

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program FY2009 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 FY2009 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 Contract in the East Area are listed in the FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices and Practice Hold-Downs. 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 CPA-1200 Application, and the CPA-1202 Appendix, and will complete the East Area WHIP Application Questionnaire. 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 WHIP conservation plan and using the East Area FY2009 WHIP Payment Schedule to estimate the total cost-share.

Ranking the Applications

All applications will be ranked using the ProTracts 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 FY09 WHIP Ranking Criteria. 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 24:

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.

Acres offered for Aspen Forest enhancement or restoration will be eligible for these points if the soil survey suitability supports this habitat type.

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

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.

Plantings for the benefit of native pollinator species will be established in accordance with Biology Technical Note 24, Plants for Pollinators in the Intermountain West.

Rank according to the ranking tool questions # 7 through 13. 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 #14 through 19.

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 contracts (must be in effect for the term of a new WHIP contract; 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 WHIP Priority Species list. Rank according to the Local Issues questions #20 through 24.

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.

- 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 the WHIP Priority Species list 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 the WHIP Priority Species 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 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 public 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 6.

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 the FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices. 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

WHIP Plans of Operation (WPO) for applications selected for funding will be developed in the Customer Service Toolkit (CST) utilizing the approved East Area FY2009 WHIP Payment Schedule, and uploaded into ProTracts for the WHIP contract. The 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 FY09 WHIP plan:

Key Dates	Key Tasks
April 15, 2009	Applications must be received by close of business on April 15, 2009 to be considered for the FY09 WHIP ranking period.
April 15, 2009	Letters will be sent by DC to each applicant who has incomplete eligibility information in ProTracts, as applications are received.
May 1, 2009	Ranking for all applications completed in ProTracts, and Application Packages due at Area Office.
May 6, 2009	Applications selected for funding, PreApproved in ProTracts, and Field Offices notified by the Area Conservationist.
May 6, 2009	Funds not Approved to contracts in ProTracts will be reallocated between Areas by the ASTC-P.
June 5, 2009	All WHIP contracts will be submitted to the AO for review.
June 15, 2009	All contracts of \$150,000 or more will be submitted to the State Conservationist by the Area Conservationist.
June 30, 2009	All WHIP contracts will be obligated in ProTracts by the Contracting Officer.

MAJOR TASKS

1. Application Procedure

- All applications are entered in ProTracts.
- All applicants must sign a ProTracts-generated CPA-1200 Application, be provided a copy of the CPA-1202 Appendix, and complete an East Area FY2009 WHIP Application Questionnaire, by April 15, 2009.

2. Applicant and Land eligibility

- Refer to 440-V-CPM Part 517.22, and Part 512.22, located in the NRCS e-Directives.
- Program eligibility will be documented on the Applicant and Land Eligibility Determination Worksheet (attachment to Bulletin WA-300-9-7).
- Certification of Control of Land (attachment to Bulletin WA-300-9-7), or other proof of control of land

3. 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.
- Submit an application package containing legible photocopies of the following for each application to the Area Program Liaison, as soon as ready for each application (final deadline is May 1, 2009):
 - CPA-1200 Application, signed by the applicant
 - Application Ranking Summary report from ProTracts
 - Application Questionnaire
 - Supplemental Worksheet
 - Likelihood of Success Evaluation
 - Preliminary WHIP conservation plan and cost estimate
 - Preliminary plan map, with WHIP offered acres outlined, and tentative practice locations
 - Participant and Land Eligibility Worksheet
 - Proof of signature authority for businesses

4. 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.

5. WHIP Conservation Plan

- The planning unit will be clearly identified on a conservation plan map.
- The plan will be developed in Customer Service Toolkit, and will 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 plan will meet NPPH planning policy for conservation management systems.
- The plan will be signed by an NRCS planner with technical approval authority, and by the applicant.

6. WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO) and Contract Development

- WHIP Plan of Operations (WPO) and contract will be developed in accordance with 440-V-CPM, Part 517 and Part 512, using the approved East Area FY2009 WHIP Eligible Practices, and the approved East Area FY2009 WHIP Payment Schedule posted in Customer Service Toolkit (CST) and ProTracts.
- The WPO will be developed using the CST contract wizard and uploaded into ProTracts. The CPA-1155 and CPA-1202 Contract will be printed from ProTracts.
- The NRCS Field Office will review the CPA-1155, CPA-1202 and Appendix with the applicant and obtain the applicant's signature on all documents.
- The DC will review the contract documents, sign the CPA-1155, and complete the

FY09 WHIP Contract Documents Review checklist.

- The DC will send the following to the Area Conservationist (Contracting Officer) for each WHIP Contract as soon as the contract is ready to obligate. All contract documents must be received in the Area Office by close of business on June 5, 2009:
 - ❖ Document originals
 - CPA-1202 contract
 - CPA-1202 Appendix (signature page only)
 - Plan Map (Arc-GIS)
 - APE Map
 - ❖ Document photocopies
 - CPA-1155 Plan of Operations
 - Conservation Plan from CST
 - Proof of Signature Authority (if not already provided)
 - CPA-09 Power-of-Attorney (if used)
 - FSA-156EZ
 - FY09 WHIP Contract Documents Review checklist, certified by the DC
 - CRRW - Cultural Resources Review Worksheet

- **All WHIP contracts must be obligated in ProTracts by June 30, 2009.**

- After obligating the contract in ProTracts, the Contracting Officer will send written notification of WHIP Contract approval to the participant. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Field Office and the DC.