



## Project Review Criteria

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership's Project Review Committee uses the following criteria when evaluating habitat restoration project proposals. Projects are scored on how well they meet three general criteria: ecological benefit, implementation, and cost. The maximum score a project can receive is 100 points. The maximum point values for each criterion are: 40 points for ecological benefit, 25 points for climate change adaptation, 25 points for implementation, and 10 points for cost. Each general criterion contains a number of elements that may influence a project's score. These criteria are designed to be applicable to any review process which the Estuary Partnership administers. As necessary, the Estuary Partnership may modify the criteria, or designate more weight to specific elements, to accommodate the objectives of particular funding sources with which the Estuary Partnership may partner. If the criteria are modified, project sponsors and reviewers will be notified when the availability of funding is announced. Explanations for the criteria follow.

### Ecological Benefit (40 points)

The most important criteria to consider when evaluating a project are those related to the project's potential ecological benefits. The end goal of any proposed habitat restoration project is the ultimate improvement in the ecosystem; as such, ecological benefits should receive the most consideration, and thus weight, when determining a project's final score. The Ecological Benefit criteria are used to evaluate the potential ecological uplift resulting from project implementation.

**Linkage to recovery plans, FCRPS BiOp, or other plans** – Is the action/project identified in regional plan(s)? What specific action(s) will the project address? If the project is not included in regional plan(s), was an explanation given for why it should be considered for funding?

**Location** – Is the project located in a high priority area for restoration? For example, has the area been identified as a priority in the Estuary Partnership's Restoration Prioritization Strategy? Is the project located in an area where restoration will ultimately be successful? What is the condition of the surrounding habitat? Will the project result in a loss of currently functioning habitat?

**Habitat Restored** – Is the project located in an area where an important historic habitat type has been lost? What specific habitat types will be restored? If this is an acquisition project, what type of habitat will be protected?

**Connectivity** – Will the project improve the site's connectivity with the Columbia River or other water bodies? How will the project improve salmonid access to spawning, rearing, or refuge habitat? Will the project result in unencumbered access to the site? Will connectivity be improved at all times, or only during specific flow/water level conditions?

**Threats and Limiting Factors** – What are the threats and limiting factors at the project site? Are invasive plant or animal species found at the project site? Why is the restoration action necessary? If

this is an acquisition project, what is the threat to the property if it is not acquired?

**Natural Processes and Ecosystem Function** – Will the project improve or restore natural processes and ecosystem function? How will the project improve habitat capacity? What specific functions or conditions will be improved (i.e. – food web support, organic matter export, sediment retention, water quality, habitat complexity)? How will the project improve conditions not only at the project site, but within a larger geographic area (i.e. – watershed)? Will the project require ongoing maintenance to function as proposed?

**Adequate Size and Scale** – What is the size of the project (in acres or miles)? What is the area affected by individual actions included as part of the larger project? Is the project's scale appropriate for its objectives?

**Species** – *What species will benefit from the project? Which specific ESUs (salmon) or DPSs (steelhead) of ESA listed salmonids will benefit from the project? What specific life stages will the project benefit? Will this project be detrimental to other species, and if so, how will the impacts be mitigated/offset?*

## Climate Change Adaptation Measures (25 points)

Integrating shifting ecological conditions and species assemblages as a result of the changing climate is vital for sustained ecological benefit and the long-term success of restoration projects. Changing climate conditions include warmer and prolonged summer temperatures making cold water refuges more vital for cold water species such as salmon and steelhead; submersion, conversion, and erosion of estuarine and floodplain habitats by rising sea levels; shifts in habitat structure (e.g., vegetation composition) by changing precipitation, temperature, and CO<sub>2</sub>; and increasing wildfires as a result of drought and invasions by pests. Traditional restoration projects that do not integrate higher flood events in engineering designs, or the longer, drier, and warmer summers in native plant establishment are prone to fail earlier or need active and costly management in the future. Traditional practices are insufficient to protect native species as research documents that native flora and fauna are expanding their ranges and will need to do so in order to maintain their climate niche. This criterium is used to evaluate whether a project targets offsetting climate change impacts to vulnerable species or integrates specific, focused climate adaptation measures into its design.

