

EXHIBIT 7

**US Forest Service-National Forest System
FY2021 Land and Water Conservation Fund
Criteria and Guidance for the Evaluation and Scoring of Proposals for Land Purchase**

LWCF Land Acquisition projects are evaluated according to a set of criteria derived from USDA and Forest Service goals and objectives, as well as the enabling legislation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Endangered Species Act. Proposals are evaluated against the National Criteria in a two-stage process which is competitive and merit based. Land purchase proposals are first evaluated at the Regional level, then Regions send top ranked projects to the Washington Office (WO) for review by a national panel comprised of an inter-disciplinary team of 8-10 subject matter experts from realty and other staffs with expertise in the criteria. The panelists review and score the proposals, then the scores are averaged to determine a final score. The National Panel finalizes a draft prioritized list of land purchase projects to recommend for funding. If requested, this project list is reviewed by Agency leadership and then forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget through the Department of Agriculture.

The criteria used to evaluate proposed land purchase projects funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations are derived from the following laws and Departmental and Agency Goals:

- Section 7 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1966, as amended;
- Section 5 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended;
- The Secretary of Agriculture's 7 Strategic Goals for OneUSDA;
- The Forest Service Chief's Five Priorities; and
- Forest Service Strategic Goals as stated in the Forest Service's Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

United States Department of Agriculture 7 Strategic Goals for OneUSDA:

STRATEGIC GOAL #1: Ensure USDA programs are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, and with Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2: Maximize the ability of American agricultural producers to prosper by feeding and clothing the world.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3: Promote American agricultural products and exports.

STRATEGIC GOAL #4: Facilitate rural prosperity and economic development.

STRATEGIC GOAL #5: Strengthen the stewardship of private lands through technology and research.

STRATEGIC GOAL #6: Foster productive and sustainable use of our National Forest System lands.

STRATEGIC GOAL #7: Provide all Americans access to a safe, nutritious, and secure food supply.

Forest Service Chief's Five Priorities for Our Work

These five national priorities do three things: They give urgency and focus to critical needs; help foster the work environment we want for our employees; and set expectations for the manner in which we accomplish our work with citizens, partners, volunteers, and each other.

- 1. Uplifting and empowering our employees through a respectful, safe working environment.**
- 2. Being good neighbors and providing excellent customer service.**
- 3. Promoting shared stewardship by increasing partnerships and volunteerism.**
- 4. Improving the condition of forests and grasslands.**
- 5. Enhancing recreation opportunities, improving access, and sustaining infrastructure.**

Forest Service Strategic Goals and Core Values

STRATEGIC GOAL: Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands

- Foster resilient ecosystems
- Mitigate wildfire risk
- Conserve open space

STRATEGIC GOAL: Deliver Benefits to the Public

- Provide abundant clean water
- Strengthen communities
- Connect people to the outdoors

CORE VALUES: Excel as a High-Performing Agency

- Support effective, efficient and transparent business practices
- Leverage strengths and partnerships

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Purposes

Title 1, Section 7 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act provides authority for the "acquisition of land, waters, or interests in land or waters" and directs the National Forest System (NFS) to use LWCF funds to acquire "Inholdings within (a) Wilderness areas of the NFS, and (b) other areas of national forests as the boundaries of those forests exist on the effective date of this Act, or purchase units..., all of which other areas are primarily of value for outdoor recreation purposes."

Endangered Species Act invocation of LWCF

Section 5(a) and (b) of the Endangered Species Act, state: (b) "Funds made available pursuant to the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended, may be used for the purpose of acquiring lands, waters, or interests therein" to (a) "establish and implement a program to conserve fish, wildlife and plants, including those which are listed as endangered species or threatened species pursuant to section 4 of this Act."

Scoring Criteria, Points, Weighting and Other Required Information

There are 6 scored criteria worth 110 points total, and 1 unscored section

Total possible score: 113 points.

