**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Restoration and Revitalization Priority Projects RFR**

**How will the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) decide whether a project receives technical assistance, contracted technical services, and/or funding if it is accepted as a Priority Project?**

DER is interested in projects that are at all stages of development. All Priority Projects will receive some level of technical assistance from DER staff, which could include assisting the project partners with project scoping, fundraising, community organizing, permitting, etc. DER also has pre-qualified restoration consultants that can be contracted directly by DER to provide technical services for projects. Priority Projects will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis for services from those consultants, or in some cases, direct funding. DER will make decisions about the type and level of assistance based on project needs and availability of funding.

**What is the difference between the Applicant, the Owner, and the Lead Project Sponsor as used in this RFR?**
First, it is possible that these may all be the same person or entity, or three separate people / entities. The Applicant is the person or entity that completes the Priority Projects application and submits it to DER. The Owner is the legal owner of the parcel where on-site physical work would occur. In the cases of large-scale revitalization or flow restoration projects, there may be many owners, and in those circumstances DER does not require all owners to demonstrate support for the project up-front. The Lead Project Sponsor is the person or entity that enters into the cooperative agreement with DER. Designation of a Lead Project Sponsor is subject to approval by DER as part of the application review process.

**What does DER expect of the Owner of a Priority Project?**

With few exceptions, the owners of land where a restoration Priority Project action will take place are expected to assume the following responsibilities. In some cases, other project partners (e.g., local NGOs) may take on these duties with the approval of DER.

1. Serve as the applicant on all regulatory permitting submittals.

Except in rare instances, DER will not serve as the applicant on permit applications. Under most of the regulations that apply to restoration projects, the property owner is responsible for compliance with the permit terms and conditions regardless of who is listed as the applicant on the permit application. As such, the efficiency of compliance is improved when the owner serves as the permit applicant.

1. Hold the contract for project implementation (i.e. construction) and with few exceptions, the contract for engineer construction oversight.

In general, DER will not hold construction contracts with firms implementing a restoration project. From a liability and business standpoint, it is generally most appropriate for the site landowner to contract directly with the implementation firm. In addition, having the landowner contract directly with an engineer to oversee the implementation improves communication regarding critical decisions during construction. This is the preferred arrangement unless the project team identifies another appropriate entity to hold these contracts, and DER and the owner agree.

1. Assist with project fundraising.

In the course of fundraising for a restoration project, some funding opportunities are only available to site owners. In other cases, having the owner as the recipient of funds is the most efficient arrangement (e.g. for construction funding per #2 above). In these cases, it is expected that the site owner will be willing and able to assist with project fundraising as appropriate, including being the applicant and recipient for a funding opportunity.

1. Assist with public outreach.

Meetings with stakeholders and the public during project development often provide critical insight into project details and can facilitate permitting and fundraising. Participation by the landowner and project partners is important to convey the collaborative nature of DER’s restoration projects.

**What should the required landowner letter include, and is there any example text?**

Landowner letters of support for a Priority Project should affirm the statements made in the application and confirm the roles of the applicant, landowner, and Lead Project Sponsor related to the responsibilities listed in the answers above. If the landowner proposes to commit cash or in-kind service match, the letter should include that commitment. DER does not offer example text for landowner project support letters.

**What kinds of contributions have landowners and project partners made to past successful projects?**

In general, each phase of a project requires some level of financial support and work (i.e. in-kind support). There are many opportunities for financial or in-kind contributions to a project. Physical restoration projects proceed through multiple steps where the landowner and partners may need to participate in or lead project development, meetings of the technical team, public meetings, contracting with consultants and contractors, and regulatory consultation, etc. All of these activities take time and effort and have associated in-kind value. Very few landowners or project team members can support the full financial and in-kind needs of a project. This is why DER asks Priority Project Applicants to describe the existing and expected resources and commitments associated with the proposed Priority Project.

**How will landowner commitment be evaluated?**

Beyond the basic commitment to the landowner responsibilities above, the strength of the landowner’s commitment will be assessed based on the owner’s letter pledging to support the stated project goals, provide financial support, provide in-kind services, and appear at public outreach forums, etc. This is evaluated in the application as well as the landowner’s letter.

**How many projects will be selected this year?**

The number of projects will be determined based on project merit, the mix of project types, and available resources.

**Can I submit more than one project application to the RFR?**

Yes.

**Does all funding have to be spent this fiscal year?**

All selected projects that are awarded DER funding will include specified dates of completion. In general, completion dates coincide with the state’s fiscal year which closes annually on June 30th. Thus, a funding award for Fiscal Year 2021 would end on June 30th 2021 and require all services specified in the associated grant contract to be completed by that same date.

**Will there be a yearly Priority Projects RFR?**

Depending on program funding and workload, DER anticipates putting out an RFR at least once every other fiscal year.

**Is funding match required to submit a project application?**

DER does not require projects to have other funding sources, but financial match and other forms of committed support will be considered in the proposal evaluation.

**Can the Priority Projects Program provide match funding for other grant?**

Support from DER can serve as match, provided that a funding organization can accept state funds as match. Use of DER support as match must be approved in writing by DER in advance.

**How long will a project remain on the DER Priority Projects list?**

Projects, once selected, will remain on the list until they are completed or new information or circumstances warrant a review of project status. DER will review the progress of all projects at least annually and may remove projects from the list at its sole discretion. Reasons for removal can include lack of sufficient progress, loss of landowner or partner support, inability to raise funds, or discovery of other obstacles that prevent implementation.

**If, for example, a project is selected as a Priority Project and it is decided that the project will be awarded specific technical services, does the Applicant still need a fiscal agent even if it will not be administering funds?**

DER will provide contracted technical services by hiring a pre-approved contractor from DER’s Ecological Restoration Technical Master Service Agreement. In this situation, an Applicant would not need a fiscal agent to advance the project. However, as direct funding may be awarded during the life of a project (e.g., for construction) , the application must identify the entity (Landowner, Applicant, Lead Project Sponsor or other project partner as applicable) which will be able to receive and administer those funds from DER, or identify a fiscal agent for that purpose.

**I have a project that is in the initial phase of development, but not ready for on the ground implementation or construction, should I still apply?**

Yes, we welcome the nomination of projects in all stages of development or implementation. They will be evaluated by the same review criteria as other projects.