

INTRODUCTION

History and Purpose

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program is a federal program authorized by Congress with distinct purposes. One purpose is to acquire federal lands known as the Federal side. The other purpose, known as State-side, provides grants to states and local governments to acquire lands and develop outdoor recreation facilities. The LWCF Program, first authorized in 1965, has resulted in Georgia receiving an accumulative total of over \$120 million in matching funds. The program was reauthorized in the Dingell Act of March 2019 and received full and permanent funding in August 2020 in the Great American Outdoors Act. With the permanent funding, it is anticipated that Georgia will receive \$5-7 million annually.

Allocation to Local Governments for the 2022-2023 Funding Cycle

Grant funds are derived from two sources: annual disbursements from the Outer Continental Shelf mineral receipts (Great American Outdoors Act, Public Law 116-152) and a mandatory set aside from other qualified offshore revenues pursuant to the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act also known as GOMESA. The U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service (NPS) allocates the funds through state agencies as a grants program to state and local governments. In order to efficiently administer the grant funds, LWCF is moving to a bi-annual grant cycle. Georgia's two years' worth of allocations to award in the **2022-2023 funding cycle is estimated to be \$10 million.**

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the local government share of the funds include incorporated municipalities, counties, and legally constituted recreation authorities and recreation commissions. Applicants must have an approved Comprehensive Plan as authorized by the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 (Growth Strategies Law). Additionally, applicants must have a verified Service Delivery Strategy as mandated by House Bill 489 (The Service Delivery Strategy Law, O.C.G.A 36-70-20 et seq.). The Georgia Department of Community Affairs provides information to state agencies regarding the eligibility status of local governments to participate in state-administered financial assistance programs. Local governments need not apply if they are not eligible to receive state and federal grants under the Georgia Planning Act and the Growth Strategies Law.

Competitive Pre-applications

SCORP 2022-2026 is the guiding document for funding projects from the LWCF and can be found at <https://gadnr.org/scorp>. Statewide issues were gathered and new criteria were developed to evaluate projects. These criteria are a major component of the pre-application. *Local governments are asked to submit only one (1) pre-application for its highest priority outdoor recreation project.* Funds will be allocated to the highest-ranking projects based on scores derived from the evaluation criteria. Only those local governments with the highest scoring pre-applications will be recommended for funding and asked to submit a second-level application for processing through the National Park Service. By using this pre-application process, local governments will save a tremendous amount of time, effort and cost given that *only those pre-applications recommended for funding will be elevated to the second-level application process.*

A pre-application will contain the following items:

- Narrative description of the project
- Answers to and support documentation for Criteria questions
- Budget/cost estimate
- Transmittal letter
- Current Resolution
- Site map with amenities noted
- Boundary map and/or legal description of the project area
- Map pinpointing the location of the project.

Division of Available Funds

In order to ensure that only high caliber projects are awarded grants, ***DNR reserves the right to set minimum scores.*** If there is an insufficient number of high-scoring-high caliber projects, DNR may delay grant awards and solicit new grant applications/proposals the following year. The calculations below are based on the lowest anticipated grant funds.

The minimum grant request is set at **\$25,000** (total project cost =\$50,000).

The maximum grant request is set at **\$500,000** (total project cost of \$1,000,000).

Second level Applications

Local governments receiving the highest-ranking scores on their pre-applications will be asked to submit second-level applications. If time permits, a workshop (in-person or virtual) for the second-level application process will be conducted. Regardless of the presentation method, the Grants Unit staff will be available to answer any questions. Note: An environmental screening will be required for all projects selected to proceed in the second-level application process. Based on the screening, an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement may be required.

Target Timeline for the 2022-2023 Funding Cycle

April 1, 2023

Funding cycle for 2022-2023 is announced to all municipalities, counties, parks and recreation departments, and regional commissions using the mailing list of the following: Georgia Municipal Association, Associated County Commissions of Georgia, and the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association. Additionally, emails will be sent using a list serve that is maintained by DNR.

May 31, 2023 (11:59 p.m.)

Pre-applications are to be submitted on-line.

Each pre-application must include:

- A transmittal letter
- Narrative description
- Evaluation Criteria with justifications and/or documentation to support the points on each criterion
- A current resolution adopted by the legal entity of the applicant
- Cost estimate/budget
- Preliminary site map
- Plat, survey boundary map and/or legal description
- Location map

June 2023- August 2023

Grants Unit reviews pre-applications for priority rankings based on evaluation criteria. Recommendations are made to the DNR Board.