1. Recreation and Recreational Access: 25 total possible points

2. Watershed Protection/Climate Resilience: 15 total possible points

3. Threatened and Endangered Species: 15 total possible points

4. Tract Location: 15 total possible points

5. Connecting Communities/Partner Support: 15 total possible points

6. Regional Ranking: 25 total possible points

7. Operation and Maintenance (not scored)

-The Regional Ranking criterion is determined at the Regional evaluation

-3 “extra” points possible added to the national panel average score to complete “final phases”

-Operation and Maintenance Section is required but not scored

Proposals support OneUSDA and Forest Service goals

For each criterion that requires a written narrative, #s 1, 2, 5 and 6, information should include how the tract(s) proposed for acquisition reflect OneUSDA strategic goals, the Forest Service Chief’s Priorities, and the Forest Service Strategic Plan. Of particular importance for the 2020 fiscal year is demonstrating that land acquisition can support local economies, contribute to effective and efficient stewardship of national forests, support shared stewardship through partnerships, and help deliver excellent customer service. Criteria #s 3 and 4 have forced rankings and do not require a narrative in their proposal sections to provide the required information, however we do recommend a discussion of how these criteria support the aforementioned goals, in the “Additional Information” section.

1.) 25 Total Possible Points: Recreation and Recreational Access

This criterion evaluates the degree to which the acquisition creates or enhances opportunities for recreation, and access to recreation on National Forests and Grasslands. More points will be awarded to acquisitions that provide significantly new or improved recreational opportunities in support of Administration and Forest Service goals and objectives. Please describe the recreational opportunities provided, who the users will be and the degree of added capacity for increased visitor use.

2.) 15 Total Possible Points: Watershed Protection/Climate Resilience

The Forest Service’s Watershed Condition Framework provides a nationally consistent, science-based approach to evaluate watershed conditions and apply integrated improvement and restoration techniques based on local characteristics. This criterion can be quantified in terms of

degree of importance a specific tract will contribute to larger stated watershed protection and restoration goals. Acquisitions can protect high functioning watersheds, or, provide needed opportunities to restore impaired watersheds. Support for acquisitions should be described in terms of how a particular tract fits in with Forest Service watershed management goals once the tract is acquired, and not the condition of the parcel while in private, State or other ownership.

- Award points based on the degree to which acquisitions contribute to watershed improvement, protection or restoration. More points could be given to parcels complementing or integrated with Agency watershed restoration projects such as CFLRP.

Connecting and restoring watersheds and protecting diverse habitats supports climate resilience. What other data or information supports this acquisition as one that is important to meet Forest Service goals with respect to building resilient ecosystems that can more readily adapt and mitigate conditions brought on by climate change?

- More points will be awarded to tracts that support Administration and Forest Service objectives regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation, ecological restoration and resiliency.

3.) 15 Total Possible Points: Threatened and Endangered Species and Habitat (Forced Ranking)

Land acquisition provides an opportunity to protect or restore habitats for fish, wildlife and plants at risk. Proposals are scored based on the tract or tracts capacity to protect or restore habitats for endangered, threatened, or candidate species as classified under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or designated Forest Service Species of Conservation Concern in Forest Plans. A score is assigned according to the level of protection afforded to a species on a specific tract. If there is more than one tract proposed, the score will be assigned according to the tract with the **lowest** level of species designation or protection represented. This is to prevent one tract with high T&E values from artificially elevating tracts with no T&E protection. With this scoring mechanism, the incentive is to nominate tracts with the highest possible T&E values. However, points may be awarded to a tract that itself has no species of special designation but supports vital ecosystem function for a species with special designation in proximity. Recognizing the importance of landscape level context to protect species at risk, ecosystem function includes things like ensuring the health of upstream waters or proximate waters, protecting adjacent and proximate tracts whereby residential or commercial development could disrupt nesting, feeding or other behavior, migration or dispersal of the species. An explanation of the importance of this kind of tract should be included in the "Additional Information" section.

