

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Natural Resources Conservation Service in New Hampshire is requesting applications to provide implementation of restoration activities on land enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program. The objective of WRP is to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners in planning, designing and implementing wetland and associated upland restoration plans that maximize wildlife habitat in wetland systems, as well as provide water quality improvements, reduced soil erosion, reduced impacts of flooding and provide wildlife habitat opportunities for threatened and endangered species. Applicants will be responsible for assisting NRCS and landowners by providing assistance necessary to implement WRP restoration plans, while at the same time improving and protecting wetland habitat for environmental benefits. Performance may include any part or all operations necessary to select appropriate contractors, see that all applicable state permits necessary to implement restoration plans are obtained, inspect, and provide construction management activities for various wetland restorations and enhancement practices; and other related conservation practices that meet NRCS standards and specifications.

Applications are being requested from eligible government or non-government organizations, tribes, or individuals for competitive consideration of cooperative agreements with a base year and up to four, one-year amendment periods.

PROPOSAL DUE DATE AND ADDRESSES: Proposals must be received in the New Hampshire NRCS State Office by 4:30 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on May 15, 2012.

The address for hand-delivered applications or applications using express mail or overnight courier service is: ATTN: Betty Anderson, Grants and Agreements Specialist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2 Madbury Road Federal Building, Durham, NH 03824. Selections are intended to be made and agreements are intended to be obligated by June 29th, 2012.

Overview

The purpose of the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to conserve, protect and enhance the nation's wetland ecosystems. The program promotes the restoration, enhancement, protection, maintenance and management of wetland systems and adjacent land that would contribute significantly to wetland functions and values. Through WRP, landowners may receive assistance to install or implement structural or vegetative wetland and associated upland restoration practices on eligible land. WRP provides that the Secretary may request the services of, and enter into cooperative agreements with, non-Federal entities to assist in providing specialized assistance necessary to implement restoration plans under the program. The agency is directing resources toward the restoration and/or enhancement of degraded wetlands and adjacent uplands within Rockingham and Strafford Counties in the state of New Hampshire.

The NRCS is requesting proposals from qualified individuals and organizations that share a common interest in the conservation and restoration of wetland resources for lands enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program located in Rockingham and Strafford Counties.

Project Description

The authority for this Cooperative Agreement is the Federal Cooperative Agreements Act and the Wetlands Reserve Program. The objective of WRP is to provide specialized assistance to landowners in planning, designing and implementing wetland and associated upland restoration plans that maximize wildlife habitat in wetland systems, as well as provide water quality improvements, reduced soil erosion, reduced impacts of flooding and provide wildlife habitat opportunities for threatened and endangered species. Applicants will be responsible for assisting NRCS by providing specialized assistance to implement WRP restoration plans, while at the same time improving and protecting wetland habitat for environmental benefits. Work shall include any or all of the following activities necessary to perform vegetative and hydrology restoration in a timely and effective manner: construction management activities for various wetland restorations and/or enhancement practices; and other related conservation practices that meet NRCS standards and specifications, selection of appropriate contractors, obtaining all applicable state permits required to implement restoration plans. Restoration activities include forest access road/trail stabilization and/or closures, stream crossing improvements and or culvert removals, invasive plant control/treatments and establishment of native plantings. All engineering practice designs will be provided by NRCS. All services shall be provided in accordance with applicable NRCS policy and criteria that can be found at the following websites: NRCS Field Office Technical Guide: <http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov>; and NRCS National Engineering Handbook, and National Engineering Manual References: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ENG>.

Awardees will perform all work in close coordination with the NRCS WRP Team staff members. Once a project is received, the awardee will complete the assigned project during the performance period identified in project documentation.

The awardee will be responsible for obtaining all necessary state permits on the landowners behalf, selecting contractors, scheduling contractors for implementation, keeping NRCS informed of the installation schedule to allow NRCS to complete all necessary on the ground layout work prior to practice implementation. All activities will occur in accordance with the NRCS provided design.

Wetland Engineering Practices and Biological Practices are described in the NRCS electronic FOTG, which can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>.

The awardee will be expected to provide the inspection and quality control of each WRP restoration project, provide to the NRCS a monthly status report of work in progress and any other documentation as may be required by the NRCS standards and specifications.

There are currently 28 restoration sites in Rockingham County and 20 restoration sites in Strafford County with restoration plans written, ready for implementation.

New Hampshire NRCS anticipates the following involvement, which is deemed substantial, in carrying out projects funded with Federal assistance provided through a cooperative agreement under this announcement.

