Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
FY2007 Ranking Guidelines and Instructions
NRCS East Area of Washington State

These guidelines and instructions will be used to evaluate and select applications for funding under the FY2007 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program in the NRCS East Area of Washington State.

The NRCS technical practices eligible for financial assistance under a WHIP Conservation Program Agreement in the East Area are listed in the WHIP FY2007 Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs (Attachment 1). All WHIP projects must be planned to meet the NRCS quality criteria for a resource management system (RMS) level for wildlife concerns.

WHIP Application

The WHIP applicant will sign the NRCS-CPA-1200 application form and complete the East Area WHIP Application Questionnaire (Attachment 2). All WHIP applications will be entered into the NRCS Program Contracts System (ProTracts).

In addition to the applicant information, the following will be entered into ProTracts for each application:

Treated Acres: enter the total WHIP offered acres (acres within the proposed WHIP planning unit boundary) into the ProTracts application.

Land Units: enter the FSA farm and tract number, and Legal Description (Section-Township-Range).

Habitat Type: enter the predominant habitat type and acres. Acres listed under any or all of the habitat types may be duplicated in the T&E acres, if applicable.

Estimated Cost: Enter the total estimated cost-share for the WHIP eligible practices needed to establish, restore, or enhance the wildlife habitat as identified in the applicant's WHIP objectives and the application ranking. This can be obtained by outlining a preliminary Wildlife Habitat Development Plan and using the East Area FY2007 WHIP Cost List (Attachment 3) to estimate the total cost-share.

Ranking the Applications

All applications will be ranked using the ProTracts Application Evaluation Ranking Tool developed for the East Area. The ProTracts ranking tool contains ranking questions in three sections: Local Issues, State Issues, and National Priorities. The ranking questions are listed in the East Area FY07 WHIP Ranking Criteria (Attachment 4). All questions in the ProTracts ranking tool require a "Yes" or "No" response. A "Yes" response earns ranking points.

In addition to answering the ranking questions, the tool also requires identification of the resource concerns that will be treated, and the conservation practices that will be included in the planned wildlife habitat restoration or enhancement on the WHIP offered acres.

➢ LOCAL ISSUES

Rank according to the Local Issues questions #1 through 23:

Restoration of Primary Habitats

Shrub-Steppe habitat and Eastside Grassland habitat areas are identified on the "EASTERN WASHINGTON STATE WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM (WHIP) HABITAT MAP" dated June 2002. If the offered acres are not within the Shrub-steppe or Eastside grassland habitat areas identified on the map, the acres may be eligible for points if the soil survey supports either habitat type at the site, and a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist, NRCS biologist, US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, or Tribal biologist concurs in writing that the site is suitable to restore either of these native habitat types.

Rank according to the ranking tool questions #1 through 6. Points may only be awarded in this category for either Shrub-Steppe or Eastside Grassland as the primary habitat.

Restoration of Secondary Habitats

Plantings to restore habitat shall ensure the establishment or enhancement of plant communities beneficial to wildlife. Restoration of fish passage shall ensure human-made barriers no longer prevent fish access to upstream habitats. All plantings and structural work shall meet the appropriate applicable NRCS practice standards. If a site already meets the NRCS standard, the offer is not eligible for these points.

Wetland projects that do not include any other habitat types should apply for funding under the Wetlands Reserve Program. Wetland projects that are combined with upland habitat projects can be funded by WHIP if funds are available.

Rank according to the ranking tool questions # 7 through 12. Points may be awarded in this category for multiple habitats.

Other Considerations

Other considerations in the ranking ask if there will be a need for supplemental irrigation water to establish vegetation, a change of primary land use, a change of domestic animal access to wildlife habitat, and what is the proximity to existing wildlife habitat. Rank according to the Local Issues questions #13 through 18.

For proximity to existing wildlife habitat, the following examples are provided:

Examples of managed wildlife areas:

- Federal or state lands managed for wildlife
- A county park managed in a natural condition
- Nature Conservancy or other land trust easement

- Tribal wildlife/natural resource area
- Wetland Reserve Program easement

Examples of cost-share agreements (must be in effect for the term of a new WHIP agreement; must be providing wildlife benefits; and must be verified):

- Existing WHIP contracts or agreements
- Wetland Reserve Program cost-share agreements
- Conservation Reserve Program contracts
- WDFW Game Farm Alternative agreements
- Lands under other Federal, State, local, or Tribal agreements meeting the criteria above

NOTE: WHIP contract acres cannot be on CRP or WRP acres.

