NOAA's FY2024 Atlantic Salmon Habitat Restoration Partnership Grants

Grants.gov Opportunity Number: **NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2024-25198**

Applicant Webinar Transcript
March 2024

Slide 1: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the applicant webinar for Atlantic Salmon Habitat Restoration Partnership Grants. This is Amanda Cousart of the NOAA Restoration Center, and my colleague Matt Bernier is also here for the presentation and for the question and answer period. The purpose of today's informational session is to outline the components of the funding opportunity and allow applicants to ask general questions about the competition. If you have highly specific questions about your proposed project, or if you are tuning into the recording of the webinar following today's presentation, please feel free to reach out to us to set up a call. Next slide.

Slide 2: For this presentation, I will be highlighting the most pertinent information from each of the main sections included in the funding opportunity. If you haven't accessed it yet, you can download a PDF from the Grants.gov posting under the "Related Documents" tab. The Roman numerals listed here on the slide correspond to the actual section headers in the funding opportunity, so you can cross-reference them when reading through the document. We will not be highlighting Sections VII and VIII today during the webinar, so please refer to the document itself for any questions regarding agency-level contacts and other information. Next slide.

Slide 3: For this funding opportunity, we anticipate that up to $2.1 million will be available to support all selected awards over a three-year project period, with approximately $700,000 available each funding year, pending Congressional appropriations. The deadline for proposal submission is Monday, April 1, by 11:59 pm, and October 1st is the earliest potential start date for selected awards. This competition has 2 additional due dates in 2025 and 2026 and will remain open, contingent on the availability of funds. Next slide please.

Slide 4: Section I of the funding opportunity outlines the program objective and priorities. The principal objective of this competition is to support the recovery of the Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment of Atlantic salmon. The next few slides will cover the other program priorities. Next slide.

Slide 5: We want to call your attention to the three program priorities that you can find in Section I.B. The priorities are not listed in any order of importance, but we will describe them numerically in the order they are outlined in the funding opportunity. The first priority that projects will be evaluated on is whether the proposed activities are consistent with priority habitat restoration actions identified in the 2019 Recovery Plan and the Species in the Spotlight 5-year Action Plan. Applicants should address the biological criteria for downlisting and delisting

outlined in the 2019 Recovery Plan, with a focus on criteria for accessible and suitable habitat and productivity. Next slide please.

Slide 6: The second priority that proposals will be evaluated on is the potential to improve fish passage and restore connectivity with spawning and rearing habitat within areas that are designated critical habitat. Project sites with river-specific stocks or that host a wild or naturally reared run of Atlantic salmon will also be prioritized. The next slide includes a map showing the distribution of critical habitat and river-specific stocks across the Salmon Habitat Recovery Units, or SHRUs. Next slide.

Slide 7: Here is a thumbnail version of the map we have posted on our program priorities webpage, included here for reference. The website address is pasted at the bottom of the slide, but you can also navigate to the map by following the web links within the funding opportunity. In short, the range of the Gulf of Maine DPS is shown in yellow, and areas with river-specific stocks are in green. Critical habitat is marked by diagonal hashed lines. In this thumbnail version, it can be hard to distinguish between the green areas and the yellow areas with hashed lines, so we do encourage all applicants to cross-check their proposed project sites with the map posted on our webpage, and to reach out to us with any site-specific questions. Next slide.

Slide 8: The third priority is the potential to provide sustainable and lasting benefits for Atlantic salmon. Proposals that incorporate proven restoration techniques and focus on removal of barriers will receive highest priority. So for example, dam removals will receive higher priority than installation of structures that require operations and maintenance, such as fish ladders. Next slide please.

Slide 9: Section II of the funding opportunity deals with funding availability. NOAA may fund multi-year awards for up to three funding years. And as I stated in the beginning, we anticipate up to $700,000 to be available to support all new awards in the first project year, with another $700,000 available over the next two fiscal years for a total of $2.1 million, pending Congressional appropriations. We will not accept proposals with a federal funding request of less than $100,000, or more than $1.5 million, over a three-year project period. Next slide please.

Slide 10: Section III of the funding opportunity deals with eligibility. Eligible applicant types include: institutions of higher education, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, U.S. territories, and state, local, and Native American tribal governments. Applicants must propose work within one or more SHRUs in the state of Maine, including: Merrymeeting Bay, Penobscot Bay, and/or Downeast Coastal. Next slide please.

Slide 11: We have included some examples here for types of ineligible projects, but please consult the funding opportunity for more details. Examples include: proposals that focus on marine debris prevention and removal, legally required mitigation, and effectiveness monitoring or research. One point that I want to emphasize here on the webinar is the difference between eligibility requirements versus program priorities. As you can see here on the slide and in the

funding opportunity itself, there aren't many project types that are truly ineligible. Your proposal will still be eligible for review even if your project types and locations don't hit all of the program priorities, but please do give us a call or send an email if you want to talk through these distinctions. Next slide.

