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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

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Topic #8b: Technical Review Panel Revisions

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Proposed Action: Discussion

Summary

Since 2000, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) has relied upon a team of technical experts to review lead entity strategies, regional plan implementation, and the technical merits of applications. The SRFB Review Panel is currently used for eight months of the year to assist applicants and lead entities to develop proposals, review final applications, and review lead entity strategies and regional plan implementation. RCO staff proposes to expand the SRFB Review Panel to a year-round standing body available to review applications and assist with post project funding issues, as needed. While the budget for the review panel is less in 2008 than in 2007, there are sufficient funds available for this expanded role. This will be accomplished by restructuring how the panel is used and reducing the size of the panel.

Background

The SRFB established the Review Panel in 2000 to provide a technical review of proposed projects and lead entity strategies. In 2006, the Review Panel's responsibilities were revised based upon recommendations from an Issues Task Force that addressed a number of emerging issues. Currently, the Review Panel is involved mostly with the application phase of a project. Its input is critical to providing recommendations to the SRFB regarding individual projects that are not technically sound. The Review Panel is also charged with reviewing regional area processes. Finally, the Review Panel evaluates lead entity strategies and projects' "fit to list" for those areas not covered under a regional recovery plan. The budget for the 2007 Review Panel was approximately \$254,000 for review of 219 projects.

Analysis

Staff proposes to expand the length of time the Review Panel is available to lead entities and project sponsors and expand its responsibilities. The Review Panel will be available year round to assist RCO staff, project sponsors, and lead entities develop project proposals. In addition, there are a number of ways that the Review Panel will



assist the RCO staff with review of project design plans, and review of requested scope changes and amendments to current projects. Following is a description of the proposed expanded role of the SRFB Review Panel during the application cycle and the project implementation phase.

Regional Review and Strategy Ratings

Staff recommends we revisit this topic after we have completed the 2007 grant round and discuss the recommendations of the review panel. Staff would like to explore a more efficient way of providing this information to the SRFB.

Pre-application Review

The Review Panel will be available year round to assist RCO staff, project sponsors, and lead entities in developing project proposals. The intent is to assist stakeholders develop quality project proposals, increase dialogue on the front end of proposal development, and reduce the number of projects of concern at final application.

There is a need from lead entities and project sponsors to have additional Review Panel participation, particularly as projects are becoming larger in scale and more complex. Some lead entities are particularly geared up for earlier review due to implementation of the Habitat Work Schedule required by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Review Panel engagement earlier in the application development phases provides feedback to project sponsors and lead entity organization prior to the local scoring process. RCO staff has received a favorable response from lead entity coordinators to this proposed expanded review period.

PSAR Design Only and Construction Reserve Project Review

There is an upcoming need to engage the Review Panel members in review of design-only and construction reserve projects funded through Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) funds. There are eleven design-only projects submitted as of the application deadline. This new category, designed to accelerate projects funded under PSAR, had no match requirement. Eleven design only projects were presented to the SRFB during its September 27 meeting and were pre-approved, pending evaluation by the Review Panel. On October 26, the Review Panel concluded that five of the projects met the minimum criteria and needed no further refinement. The remaining six projects were routed through the standard process for funding consideration in December. Additionally five to ten projects have been revised to design only since the Review Panel's final comments. Reserved construction funds must be under contract by December 31, 2009 and be spent by June 30, 2011. The design plans must be submitted to SRFB for review prior to the release of the construction funds. Members of the Review Panel are needed to review design-only and construction plans, and make funding recommendations to the SRFB. It is expected that review would occur throughout the next two years as design-only and construction reserve plans become available for review.

Project Implementation Assistance

There are a number of ways that a year round Review Panel will assist RCO staff review requested scope changes and amendments to current projects. When project amendments and changes in the scope of a project are requested, RCO staff work with project sponsors to develop a formal request, which is either approved by the Director, SRFB Subcommittee or SRFB. The Review Panel will be used to evaluate the technical merits of amendment requests on an as-needed basis. Their recommendation on the amendment request would further assist the Director, SRFB Subcommittee, or SRFB in making their decision.

In addition, the Review Panel assistance is needed to review non-capital work products submitted by project sponsors. Non-capital projects include assessments, feasibility studies, and design plans for restoration projects. Reports and design plans are reviewed by RCO staff on whether they meet the intent of the funded project. Review Panel members can assist with this review and provide comments on the technical merits of the final work product submitted by project sponsors.

Finally, the Review Panel is increasingly applying special conditions to applications as a way to guide project sponsors on how to proceed with their projects. Review Panel members may be needed to assist RCO staff in crafting the project agreement language to successfully meet the special condition identified during the review process.

Pros and Cons of Expanding the SRFB Review Panel Responsibilities

Pros	Cons
Provides lead entities with more flexibility in their schedules.	Lead entities may need to adjust their pre-application materials.
Earlier involvement in the application cycle may result in fewer projects of concern at final application review.	Applicants will need to be involved earlier which may be a strain on their resources.
Earlier review of proposals may improve the quality of projects.	Any change in the application cycle review from last year can be confusing.
May reduce the time spent on reviewing final applications.	Review Panel time would need to be monitored and equitably assigned to lead entities.
Draft review panel comments are provided prior to local scoring processes.	May add additional time to review of work products and amendment requests slowing down the approval process.
May reduce the number of special conditions recommended from the Review Panel.	Unsure of the amount of time that would be needed by Review Panel members.
Incorporates Review Panel oversight of implementing the special conditions created during the application review process.	
Ensures additional technical review of PSAR design-only and construction	

Pros	Cons
reserve projects.	
Allows for Review Panel involvement as outlined in the project amendment Authority Matrix adopted June 2005.	
Incorporates additional technical review of deliverables required under grant contracts.	
Responsive to long-range recovery planning being conducted by some regions.	

Next Steps

RCO staff proposes to expand the Review Panel responsibilities starting in January, 2008. Proposed changes to the Review Panel related to the application process will be included in the proposed application process changes available for public comment in December 2007. Contracts will be negotiated with Review Panel members with the intent of at least a few of the previous members being available to review pre-application materials in early 2008. It is anticipated that due to the lower level of grant funding available for 2008 in comparison to 2007, there will be less time needed by the Review Panel for application review.

Year round access to the review panel will streamline grant making in future cycles and provide some flexibility to regions and lead entities in their grant round timing. Staff will bring the 2008 grant round policies and procedures packaged in Manual 18 to the February 14-15, 2008 SRFB meeting. Staff will provide regions, lead entities, and project sponsors sufficient time to comment on the 2008 grant round. It is the staffs hope that we will be able to officially start the 2008 grant round in February several months earlier from previous rounds.