Scoring:

- Threatened or Endangered Species: 15 points
- Candidate Species or Forest Service Species of Conservation Concern: 10 points
- No special species designation on the tract itself but the tract supports a direct vital ecosystem function for a designated species: 5 points
- No special species designation: 0 points

Example:

- 1.) Green Acres Tract protects Endangered Kirtland's Warbler = 15 points
- 2.) Red Acres Tract protects the Species of Conservation Concern Northern Short-Tailed Shrew=10 points
- 3.) Blue Acres contains no species with special designation=0 points
- 4.) Purple Acres contains no species with special designation but protects some ecosystem function vital to the support of the Kirtland's Warbler on adjacent Green Acres Tract=5 points

If Green Acres tract is submitted alone the points awarded in this criterion are 15.

If Green Acres tract and Red Acres tract are submitted together the points awarded are 10.

If Green, Red and Blue Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 0.

If Green, Red, Blue and Purple Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 5.

If Purple Acres tract is submitted alone the points are 5.

4.) 15 Total Possible Points: Proposal Tract Location (forced ranking)

This Criterion supports the specific language in the LWCF authority for the Forest Service that directs the Agency to acquire lands with higher levels of protection like Congressionally Designated Areas (CDA) such as Wilderness. It also recognizes that Forest Plans designate areas for specific uses or needs such as an inventoried Roadless areas, proposed Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers areas, and Wilderness Study Areas. Please ask the WO if there are any questions about which designations are eligible. Points are awarded by a forced ranking.

Forced scoring by tract:

15 points: Inside Congressionally or Presidentially Designated Area. Acquisitions within a Congressionally or Presidentially Designated Area such Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River Corridors, National Scenic Areas, National Recreation Areas, National Historic and Scenic Trail Corridors, National Monuments or other special management or emphasis areas designated by Congress or the President of the United States.

10 points: Area with special designation by NFS Plan. Acquisitions that are within an Inventoried Roadless Area, Wildlife Management Area, proposed Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, or Wild and Scenic River Corridor, research natural areas or other special designation per NFS planning goals within National Forest or Grassland boundaries. If you are not sure if a tract is in or out of a NFS designation please contact Nancy Parachini at 202-570-9009.

5 points: Inside NFS boundaries. Proposed acquisitions that are within NFS boundaries but not included in a special designation.

5 points: Tracts have no special designation but are vital to the integrity of an area with a special designation. Tract can be in or out of NFS boundary. The tract warrants acquisition in order to protect some vital function or feature of an adjacent tract with a special designation. An explanation of the

importance of the tract should be included in the “Additional Information” section. And example would be acquisition of a tract to prevent incompatible development directly adjacent to a Wilderness.

0 Points. Outside NFS boundaries-excludes National Historic and Scenic Trails

The score assigned will be based on the location of the tract proposed. If there is more than one tract proposed, the score for the criterion will be assigned according to the **lowest** scoring tract. This is to prevent one tract that occurs within a Congressionally or Presidentially Designated Area from artificially elevating tracts with no special designation. With this scoring mechanism, the incentive is to nominate the highest priority tracts with respect to Congressional and Presidential direction, Forest Planning and resource management.

Example:

- 1.) Green Acres Tract occurs in a CDA or National Monument or contains National Historic or Scenic Trail = 15 points
- 2.) Red Acres Tract occurs in Wilderness Study Area or Inventoried Roadless Area=10 points
- 3.) Blue Acres occurs on NFS lands with no special designation=5 points
- 4.) White Acres occurs outside of NFS boundaries = 0 points
- 5.) Purple Acres occurs adjacent to a tract with a special designation and its protection is vital to the integrity of the benefits conferred by the specially designated tract =5 points

If Green Acres tract is submitted alone the points awarded in this criterion are 15.

If Green Acres tract and Red Acres tract are submitted together the points awarded are 10.