New Hampshire NRCS will:

- Conduct an initial briefing at the New Hampshire NRCS State Office in Durham, NH prior to award to discuss the goals and objectives of the project and items of work to be conducted under the agreement.
- Designate a liaison to participate in the planning and management of the cooperative agreement and coordinate activities between the awardee and New Hampshire NRCS.
- Identify and prioritize work assignments for the awardee at the New Hampshire State Office level with consultation from the New Hampshire NRCS Field Offices.
- Provide for state level coordination/guidance of the technical specialists.
- Provide quality assurance for services provided under the agreement.
- Provide access to NRCS technology and technical tools to the maximum extent possible.
- Provide NEPA compliance, restoration plans and approved NRCS engineering designs.
- Approve all practice plan or design change orders, including applicable standards and specifications, prior to the applicant applying those practices.
- The New Hampshire Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC), State and Area Specialist(s), FO and the District Conservationist(s) (DC) will participate in the planning and managing of the cooperative agreement(s) and coordinate activities between the awardee and the NRCS.
- The NRCS will identify and prioritize work assignments for completing activities required to implement the wetland and associated upland restoration components of each restoration plan.
- The NRCS will monitor the awardee's progress and suspend work if agreement or conservation plan requirements or NRCS standards and specifications are not met.

Funding Availability

All awards are subject to the availability of sufficient funds being appropriated by Congress and apportioned by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to support the addition and full cost of service to implement specialized assistance activities. Cooperative agreements will be awarded competitively to applicants. Cooperative agreements have been determined to be the appropriate funding instrument because of the substantial involvement of NRCS in providing technical oversight and coordination of planning, designing and implementing wetland and associated upland restoration activities. It is anticipated that approximately **\$500,000** will be available for implementing wetland and associated upland restoration plans in Fiscal Year 2012. The amount of funds available for this program is not fixed and may vary considerably from the current funding level. The maximum allowable overhead under this agreement is 10%. Amendments to the agreement(s) may be developed upon availability of funding in future years (approximately a 5-year period). The work will be performed in Rockingham and Strafford Counties. Proposals will be considered for work to be performed in one or both counties.

The cooperative agreements will include one base-year and four, one-year amendment periods. Work under this cooperative agreement is subject to satisfactory negotiation of individual or grouped conservation plans of operation projects. There will be no minimum or maximum price on any conservation plans of operation projects. The maximum amount of reimbursement for each cooperative agreement period (base-year and each option-year) shall be determined by available funds. There shall be no guaranteed minimum. Multiple cooperative agreements may be awarded as a result of this announcement. Projects will be ordered on an as-needed basis beginning from the date of the award of the agreement for a period not to exceed five years.

Application and Submission Information

(Proposal amendments and notifications, if required, will be managed through grants.gov and associated e-mails registered on that system.)

1. How to Obtain Application Materials

All OMB standard forms necessary for proposal submission are posted on the following site: http://www.grants.gov/agencies/aapproved_standard_forms.jsp

2. Proposal Content and Format

Proposals must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for an award. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the work described in the application. Proposal must include all required forms and narrative sections described below; incomplete applications will not be considered. Do not include letters of support, endorsement or recommendations for award.

It is the sole responsibility of the applicant to complete the grant or cooperative agreement application. Applicants should refer to <http://www.grants.gov> to apply. Further, the applicant must respond to the Evaluation Factors for Award, provide cost data to support a proposed budget and include project narratives with a detailed discussion of the project and methodology used.

3. Cover Sheet.

Applications must use Standard Form 424 (including SF 424A and 424B) with the required information filled in and the certified assurance signed as the cover sheet for their proposal.

4. Project Funding.

The SF424 will document pricing information for the initial one year project period. Address all data points as applicable. The evaluation of pricing information will be to insure all costs are allowable in accordance with the following paragraph.

NRCS intends for the final project funding to be determined on a site by site basis. WRP is a detailed and extensive restoration implementation process. For agreement obligation purposes, an average restoration cost per easement will be used to support "Attachment B – Work Products" of the agreement. NRCS will complete the

engineering, survey, design, and zone specific seeding plans which will provide the basis for the government estimate. NRCS will forward the conservation plan, schedule, and design specifications to the awardee(s) and request the submission of a cost proposal and breakdown. NRCS will negotiate with the awardee(s) if the proposed costs are not fair and reasonable considering the government estimate. The agreement Attachment B will then be amended as necessary to show funds committed to each individual easement restoration.