**Climate Adaptation Measures** - *Does the project target offsetting climate change impacts to vulnerable species or include climate adaptation measures? Some recommended measures can include, amongst others: designed for higher winter flows or more intense precipitation events, supports floodplain wetland migration inland with increasing sea levels, protects or enhances a cold water refuge(s), improves site thermal conditions through hyporheic exchange, includes drought-tolerant plant species.*

## Implementation (25 points)

Though the ecological benefits of a project should be the primary focus during project evaluation, it is important to determine how likely it is that the project will meet its goals. To evaluate this likelihood, it is important to consider the implementation strategy for the project. The Implementation criteria are used to evaluate both the certainty that the proposed project will work as designed, and the likelihood that the project will achieve its goals. Additionally, to determine if the project was successful in meeting

its goals, it may be important to implement a monitoring strategy. Ideally, baseline monitoring should be completed prior to implementation, and effectiveness monitoring should be conducted upon project completion.

**Approach** – Does the project use a proven restoration method? Has the proposed methodology been used for other projects? What uncertainties/constraints exist? Will the project rely on natural processes or is the restoration dependent on an engineered solution? If the project is dependent on an engineered solution, is there a monitoring plan in place to verify the solution is functioning as intended (i.e. – if a passage project is dependent on a certain water velocity being met, is there monitoring in place to verify that velocity is being maintained)?

**Timeline** – Is the project’s timeline well thought out/developed? Does the project’s sequencing make sense? Is the project likely to occur within the proposed timeframe? Can the necessary permits be obtained within the proposed timeframe?

**Scope** – Is the overall scope well thought out/developed?

**Long Term Management** – Will the project require a formal management plan or long term management? Who will be responsible for the long term management of the site? Is funding secured for the long term management of the site? Is the long term functioning of the site threatened by invasive species, and if so, is there a plan to address that threat?

**Support** – Does the local community support the project? Do affected landowners support the project? Is the project’s ultimate success dependent on community support? What partners are involved with the project? Are any outreach activities included as part of the project?

**Capacity** – Is the project sponsor capable of implementing the proposed project? Have they implemented similar projects in the past?

**Monitoring** – Has the project sponsor adequately explained how they will evaluate project success? Have success criteria and performance criteria been developed? Was baseline monitoring completed at the project site? Has a post-project monitoring plan been developed? Has funding been secured for post-project monitoring?

## **Cost (10 points)**

Because habitat restoration funding is limited, projects should be evaluated to determine if the requested funding is appropriate given the project’s likely outcome.

Is the funding request appropriate for the desired outcome?

Is the project’s cost commensurate with its projected benefits/ecological uplift?

Is the cost in line with similar projects?

Is this funding source the most appropriate one for this project?

## **Guidance for Reviewers**

**Design Projects** – Though the review criteria may be most directly applicable to restoration projects, reviewers will also need to evaluate design projects. For these projects, reviewers should focus on how the actual restoration project resulting from the design work will function. For example, when evaluating the project’s ecological benefit, reviewers should consider how the restoration component of the project will affect natural processes, what threats it will address, and what species it will benefit. As the effects of the actual restoration work are directly tied to the design, reviewers should closely analyze the proposed design and evaluate, to the best of their ability, what the outcomes of the proposed design will be.

**Acquisition Projects** – It is likely that reviewers will also evaluate acquisition projects. For acquisition projects containing a restoration component, reviewers should evaluate them similarly to other restoration projects. For acquisition projects without a restoration component, reviewers should focus on the necessity of the acquisition as it relates to protecting or improving ecosystem function. Reviewers should focus on potential threats to the property, and the seriousness of those threats if the property was not acquired.

**Monitoring** – All proposals should include a description of how the sponsor will evaluate project success and determine if adjustments to the completed project are necessary. Reviewers should determine, to the best of their ability, if the monitoring activities or plan included as part of the project are sufficient to meet these goals.

**Critical Flaws** - It is important that reviewers identify project components they believe may be critical flaws to a project. It is possible that a particular element within one of the criteria may be such a flaw, even though a project may receive a favorable total score. For example, if projects score high in the Ecological Benefit and Implementation categories, their overall score will be high, as those two criteria are worth the majority of possible points a project can receive. However, if reviewers feel the cost of a project is out of line with its expected benefits, they should identify this as a possible critical flaw, even though the project may receive a high score overall. As another example, if project success relies on long term management, but no management plan has been developed, this may be a critical flaw the project sponsor would be required to address before funding was awarded to the project.