

and in 43 CFR 12.64. A grantee can provide materials, equipment, or other services as a noncash match for portions of the grantee's matching share. Congress did not require matching funds for this appropriation. However, the Service will consider matching funds as an indication of tribal commitment to the program and to encourage partnerships.

In *part II., Proposed Implementation Guidelines, section B., Application Requirements (6)*, the Service indicates that tribes are encouraged to submit a single proposal but may submit additional proposals if all of the funds are not expended. Three comments agreed that one proposal is sufficient as long as the tribe can bundle several projects, with the understanding that portions may be rejected. Two stated that a single proposal is a good target but that the Service should not exclude multiple proposals outright. Three advocated for multiple proposals, and one asked the Service to definitively state whether one or multiple proposals are allowable. One comment asks the Service to explain how excess funds will be handled.

*Response:* Tribes are encouraged to submit one proposal, but multiple proposals are allowable. The Service does not anticipate that excess funds will be available.

*Part II., Proposed Implementation Guidelines, section B., Application Requirements (7 and 8)*, recommends no minimum and that a maximum of approximately 5 percent of available funds (\$250,000) be implemented. Depending upon the number of proposals submitted and the relative merit of each proposal, some applicants may receive greater amounts. One recommendation stated that a \$5,000 minimum be placed on proposals to relieve administrative burden on the Service. Eighteen comments supported 5 percent as a non-binding target but not as a strict cap. Other comments recommended a \$75,000 and \$100,000 limit on proposals, and four advocated for no cap at all. Others suggested a 1, 2, or 2.5 percent cap on proposals. One comment advocated for a cap based on the land base of projects but did not offer any further explanation. It was also suggested that the Service state clearly whether a suggested limit is an actual cap or simply a target.

*Response:* The Service will award grants up to a maximum of \$250,000 per proposal with no more than \$250,000 total awarded to any one tribe. There is no proposal or grant award minimum but the Service is concerned that an excess number of small grants could

result in an undue administrative burden.

Several other comments were received that offered additional feedback. One suggested allowance for partial funding of proposals. Another offered that the TWG could be divided into a large and small grants program to ensure greater participation.

*Response:* Proposals will be scored and ranked on the relative merit of each proposal. The Service may need to partially fund one or more proposals to fully allocate the funds. Small-grant and large-grant programs may be considered in the future.

*Part II., Proposed Implementation Guidelines, section C., Ranking Criteria*, offers a proposed weighting system by which the Service can determine a relative score for proposals including Benefit, Performance Measures, Work Plan, Budget, Capacity Building, Commitment, Partnerships, and Administrative Costs. Two general comments on the Ranking Criteria advised the Service to make them as close as possible to those of the State Wildlife Grants program. One agreed with the proposed criteria but, encouraged consultation with tribes to ensure adequate knowledge of Service goals and strategies. An additional comment asked that the Service better define this program's priorities.

*Response:* Ranking criteria will be clearly defined in the TWG guidance. The State Wildlife Grants Program is not a competitive grant program and has no ranking criteria.

Regarding the *Benefit* of proposals, 12 comments advocate for adding emphasis to this criterion. Four agreed with this criterion if tribes set their own goals and priorities to determine which species are to benefit. Two respondents asked further that the Service define what is meant by the language "including species that are not hunted or fished," and stated that tribal priorities should take precedence over the Service's. One comment favored increasing the emphasis on federally listed endangered species (Endangered Species Act), and another specifically suggested that no special preference be placed on them. A final comment stated that preference should be given to tribes with Integrated Resource Management Plans (IRMPs) or Natural Resource Management Plans.

*Response:* The cumulative maximum of 25 points for *Benefit* (0–25) and 20 points for *Performance Measures* (0–20) already places high value on the extent to which the project will benefit fish and wildlife resources. The Service agrees that benefits will be measured against Tribal fish and wildlife goals. The Service requires that tribes

articulate how their proposals help support the goals and objectives of the TWG and Service and tribal Performance Goals in their proposal narratives.

By including species that are not hunted or fished, the Service provides tribes with discretion to implement projects that benefit species of conservation concern and species of cultural importance. Special emphasis will not be placed on federally listed endangered species, as this is not the purpose of this grant program. These funds may be used to develop IRMPs (or equivalent); therefore, to give preference to those tribes that already have IRMPs is not appropriate.

Under the heading *Performance Measures*, four comments call for an emphasis to this criterion. Two suggested that the Service de-emphasize or delete it, but suggested that if tribal goals rather than the Service's goals were prioritized, "Performance Measures" would be an acceptable criterion. Four additional comments suggested that tribal goals be included, and three others call for the inclusion of Service Goals, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, and Mission Goal in Partnerships 4.1.

*Response:* The Service believes that quantifiable performance measures are an important ranking criterion. This criterion is weighted adequately in the ranking process. Tribes are required to articulate how their proposals help support the goals and objectives of the TWG and Service and tribal Performance Goals in their proposal narratives in the *Benefit* criterion.

Seven comments suggested an added emphasis to the *Work Plan* criterion, and one supported the proposed emphasis on the *Budget* criterion.

*Response:* The Service believes these criteria are adequately emphasized in the ranking process.

Six respondents felt that emphasis should be added to the *Capacity Building* criterion, and one stated further that such projects should be favored in future funding periods. Two asked that the Service remove or de-emphasize this criterion, and one agrees with it as proposed.

*Response:* The Service believes that this criterion is adequately emphasized. Many tribes have limited capacity to develop and implement programs to benefit fish, wildlife, and their habitats, and the TWG program provides an excellent opportunity to increase their capacity. The Service believes that the TWG program can enhance the capacity for all tribes to implement programs for the benefit of fish and wildlife, even tribes with relatively sophisticated fish and wildlife departments.