5. Project Description.

The application shall include a narrative statement that addresses the following as a minimum:

- a) A description of the resources and experience of the organization necessary to successfully perform implementing wetland and associated upland restoration activities.
- b) The organization's level of commitment in terms of the staff, equipment resources, and/or funding support necessary to leverage the cooperative agreement.
- c) A brief description of the capabilities to perform the terms of the cooperative agreement, including a brief description of the organizational entity and of the qualifications, employment status, current responsibilities, and proposed level of effort for the project coordinator, and staff responsible for implementation. Resumes for key personnel should be included in an appendix to the application. Similar information requested in this paragraph may also be included for subawardees, contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers that would be beneficial for proposal evaluation.
- d) A list of past experiences with providing implementation of wetland and associated upland restorations for conservation contracts.
- e) The application shall include an appendix. Material should be included only when necessary to support information provided in the narrative. Copies of documents, brochures, etc. are encouraged to demonstrate experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

Evaluation Criteria:

The New Hampshire NRCS anticipates the possibility of up to two awards for this announcement.

Prior to the evaluation review, each application will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice by the appropriate NRCS staff. Incomplete applications and those that do not meet the provisions of this notice will be eliminated from competition and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the provisions of this notice will be evaluated by an evaluation team against the evaluation criteria. The evaluation team will make recommendations to the State Conservationist for final selection and award.

The focus of the evaluation will be the responses to the evaluation criteria. There is no sample project or associated pricing required. Proposers are welcome to reference NRCS restoration examples or sample projects if they choose. Capability, not cost, is the basis of the evaluation process and following criteria.

The applications will be evaluated using the following criteria that are listed in descending order of importance:

A. Specialized experience and technical competence in the type of work required (45%)

- Evaluation will be based on the extent of related experience in performing planning, designing and implementing wetland and associated upland restorations. Consideration will be given to those applicants with knowledge of and direct experience in implementing wetland and associated upland restorations in New Hampshire. Some key areas of expertise that will be evaluated include, but are not limited to:
- Organizational capabilities. The adequacy of organizational resources and experience to successfully install wetland restoration projects. Share in a common mission that supports the natural resource conservation efforts with private landowners.
- Project personnel. The reasonableness and feasibility of the applicant's approach and expertise for successfully achieving the objectives of the project within the required time frame.
- Understanding the intent of WRP. The applicant's recognition of the value and need of the project and the full understanding of the intent of WRP.
- Ability to demonstrate successful past history and credibility of working with private landowners.
- Experience working on wetland restoration in the State of New Hampshire or similar ecosystems, to include expertise in specific types of ecozones. Examples of previous work shall be documented for review.

B. Professional qualifications necessary for satisfactory performance (25%)

Evaluation will be based upon the number of qualified personnel, their knowledge and experience associated with the requirements above, and their availability to perform work on this agreement.

C. Capacity to accomplish the work (15%)

Evaluation will be based upon the number of qualified personnel, the quantity of existing work under contract and the schedules for completion of the existing work.

D. Past performance regarding work of this nature (15%)

- Past experience with other government agencies and other organizations in regards to work of this nature.
- Quality and timeliness of performance of work performed.

Selection

Each proposal will be evaluated and ranked in accordance with the evaluation factors listed above. Discussions may be held with each applicant regarding the applicant's experience and operational methods. NRCS reserves the right to select more than one applicant for award. Applicant(s) may be selected to perform work by New Hampshire NRCS Easement Area(s), Ecozone(s), other geographical or program area, statewide or combination(s) thereof. After selection, NRCS will enter into negotiations with the selected applicant(s) to discuss cost and the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement to be signed. The cooperative agreement will identify the USDA Field Office(s) or locations to be served. NRCS has the option to cancel the announcement if there no qualified applicants or limit the number of awards made from this announcement. If multiple awards are made, NRCS reserves the right to designate what restoration projects are to be completed by which awardee. It is expected that restorations will be packaged in groups to obtain the best value to the government.

Award Information-Cooperative Agreement

The NRCS will use a cooperative agreement with selected applicants to document the agreement parameters. The cooperative agreement will include:

- Project purpose;
- Project objectives and deliverables;
- Project progress and budget reporting requirements;
- Award amount and budget information;
- Information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement;
- Other requirements and terms deemed necessary to protect the interests of the United States.

Neither the approval of any application nor the award of any cooperative agreement commits or obligates the United States to provide further support of a project or any portion thereof or implies any endorsement. This award is not subject to Intergovernmental Review, Executive Order 12372.