FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM
PROJECT SCORING GUIDANCE

Introduction:

This document provides guidance to the National Review Panel on how to score individual Forest Legacy Program (FLP) projects, including additional clarification on the core national criteria, project readiness, and other evaluation considerations used in this process. The outcome from the National Review Panel will be a ranked and prioritized list of FLP projects for submission to the Office of Management and Budget for consideration in the President's Budget. Its objectives are to:

- Provide a clear and defensible ranking process that can be easily articulated to program participants and partners; and
- Ensure fair, equitable, and thorough review of all projects by the National Review Panel.

National Project Selection:

- A multi-tract project should be scored based on how all the tracts fit within the criteria. For example, if only one tract meets the highest point criteria, the project will not likely obtain the highest points.

Region/Area/IITF Role:

- Work with States to produce highly competitive FLP projects;
- Work with States to produce projects that are "Ready";
- Work with States to assure that all pertinent project information is in the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS), including prioritizing tracts if the States choose to do so;
- Learn and understand project details;
- Assure that projects are consistent with the goals of the State Forest Action Plan (Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy, including Assessments of Need incorporated by reference);
- Confirm that projects have been reviewed and evaluated by the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee;
- Assure that projects comply with the June 30, 2003, FLP Implementation Guidelines, as amended;
- Work with States to identify which projects can be phased and the funding threshold.

Washington Office Role:

- Work with Regions/Area/IITF (R/A/I) to produce highly competitive FLP submissions; and
- Ensure that project selections meet congressional direction and national program goals.

National Review Panel Role:

- Score projects using the national core criteria (Importance, Threatened, and Strategic);
- Develop a National List of ranked projects.

National Core Criteria:

Importance - This criterion focuses on the attributes of the property and the environmental, social, and economic public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property and its resources. This criterion reflects the ecological assets as well as the economic and social values conserved by the project and its level of significance.

National significance of a project is demonstrated in two ways:

1. A project that solidly represents a majority of the attributes outlined is viewed as nationally significant because of its strong alignment with the purposes and Strategic Direction of the Forest Legacy Program.
2. A project that supports Federal laws (such as Endangered Species Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and Clean Water Act) contributes to Federal initiatives or contains or enhances Federal designations (such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Scenic Byways, National Recreation Trails, and cultural resources of national importance). When determining Federal importance, interstate/international resources (such as migratory species, or trail and waterways that cross state or international boundaries) should also be considered.

Scoring consists of evaluating a project for the attributes below and identifying a point score. More points will be given to projects that demonstrate multiple public benefits of significance. Significance of attributes is demonstrated by the quality and scope of the attributes. More points will be given to projects that exemplify a particular attribute or combination of attributes.

A project need not have all the attributes listed to receive maximum points for this category, but projects that contain more attributes should receive a higher score. For a project to receive the maximum point score, it must contain a majority of the attributes and must significantly address one or more of the Federal laws or initiatives noted above. A project brief that discusses the majority or all the attributes, but demonstrates only limited importance for each attribute, should not receive maximum or perhaps even medium ranking.

- *High importance* (21-30 points) - The project contains a majority of the attributes and those attributes are very significant and of high-quality.
- *Medium* (11-20 points) - The project contains a majority of attributes, several of which are very significant and of high-quality.
- *Low* (0-10 points) - The project contains only a few attributes or it could contain all of them, but does so in a limited, marginal, or tertiary way.

**Please note: Discussion about how the project fits within a landscape conservation initiative should be included under the "strategic" category and not in this section.

Attributes to consider: The descriptions listed below represent the ideal project for each attribute. *Note that the attributes are not listed in priority order.*

Economic Benefits from Timber and Potential Forest Productivity - This category includes three independent components: (1) Landowner demonstrates sustainable forest management in accordance with a management plan. Additional points should be given to land that is third party certified (such as Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council, and American Tree Farm System). (2) Forestry activities contribute to the resource-based economy for a community or region. (3) The property contains characteristics (such as highly productive soils) to sustain a productive forest. (Strategic Direction Goal 2.3)

Economic Benefits from Non-timber Products - Provides non-timber revenue to the local or regional economy through activities such as hunting leases, ranching, non-timber forest products (maple syrup, pine straw, ginseng collection, etc.), guided tours (fishing, hunting, birdwatching, etc.), and recreation and tourism (lodging, rentals, bikes, boats, outdoor gear, etc.).

Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat - The site has documented threatened or endangered plants and animals or designated habitat. Documented occurrence and use of the property should be given more consideration in point allocation than if it is habitat without documented occurrence or use. Federally listed species should be given more consideration than state-only listed species when evaluating the significance of this attribute. (Strategic Direction Goal 2.3)

Fish, Wildlife, Plants, and Unique Forest Communities - The site contains unique forest communities and/or important fish or wildlife habitat as documented by a formal assessment or wildlife conservation plan or strategy developed by a government or a non-governmental organization. The importance of habitat to an international initiative to support and sustain migratory species can be viewed as national importance if conserving the property will make a significant contribution. The mere occasional use of the property or a modest contribution to an international initiative does not raise the property to national importance. (Strategic Direction Goal 2.3)

Water Supply, Aquatic Habitat, and Watershed Protection - (1) Property has a direct relationship with protecting the water supply or watershed, such as providing a buffer to public drinking water supply, containing an aquifer recharge area, or protecting an ecologically important aquatic or marine area, and/or (2) the property contains important riparian area, wetlands, shorelines, river systems, or sensitive watershed lands. When allocating points consider the importance of the resource, the scope and scale of the property, and the magnitude and intensity of the benefits that will result from protection of the property. Merely being located within an aquifer recharge area or in a water supply area should not be given the same consideration as a property that makes a significant conservation contribution to water, riparian, and aquatic resources and habitats. (Strategic Direction Goal 2.1)

Public Access - Protection of the property will maintain or establish access by the public for recreation; however, restrictions on specific use and location of recreational activities may exist. (Strategic Direction Goal 2.3)

Scenic - The site is located within a viewshed of a government designated scenic feature or area (such as a trail, river, or highway). Federal designation should be given more consideration than state-only designations when evaluating the significance of this attribute.

Historic/Cultural/Tribal - The site contains features of historical, cultural, and/or tribal significance, formally documented by a government or a non-governmental organization. A Federal designation should receive greater consideration.

Threatened - This criterion estimates the likelihood for conversion. More points will be given to projects that demonstrate multiple conditions; however, a project need not have all the conditions listed to receive maximum points for this category.

During the evaluation of a threat, a landowner interested in conserving their land should not be penalized in allocating points because they are not marketing their land, have not subdivided their land, or sought approval for a subdivision plan. Also, a property with an approved subdivision plan should not, without question, receive a high score in the Threatened section. The attributes outlined below must be considered to determine if the conditions exist to make conversion of a property likely and points should be allocated accordingly.

If the property has been acquired by a third party with the support of the State, threatened will be evaluated based on the situation prior to the third party acquisition.

- *Likely* (11-20 points) - Multiple conditions exist that make conversion to non-forest uses likely;
- *Possible* (1-10 points) - A few conditions exist that make conversion to non-forest uses possible; or
- *Unlikely* (0 points) - Current conditions exist that make conversion to non-forest uses unlikely.

**Please note: Discussion about what project attributes will be threatened if the project is converted should be included under the "importance" category and not in this section.

Attributes to consider: The descriptions listed below represent the ideal project for each attribute. *Note that the attributes are not listed in priority order.*

Lack of Protection - The lack of temporary or permanent protections (e.g. current zoning, temporary or permanent easements, moratoriums, and encumbrances that limit subdivision or conversion) that currently exists on the property and the likelihood of the threat of conversion.

Land and Landowners Circumstances - Land and landowner circumstances such as property held in an estate, aging landowner, future property by heirs is uncertain, property is for sale or has a sale pending, landowner anticipates owning property for a short duration, landowner has received purchase offers, land has an approved subdivision plan, landowner has sold subdivisions of the property, etc.

Adjacent Land Use - Adjacent land use characteristics such as existing land status, rate of development growth and conversion, rate of population growth (percent change), rate of change in ownership, etc.

Ability to Develop - Physical attributes of the property that will facilitate conversion, such as access, buildable ground, zoning, slope, water/sewer, electricity, etc.

