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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

October 12, 2007

**TOPIC #19: WWRP Preference for Match – Policy Issues**

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**Approved by the Director:** *J.F.*

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**Proposed Action:** Discussion

**Summary**

On August 27, Recreation and Conservation Office staff requested comment from interested parties on whether or not the evaluation criteria for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Habitat Conservation Account categories should include a question about matching shares. This memorandum summarizes the proposed options and comments, and outlines staff's recommendation for modifications to existing program policies.

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends no change to the existing evaluation criteria, and therefore not giving extra preference for sponsors providing a matching share greater than the minimum required amount. The existing criteria provide adequate opportunity for all applicants to address matching resources through the project support element of the *public benefit* evaluation criterion. Adding a separate evaluation question is not necessary.

**Background**

The Washington State Legislature established the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program<sup>1</sup> (WWRP) in 1990. The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) is responsible for decisions regarding program policies, including adopting the evaluation criteria. The Habitat Conservation Account has four categories:

- Critical Habitat
- Natural Areas
- State Lands Restoration and Enhancement
- Urban Wildlife Habitat

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<sup>1</sup> WWRP is codified in RCW 79A.15 and WAC 286-27.



Local agencies and Native American tribes may apply for critical habitat and urban wildlife habitat category grants, and by statute must provide a minimum 50% match. State agencies are eligible applicants in all four categories and are not required to provide match. On occasion state agencies do have matching resources and have expressed an interest in getting credit for match in the evaluation process.

Currently, an existing evaluation question addresses matching shares<sup>2</sup> in the critical habitat, natural areas, and urban wildlife habitat categories. The *public benefit* criterion, specifically asks applicants to: "Describe and document other monetary means that have been secured to help cover the costs for the project (i.e., grants, donations, in-kind contributions, etc.)." In addition, all four Habitat Conservation Account categories have another criterion that asks applicants to describe their on-going stewardship program and identify the fund source for stewardship activities. Subsequently, there are existing criteria that provide applicants with an opportunity to address matching resources.

**Analysis**

Stakeholders commented on the following four options regarding the addition of a new evaluation question about matching shares.

- ➔ **Option 1:** In the two categories where state, tribal and local agencies compete (critical habitat and urban wildlife habitat), give additional points to any applicant providing more than a 50% match. State agencies would not receive additional points for a match less than 50%. In the two categories where only state agencies are eligible, give additional points to any match.

Pros	Cons
Places greater emphasis on the significance of providing match for a WWRP project.	An existing criterion addresses match.
Promotes greater leveraging of grant funds.	State agency match would often come from the same source as grant funds, for example capital bond funds. Local agencies have the ability to generate matching funds through local taxes whereas state agencies are fully dependent on the state's capital budget.
Awards points to state agency projects that have received federal or other grant funds. This is seen as confirmation the project is a high	Providing additional points to agencies that can provide higher matching funds most often helps those that already have more money available. Agencies

<sup>2</sup> Matching shares refers to applicant resources used to match Recreation and Conservation Funding Board grants and may include: cash, local impact/mitigation fees, certain federal funds, the value of privately owned donated real estate, equipment, equipment use, materials, labor, or any combination thereof. WAC 286.13.045(1)

priority from perspectives other than just WWRP.	who need the funds the most (those with a smaller tax base or without dedicated fund sources) may be at a disadvantage.
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- ➔ **Option 2:** In all four categories, give additional points to applicants providing a match greater than the required minimum. Thus, state agencies would receive additional points for any match greater than 0%, and local agencies and tribes for a match greater than 50%.

Pros	Cons
Same as in Option 1 above	Same as in Option 1 above
	May be perceived by local agencies as providing an advantage to state agencies that could receive points for a relatively small match compared with the local agency minimum requirement of 50%.

- ➔ **Option 3:** Add a staff-scored evaluation criterion that awards points for match based on whether the match is documented (more points), or is anticipated but not documented (fewer points). This could apply to either option 1 or 2 above.

Pros	Cons
Same as in Option 1 above	Same as in Option 1 above
Allows applicant to earn points based on anticipated match. Particularly helpful for those situations where an applicant has been told they are likely to receive a grant, but the award has not been made.	Existing policy requires all declared match be certified prior to Board funding. This option could lead to a project receiving points for anticipated match, and then the match may not materialize. If the project is left with the original ranking that would not be fair to other applicants. If this option is chosen, RCFB policy should state that in cases where a project is ranked based on anticipated match, the project will not be recommended for funding if the match falls through.
	Agencies should not be able to earn points based on an uncertain match. All matching shares should be documented – especially if points are given in the evaluation process.

- ➔ **Option 4:** No preference would be given for providing match above the required amount.

Pros	Cons
An existing criterion addresses match.	Places greater emphasis on match rather than the quality or significance of the habitat.
There is no clear relationship between the availability of matching funds and the quality, need, or critical nature of the habitat to be acquired.	Does not achieve the benefits listed in Options 1 and 2 above.
State agency match would often come from the same source as grant funds, thereby placing a greater demand on capital bond funds. This option avoids the potential of creating that additional demand.	

Stakeholders expressed a preference for no change to the existing evaluation criteria. If a change is made in the criteria, comments expressed a strong preference for applicants having to document the availability of match. Many thought an applicant should not receive any points for an undocumented match.

### Next Steps

Public comments on the proposed options referenced above were distributed to the Board at the September 14 RCFB meeting. Comments received by October 25 on staff's recommendation as presented in this memorandum will be distributed to the Board electronically in advance of the November meeting.

If the Board approves the staff's recommendation, no manual update is required. If the Board adopts a change, staff will update Manual #10b, *WWRP: Habitat Conservation Account and Riparian Protection Account: Policies and Project Selection* and send out notices to potential applicants and other interested parties. Any adopted changes will affect grant requests beginning with the 2008 grant cycle.