Habitat Improvement for Priority Species

The planned restoration or enhancement on the WHIP offered acres will improve habitat conditions for one or more federal or state-listed Threatened & Endangered species, federal or state candidate species, federal species of concern, state sensitive species, or other priority wildlife or fish species included in the East Area Priority Species (Attachment 5). Rank according to the Local Issues questions #13 through 18.

The habitat improvement on the WHIP offered acres must **directly benefit** the identified species. Record the priority species and describe the direct benefits the habitat restoration will have to each species on the WHIP Supplemental Worksheet (Attachment 6).

- For aquatic species, the WHIP offered acres must contain a stream or water body, and the habitat restoration must directly benefit the species.

- For both terrestrial and aquatic species, if Attachment 5 does not show a species for the county location of the WHIP offered acres, but the local WDFW biologist, USFWS biologist, NRCS biologist, or Tribal biologist determines that a species listed in Attachment 5 will be directly benefited by the habitat restoration, these points shall be awarded. Obtain the biologist's documentation of direct benefit to the species, and attach it to the WHIP Supplemental Worksheet.

➢ STATE ISSUES

Rank according to the State Issues questions #1 through 8:

Likelihood of Success

Use the WHIP "Likelihood of Success" Evaluation (Attachment 7) to determine which State Issues question #1, 2, or 3 will be answered "Yes".

Cost of Operations and Maintenance

Only one State Issues question #4, 5, or 6 will be answered "Yes" for the cost of operation

and maintenance of planned practices on the WHIP offered acres.

Educational and Recreational Benefits

State Issues question #7 will be answered "Yes" if the applicant will allow pubic access to the WHIP offered acres for educational or recreational use.

Project Complexity

State Issues question #8 will be answered "Yes" if all of the planned WHIP practices will be vegetative, non-engineering, and/or engineering practices with a TSP design from a certified licensed professional engineer.

- **NATIONAL PRIORITIES**

If the planned practices on the WHIP offered acres will address one or more of the National Priorities, answer "Yes" to the appropriate questions #1 through 5.

WHIP Application Selection

Applications will be selected for funding by the Area Conservationist, using the ranking scores assigned through use of the ProTracts ranking tool. In the event of a ranking score tie between applications, the tie-breaker will be the random number generated by the tracking code feature in ProTracts.

Special Projects

The Area Conservationist (AC) may utilize up to 30% of the Area's WHIP allocation to fund special projects not identified in the ranking criteria. Special projects may only include practices selected from FY2007 WHIP Eligible Practices (Attachment 1). This special provision will provide an opportunity to fund projects that are unique and/or where NRCS can participate as a project partner with other wildlife agencies or organizations to fund a special project.

WHIP applications suitable for selection as special projects may be submitted to the AC, with justification, by the District Conservationist. If an application is selected for funding as a special project, the AC will document the basis for the decision and obtain concurrence from the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs.

WHIP Plan and Contract Development

Wildlife Habitat Development Plans for applications selected for funding will be developed in the Customer Service Toolkit (CST) utilizing the approved East Area FY2007 WHIP Cost List, and uploaded into ProTracts for the WHIP contract. The NRCS-CPA-1202 Conservation Program Contract and Appendix from ProTracts will be printed for signature of the applicant.

Implementation Schedule

The following timeline will be adhered to in the implementation of the FY07 WHIP plan:

Key Dates	Key Tasks
Dec. 1, 2006	Applications must be received by close of business on December 1, 2006 to be considered for the FY07 WHIP ranking period.
Dec. 15, 2006	Letters sent by DC to each applicant who has incomplete eligibility information in ProTracts.
Jan. 12, 2007	Any applicant who still does not have all eligibility flags set to "Y" (Yes) in ProTracts is determined ineligible for this ranking period, and notified by DC.
Jan. 12, 2007	Ranking for all applications completed in ProTracts, and Application Packages due at Area Office.
Feb. 2, 2007	Applications selected for funding, PreApproved in ProTracts, and Field Offices notified by the AC.
Apr. 13, 2007	Funds not Approved to agreements in ProTracts will be reallocated between Areas by the State Program Manager.
May 1, 2007	All contracts of $150,000 or more will be submitted by the State Conservationist to the Regional Assistance Chief for approval.
May 15, 2007	All WHIP contracts will be obligated in ProTracts by the Contracting Officers.