If Green, Red and Blue Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 5

If Green, Red, Blue and Purple Acres tracts are submitted together the points are 5

5.) 15 Points: Connecting Communities/Partner Support

This criterion evaluates a project based on the degree of public support for the acquisition. The focus is on partnerships and community support and involvement. Does the acquisition help the Forest Service work in partnership with the local community and provide a benefit? Example: acquisitions that support gateway community planning, locally used trail systems, youth education. How is the acquisition part of an effort by the Forest Service to add value to the community? Who are the partners and supporters? Why is this support important? If the proposal is forwarded to the National Panel, proponents are strongly encouraged to submit letters of support to supplement the nomination, particularly support from locally elected officials, members of Congress, adjoining landowners and community members. **Are there current support letters from local groups and elected officials? Provide updated copies of the support letters with the proposal, as they will not be accepted after the submission deadline.**

- More points will be awarded to projects that clearly demonstrate that the acquisition provides an economic benefit for the local community, or helps deliver a needed service to the community.

6.) 25 Points: Regional Ranking

Regional Ranking: This criterion is scored at the Regional evaluation. The Region can apply 25 points based on Regional factors and goals. The National Panel will not rescore this criterion. It will import the Regional Score into the National evaluation. Regions may choose to award points based on specific Regional goals and circumstances. For example, tracts that may require more points could be those with important cultural features, or are extremely threatened, or for whatever reason may be important and warrant more points to be competitive. **Project fact sheets require Regions to explain the rationale for how Regional Ranking points were awarded.**

The points may be allocated in any configuration but in total cannot exceed 25 points. Example point allocations:

Project 1-20 points	Project 1-5 points	Project 1-10 points
Project 2-5	Project 2-5	Project 2-5
Project 3-0	Project 3-5	Project 3-3
Project 4-0	Project 4-5	Project 4-2
Project 5-0	Project 5-5	Project 5-5
Project 6-0	Project 6-0	
Project 7-0	Project 7-0	

7.) Operation and Maintenance-not scored

This criterion is not scored but the information is important and required by Congress. How does the acquisition improve the ability of the acquiring unit to perform its work and deliver benefits to the public with greater efficiency and lower costs? Or does the acquisition incur costs? Is the cost outweighed by a longer term benefit? Please try to describe how the acquisition makes a net positive contribution to operation and maintenance measured in terms of verifiable cost savings or other quantifiable efficiencies.

Additional Information, Attachments and Panel Considerations

Additional Information Page

Page four of the fact sheet can be used to include any additional information for any of the criteria.

Photos and other attachments

One page of photos is allowed. No additional attachments are allowed other than support letters

Maps

Maps must be submitted in the legislative map standard outlined in interim directive 1510-2011-1. Proposals may include as many maps as necessary, within reason. Please try to provide a “vicinity map” that shows where the tract(s) are located in a landscape context relative to NFS boundaries, roads, cities, and other protected lands. Individual maps for each tract should be included. Please use green to represent National Forest and Grassland areas and Red to indicate tracts proposed for acquisition. Map

features need to correspond to locations, features and other elements described in the narrative. For instance, if the narrative describes a trail, but sure to show the trail on the map.

Extra Points-National Panel

Project Completion. In order to try to ensure that partially completed projects or tracts reach completion, a project before the National Panel review will receive an extra three points to the average score of a project ONLY if the request is for the final phase or tract(s) and is \$3.0 million or less. **3 points**

Unobligated Balances and Readiness

The panel will use the following information to inform decisions about project funding.

- **Unobligated Balances.** Unspent funds from prior years' appropriations. Projects with unobligated balances two (2) years old or older. Also, the Region's ability to obligate funds awarded in prior fiscal years can be considered.
- **Readiness.** Per Congressional Direction the following due diligence must be addressed in the fact sheet:
 - 1.) Whether or not the landowner has signed an option;
 - 2.) Whether or not an appraisal is finished if the proposed value is based on an approved appraisal to Federal standards, or a market analysis.
- **Budget Considerations:** The Panel's recommendations will take account of anticipated appropriation levels.

Project Definitions:

Phased acquisition: One large tract with one owner, divided into 2 or more smaller parts ("phases") in order to be acquired over more than one year..

- **On-going project acquisitions:** Multiple discrete tracts, often under different ownerships, in the same landscape that are grouped under a general heading that is often repeated for several years. Tracts that make up the project are often prioritized for acquisition until the project is complete.
- **Single acquisition:** A single acquisition that can be completed in one purchase.