conservation Office provides Project Sponsors and the Lead Entity the opportunity to comment on the Technical Review Panel evaluation forms. By mid-November, the grant manager puts together a draft Salmon Recovery Funding Board Grant Report that it releases for public review and comment.

Step 5

At their December board meeting, the full SFRB convenes to review the project lists. They consider the Lead Entity strategy summary, comments from WCSSP, reports from the Technical Review Panel and RCO staff, and public comments before making a final decision on grant awards.