MAJOR TASKS

1. Application Procedure
    - All applications are entered in ProTracts.
    - All applicants must sign a ProTracts-generated NRCS-CPA-1200 by December 1, 2006, and complete an East Area FY2007 WHIP Application Questionnaire.

3. Applicant and Land eligibility
    - Refer to Part 517.10, Part 517.11, and Part 512.20, 440-V-CPM located at http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/
    - Program eligibility will be documented on the Applicant and Land Eligibility Determination Worksheet (Attachment 3 of Bulletin WA-30-6-28).
    - Certification of Control of Land (Attachment 4 of Bulletin WA-30-6-28), or other proof of control of land

4. Processing Applications
    - Develop preliminary plan at level adequate to evaluate and rank the application.
    - Rank the application using the Ranking Tool in ProTracts.
    - Enter the treated acres, land units, predominant habitat type, and estimated cost for each application into ProTracts.

- By January 12, 2007, submit an application package containing legible photocopies of the following for each application to the Area Program Liaison:
  - ☐ NRCS-CPA-1200 Application generated from ProTracts and signed by the applicant
  - ☐ Application Ranking Summary report from ProTracts
  - ☐ Application Questionnaire (attachment 2)
  - ☐ Supplemental Worksheet (attachment 6)
  - ☐ Likelihood of Success Evaluation (attachment 7)
  - ☐ Preliminary plan and cost estimate
  - ☐ Preliminary plan map, with WHIP offered acres outlined, and tentative practice locations
  - ☐ Participant and Land Eligibility Worksheet (WA-30-6-28, attachment 3)

5. Application Selection

- Area Conservationist and Program Liaison will review and select applications for funding and notify the District Conservationist of the selection.
- Special Projects and/or Tribal projects may also be selected by the Area Conservationist at this time, if any justifications for such projects are received.
- District Conservationists will notify applicants in writing of their application status.

6. Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP)

- The planning unit will be clearly identified on a conservation plan map.
- The WHDP will be developed in Customer Service Toolkit for selected applications.
- The WHDP must contain all essential practices needed to meet quality criteria contained in the Field Office Technical Guide, Section III, that apply to the applicant's wildlife resource concerns.
- The WHDP will meet NPPH planning policy for conservation management systems.
- The WHDP will be signed by the NRCS planner, a Conservation District representative, and the applicant.

7. WHIP Agreement Development

- Agreements will be developed in accordance with 440-V-CPM, Part 517 and Part 512.
- Agreements will be developed using the approved Area FY2007 WHIP Eligible Practices, and the approved Area FY2007 WHIP Cost List posted in Customer Service Toolkit and ProTracts.
- The WHIP agreement will be developed using the CST contract wizard and uploaded into ProTracts, and an AD-1155 and NRCS-CPA-1202 Contract with Appendix will be printed from ProTracts.
- The NRCS Field Office will review the WHDP, AD-1155, CCC-1200 and Appendix with the applicant and obtain the applicant's signature on all documents. Obtain the District Conservationist's signature on the AD-1155.
- The Field Office will notify the Area Conservationist (Contracting Officer) that the WHIP Agreement is ready to obligate. The Contracting Officer will notify the field offices if the CO will require hard copies of the WHDP, AD-1155, NRCS-CPA-1202, Appendix, plan map, etc., before obligating the Contract.

    - Reminder: Any agreement of $150,000 or more in total cost-share must be submitted by the Contracting Officer, through the State Conservationist, to the Regional Assistant Chief for approval.
- **All WHIP contracts will be obligated in ProTracts by May 15, 2007.**
- After obligating the NRCS-CPA-1202 Contract in ProTracts, the Contracting Officer will send written notification of WHIP Agreement approval to the applicant (now the participant.) A copy of the letter will be sent to the Field Office and the DC.

8. Processing Payments

- The Field Office will complete the practice certification and payment process in ProTracts, obtain participant signature on the NRCS-CPA-1245 Payment Application, and submit the payment documents to the District Conservationist for review and Approval in ProTracts.
- The DC will submit the NRCS-CPA-1245 and associated documentation to Financial Management (FNM) for processing.