Strategic - This criterion reflects the project's relevance or relationship to conservation efforts on a broader perspective. When evaluating strategic, four considerations should be made: 1) the scale of a conservation initiative, strategy, or plan; 2) the scale of the project's contribution to that initiative, strategy, or plan; 3) the placement of the parcel within the area of the initiative, strategy, or plan; and 4) how the project complements protected lands. (FLP Strategic Direction 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3)

- *High* (21-30 points) - The property significantly advances a conservation initiative, strategy, or plan and complements protected lands.
- *Average* (11-20 points) - The property makes a modest contribution to a conservation initiative, strategy, or plan and is near already protected lands.
- *Low* (0-10 points) - The property is not part of a conservation initiative, strategy, or plan or near already protected lands, but will lead to locally-focused conservation effort.

**Please note: The submitted project map should support this category and it is important to make sure the text and map are consistent.

Attributes to consider: The descriptions listed represent the ideal project for each attribute. *Note that the attributes are not listed in priority order.*

Conservation Initiative, Strategy, or Plan - How the project fits within a larger conservation plan, strategy, or initiative as designated by either a government or non-governmental entity.

Complement Protected Lands - How the project is strategically linked to enhance already protected lands including past FLP projects, already protected Federal, State, or non-governmental organization lands, or other Federal land protection programs (NRCS, NOAA, etc).

Additional Considerations:

Prior to developing the Regional project list, each State should be evaluated by the R/A/I regarding its fulfillment of the FLP core program requirements listed below:

1. Baseline reports for all closed conservation easement tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 18);
2. Forest stewardship plan or multi-resource management plan for all closed conservation easement tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 18);
3. Annual monitoring conducted for all closed conservation easements tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 20);
4. Addresses significant conservation easement violations and/or has a conservation easement violation plan (FLP Guidelines, page 20);
5. Implements a record keeping protocol for all FLP tracts (FLP Guidelines, page 37);

6. Developed and implemented an action plan to address recommendations in a Quality Assurance Inspection
   (Quality Assurance Plan for Forest Legacy Program Appraisals. September 2006);
7. The amount of unspent funds a State has in outstanding grants; and
8. Up-to-date on grant reporting requirements.

For the majority of States, we expect that all requirements will be met. In the rare case that persistent deficiencies in a State's performance are identified and cannot be remedied, the State can either not submit projects for consideration or submit projects with the understanding that they will not be reviewed and ranked by the National Review Panel. The projects will still be part of the National list, but will be added to the bottom below the reviewed and ranked projects. We expect that the R/A/I will have been working closely with the State during the year to address all deficiencies.

Prior to the due date, Forest Service WO and R/A/I FLP program staff will discuss deficiencies to ensure consistent treatment of States' projects and will share the outcome with the State.

The following items will be considered by the National Review Panel when developing the final list of ranked projects and associated funding levels, and not by the individual panel members when scoring projects:

1. The National Review Panel is not bound by a State's priority ranking of projects. If the National Review Panel ranks projects out of a State's priority order, then the panel will call that State to discuss the situation. However, the panel will not move a lower ranked project up the list to maintain the State's priority ranking.
2. The National Review Panel will give additional attention to projects from States that have not recently received funds as well as from States that are competing for the first time.
3. The National Review Panel will consider the following information when breaking ties, determining recommended funding levels for projects, or evaluating second and third projects for a State: (a) the amount of unspent funds each State has in outstanding grants; (b) amount of funds leveraged for the proposed project; (c) average time to close projects within the past five years; (d) average funds leveraged within the past five years; and (e) project readiness.

   Project Readiness is defined as the degree of due diligence completed. To demonstrate project readiness, completed items need to be specified (including completion date) in FLIS and credit will only be given to those items completed (One tally for each completed item, with a maximum tally of 7. Projects with multiple tracts will need to have the majority of their tracts have the task completed before a tally is given.):
   1. Documented support for the cost estimate, such as completed market analysis or preliminary appraisal.
   2. Landowner and State have general agreement on conservation easement or fee acquisition conditions.

3. Cost Share commitment has been obtained from a specified source.
4. A signed option or purchase and sales agreement is held by the State or at the request of the State **OR** At the request of the State, conservation easement or fee title is held by a third party.
5. Title search is completed, including identifying any temporary or permanent protections.
6. Minerals determination is completed.
7. For conservation easement properties, a stewardship plan or multi-resource management plan is completed.