September 2023

Notifications to submit second-level application are mailed to the local governments who received the highest. On-site inspections begin. Second-level workshop scheduled.

February 2024

Federal/second-level applications due to Grants Unit. Grants personnel will coordinate and correspond as appropriate with each successful applicant to determine if additional documents are needed to complete the second-level application process.

TBD

NPS formally approves grant.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

These are requirements that an applicant must meet in order to be considered for an LWCF grant. There are no points attached to these requirements. Only one of two situations may occur: (1) Yes, the applicant meets all minimum requirements and is therefore eligible for consideration of funding based on how the proposed project scores under the Evaluation Criteria; or (2) No, the applicant does not meet the minimum requirements and is therefore ineligible for funding under the LWCF program.

Any questions concerning the minimum requirements should be addressed to the Grants Unit staff.

Equal Opportunity:

Applicants must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended; and all other State and Federal laws and regulations on nondiscrimination. This means that no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age or disability for recreation programs and facilities sponsored by applicants.

Legally Constituted Entity

The applicant must be a legally constituted governmental entity. This includes a municipality, county or a legally constituted recreation commission or recreation authority with legislative sanction.

State and Federal Laws / Regulations

Applicants must comply with existing laws and regulations for receiving and expending state and federal grant money including, but not limited to, public notices, Georgia Planning Act, bidding and purchasing requirements, Uniform Relocation Act, Architectural Barriers (ADAAG) regulations, Energy Standards, laws and regulations regarding Historic Preservation and archaeological concerns, Georgia Environmental Policies Act, and National Environmental Policies Act, and related environmental rules and regulations. *Note: An environmental assessment will be required for all projects selected to proceed in the second-level application process. Applicants must not have been debarred, suspended, or otherwise ruled ineligible to participate in federal programs by any federal department or agency.*

Operation and Maintenance

Applicants must have a satisfactory track record for operation and maintenance of public recreation areas and facilities. Those applicants with no track record are exempt from this requirement.

Grants Administration

Applicants must have demonstrated a capability for administering grants. An applicant is not ruled out if a grant has never been awarded to that local government. It is possible, however, that applicants who have received previous recreation grants and have not demonstrated a capability for administering grants may be deemed ineligible for assistance.

Fifty Percent Match

Applicants must document the availability of the required fifty percent (50%) match for each application. This requires that each applicant submit a resolution passed by its governing authority that, if a grant were awarded, the required match would be forthcoming.

User Fees

Applicants must agree that any and all user fees either resulting from this application or as part of the applicant's system of public parks and recreations areas cannot be so large as to be exclusionary.

Eligibility (per GA Planning Act of 1989 & Service Delivery Strategy Law)

Applicants must be in compliance with these planning requirements. Local Governments whose eligibility cannot be verified by the Department of Community Affairs shall be deemed ineligible to apply.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

These are the criteria to which a variable number of points are attached. These criteria are designed to measure the overall concept of the proposed project and will produce a ranking score for each pre-application. The evaluation process continues to provide for:

- a broader range of applicant scores;
- continuity of an evaluation process which will gain concurrence from the grantor agency (National Park Service) and will be utilized for future LWCF grants cycles;
- equal opportunity for all eligible sponsors and all sectors of the general public to participate in the processes and benefits of the LWCF program, and an ability to affirmatively address and better attempt to meet priority recreation needs; and
- a continuation of an open selection process for the wise use of scarce funding resources which addresses the concepts of recreation needs, while promoting equity and efficiency in the allocation process.

Pre-applications must include a discussion of each criterion to support point values. DNR Grants Unit staff will assign points based on reasonable and verifiable facts and not supposition. Points will be assigned in a way that provides for consistency in interpretation and application for all pre-applications in the scoring process.

In line with the LWCF manual, Georgia chooses to honor request to amend projects to increase the cost of a project, including the federal share, without further OPSP competition under the following condition:

The State Liaison Officer or Alternate State Liaison Officer has the sole discretion to approve/amend projects to increase the cost of an active project to the extent that it meets NPS approval and it does not negatively impact an active or future grant cycle.