

WILDLIFE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Questions and Answers #1

February 7, 2018

The following are questions FWP has received, or generated on its own, to help clarify certain aspects of the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program.

MCA 87-5-805(4), which defines qualifying program expenditures, is cited multiple times below. For reference, qualifying expenditures are as follows: (a) biological or mechanical control of noxious weeds; (b) purchases and application of approved herbicides; (c) seed purchases and application of seed; and (d) grazing costs as a component of an overall integrated noxious weed management plan.

If you have further questions, please contact Rick Northrup, Wildlife Habitat Bureau Chief at 406-444-5633.

1) QUESTION: How is non-federal match defined for the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP)?

ANSWER: For the purposes of WHIP, non-federal match is limited to qualifying expenditures (MCA 87-5-806(4)) made with nonfederal dollars during the period of the grant.

2) QUESTION: How is non-federal match documented?

ANSWER: A copy of an invoiced receipt must be submitted to document match.

3) QUESTION: How does FWP distribute grant funds?

ANSWER: All grant funds will be requested by and paid directly to the Project Sponsor. FWP will make payments upon receipt of proper documentation, including a statement of work completed, source of non-federal match, and associated copies of invoiced receipts.

4) QUESTION: If WHIP funding is intended specifically for wildlife habitat, how do we address non-habitat areas that are integrated within those habitats?

ANSWER: We recognize the value of providing comprehensive weed treatment coverage. WHIP grant funds are intended to be used on important wildlife habitats (MCA 87-5-804). To be effective, treatments on incidental non-habitats, such as a road corridor or other minor disturbed sites can be included. These sites must, however, be incidental in size when compared to the overall treatment area. WHIP is not intended for targeting roads and other disturbed areas in the vicinity of wildlife habitat. However, partner efforts to manage weeds in these non-habitat areas are useful to include as background information in the grant application to show the overall effectiveness of coordinated partner efforts.

5) QUESTION: What are some options for how non-federal match can be used to leverage grant funds?

ANSWER: As the question implies, there are a few ways of configuring nonfederal match contributions, all of which may be part of the same grant. Eligible expenditures (MCA 87-5-806(4)) within treatment areas may serve as non-federal match, be funded with grant funds, or a combination of both. We provide the following scenarios to help explain this further. Note that in all scenarios, the match must be spent either before the federal funds or coincident with federal funds at a rate of 25% match and 75% federal. The federal dollars cannot be spent before the non-federal match dollars but the non-federal match dollars may be spent before the federal dollars (during the grant period).

Scenario 1: The most common manner for providing match is to complete an eligible treatment (using non-federal funds for materials or services as defined in MCA 87-5-806(4)) and submit a request for reimbursement to FWP based on work accomplished. FWP would then provide reimbursement to the project sponsor for 75% of the documented costs.

Scenario 2: Landowner A completes an eligible treatment using non-federal funding within one of the treatment areas. Landowner A may have paid for the treatment entirely out-of-pocket or may have used other non-federal sources and therefore all the expenditures may be claimed as non-federal match. Landowner B, who also has land within a treatment area, may ask for reimbursement of up to 3 dollars of federal WHIP funds for every dollar spent by Landowner A. This scenario was suggested by a conservation district with the notion that federal lands could operate as Landowner B, providing a means for achieving landscape-scale weed management, across federal lands where federal agency funding is limited.

Important related notations: The intended match configuration must be described in the Treatment Plan Budget Narrative. Also, non-federal expenditures must be confirmed before federal funds can be distributed.

6) QUESTION: Does contributing partners mean the landowners that will be benefitting from this grant or specifically the entity who will be administering the program? In other grant programs we have administered, we usually have a CWMA (Coordinated Weed Management Area) selected and leave it open to all landowners in that area to participate if they are interested but we don't usually require any landowner confirmation prior to applying for a grant. I just want to double check on your exact requirements here.

ANSWER: A contributing partner is any entity that intends to provide a cash contribution toward the grant project. It is important that grant expenditures be restricted to ecologically important wildlife habitats (where treatment areas are defined), as required by program statute. The grant application format requires each contributing partner to

complete a contribution statement that details their contributions toward the overall project. This provides the Council and FWP with a tangible accounting of non-federal cash match that is being offered up, as well as other forms of contribution that support grant project objectives. This does require knowing in advance the contributing partners and their commitments toward the grant project. As with the following question, it may be that a landowner intends to provide 25% cost share on work conducted on their land, corresponding to an estimated treatment acreage. The actual amount may vary depending on the actual acreage treated. Also, as with Scenario 2 above, a landowner could participate without contributing match.

- 7) QUESTION:** How imperative is it that the herbicide and application cost-summary sheet exactly matches the actual treatments? In my experience landowners oftentimes change their minds on what they treat after they have already agreed to a specific amount.

ANSWER: An awarded grant can only pay up to the total amount committed to in the grant agreement within the defined treatment areas, consistent with what is detailed in the grant application. And, the actual types of treatments (including types of chemicals, specific biocontrol agents, and the like) must be the same as what is described in the application. These details form the basis for completing an environmental assessment. Actual types of treatments cannot vary from what is described in the EA and the grant agreement; however, we recognize the acreages in the cost summary sheets are estimates and will vary from actual treated acreages. Anticipated treatment acres should be based on best estimates.

- 8) QUESTION:** Is grant administration and project oversight included in the "total nonfederal cash match" section or can it be included in the grant request as contracted services?

ANSWER: MCA 87-5-805(4) defines qualifying expenditures of WHIP (see introductory information above). Administration or other such costs are not eligible. Only qualifying expenditures can be funded with WHIP funds or used as match for WHIP funds. Partner contributions that are not eligible for funding may still be considered when ranking grant applications.

- 9) QUESTION:** What is a nonfederal, non-cash contribution?

ANSWER: These are materials or labor of nonfederal origin that a partner is providing within the project area that helps accomplish the overall goal of wildlife habitat restoration that is not being used as a match contribution. These items do not constitute match for federal funding but can be used to describe the overall effectiveness and commitment of the partnership, which would be important for ranking grant applications and awarding funding.

- 10) QUESTION:** Will this grant opportunity be available again in 2019?

ANSWER: House Bill 434 established The Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program and includes a sunset date of June 30, 2023. FWP intends on conducting annual calls for grant applications until that time. FWP felt it was important to get this program implemented as soon as possible, with the intent of funding some work during the 2017 growing season. However, to make the program most effective, it is likely after this initial call for applications, the program will shift into a pattern of making requests for applications in an August/September timeframe, which would allow for completing all grant processes prior to the following year's weed control season. Consistent with that timeframe, FWP is tentatively planning on making a second call for proposals later in this calendar year.