Slide 12: Submission information can be found in Section IV of the funding opportunity. For application packages, federal forms, and instructions, please see the Grants.gov posting. Applicants should be registered in eRA Commons, SAM (the System for Award Management), and also provide a valid UEI/EIN on the application. If you haven't done so already, now would be a good time to initiate the registration processes, or to check whether your status is active if you have registered previously.

In sub-section IV.B., you can find guidance on the expected structure for the proposals. This includes all of the page limits, as well as the content of proposal components such as the Project Narrative, Budget Narrative Justification, federal forms, and other pieces. Please also be sure to check requirements for monitoring plans and data management plans. We have website links in the funding opportunity that provide examples and templates for monitoring plans and data management plans. Next slide please.

Slide 13: At the bottom of page 12 in Section V of the funding opportunity, you can find the beginning of the Evaluation Criteria. There are too many sub-criteria to recite all of them here on the webinar, but briefly, the five main criteria are:

1. Importance and Applicability, worth a total of 40 points out of 100
2. Technical and Scientific Merit for 24 points
3. Applicant Qualifications for 10 points
4. Project Costs at 16 points, and
5. Outreach and Education at 10 points

On the next slide, I will highlight the sub-criteria that are associated with the Program Priorities. Next slide.

Slide 14: Under Importance and Applicability, all three sub-criteria relate directly to the Program Priorities. The first is "Consistency with the Recovery Plan," which is worth a total of 20 points, so that's definitely an important piece to pay attention to.

"Location of Project Sites" includes both critical habitat and river-specific stocks. In order to score a full 10 out of 10 here, all of your project sites would have to be located in critical habitat and have river-specific stocks present. There is a lot of room for partial credit here, so please do give us a call if you have questions or concerns about your project locations.

The next sub-criterion is "Sustainability of the Restoration Approach," which is also worth 10 points. Barrier removals are prioritized in this category, but again, there is room for partial credit for other approaches. For all of the Evaluation Criteria, you can see the scoring guidance embedded within each question, so please pay close attention to this section of the funding opportunity while writing your proposal. Next slide please.

Slide 15: Eligible submissions will undergo technical review, ranking, and selection based on Program Priorities and the Evaluation Criteria that I just outlined. Applicants should receive notification regarding funding by the end of June, and the earliest anticipated start date for awards will be October 1. Next slide please.

Slide 16: And now, here are some helpful reminders and tips for submission:

- Start the process of registration now, if you are not yet registered or currently active! SAM registration can take several weeks, so save yourself some stress and start early. For Grants.gov, register your organization and create accounts for people authorized to submit proposals.
- Speaking of starting early, don't wait until the last minute to submit your applications. Grants.gov can take up to two business days to validate or reject applications.
- Please read the entire funding opportunity and verify that all requirements are complete before you hit the submit button. Please pay close attention to the directions specific to submission with eRA Commons. This is something new for us this year. We've linked to eRA-specific directions in the NOFO, but I really want to emphasize here that if you have not submitted an application and are not familiar with the requirements associated with eRA Commons, that you pay really close attention to those instructions and reach out to us if you have any questions. If you feel that you are unable to complete these requirements in a timely manner, again reach out to us, and consider whether you want to submit a paper copy as well. And if you do choose to do that, please reach out to us and let us know!
- And finally, please refer to the websites listed within the funding opportunity for more information.

Next slide.

Slide 17: That concludes the presentation section of the webinar. We would now like to open up the line for any questions that you may have.

Q&A:

I do see one question that came in, and I will read it aloud, and I believe my colleague Matt will be well equipped to answer this question.

(Amanda) **The question is, please talk about the data relating to higher baseflows for the narrative section. Where is that supposed to come from?**

(Matt) Yes, hi. Really good question on that. We can perhaps send out a link, but basically that is the U.S. Geological Survey study that was done for the Gulf of Maine DPS, where they did baseflow estimates for different watersheds. What we're looking at is for those areas that have higher baseflows than others. Another good way to do that is to go to GIS layers and look for watersheds that have connections with sand and gravel aquifers. Basically the baseflow is related to areas where we have a lot of groundwater. And the thought is that those streams are

going to be more sustainable, we're going to have more flow during low-flow periods, so are perhaps better able to withstand droughts and a warming climate. But definitely follow up if you can't find that information, with Amanda or me and we can get you the links for those studies.

(Amanda) **Thanks, Matt. I see another question that came in that asks: Are there any thoughts of opening this program further south?**
My short answer to that would be that, at the present, we've described the geographic range that this funding opportunity encompasses. That being said, we do review program priorities and plans routinely throughout NOAA. As we continue to do our ongoing evaluations of those, there may or may not be adjustments in the future.

I'm not seeing any additional questions, but please do follow up if you do have anything. Otherwise, that will conclude the webinar for today. Thank you all very much for attending.