

CHAPTER 8: OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

The Open Project Selection Process is an ongoing, integral part of Michigan's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant process. Given the amount of funding available for land acquisition through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (approximately \$32 million available in previous years), and the demonstrated need for facility development and renovation for both the department and local units of government, Michigan dedicates its entire LWCF apportionment to development grants. A portion of the state's apportionment is used for projects at department-owned and operated facilities and a portion as matching grants to eligible local applicants. These applicants include counties, townships, cities and villages, and combinations of the above with legal authority for providing public recreation. Federally recognized Native American tribes also are eligible. In order to be eligible to compete in a funding cycle, applicants must have a department-approved, locally adopted five-year recreation plan on file by the application deadline.

Grantees must provide 50 percent of the project cost as local match. The match can be in the form of cash, donated goods/services or work performed by the grantee (force account). The only federal funds that can be used as match are Community Development Block Grant funds and Recreation Trails Program. Applicants must own the property they are proposing to develop; leased sites are not eligible for LWCF support.

Priority Rating System

Michigan's priority rating system is based on a point system which is used to rank projects according to specified criteria. The criteria are used to evaluate the project need, applicant history, site and project quality and alignment with SCORP goals.

Project Selection Process

Local projects are reviewed and scored by staff based on criteria and on-site inspections. The list of applications in ranking order by score are submitted to the DNR Director (state liaison officer). The state liaison officer then submits projects that are within the level of available funding to the National Park Service. Each project is reviewed by Department of Natural Resources professional staff and given a score for the degree of how well the project meets the criteria. Projects are ranked by descending score order and a list of recommended projects is compiled, based on the available LWCF apportionment awarded to Michigan by the National Park Service (NPS). The recommended projects list then is submitted to the DNR Director for approval. The recommended projects are subsequently forwarded by the DNR to the NPS for final approval. Once projects are completed, the sites are regularly reviewed in the field through a post completion project review by the DNR, with follow-up reporting to the NPS.

Recurring Funding Cycle

Michigan's LWCF funding cycle is held every year.

Public Notification

To provide eligible applicants an opportunity to participate in the LWCF program, flyers are mailed to all local units of government notifying them that the DNR is accepting applications to the LWCF with instruction on how to request application materials in hard copy format or download them from the Internet. Notice also is given in these flyers of any workshops that are being held to explain the program, the application process and criteria. Workshops are held in various locations across the state and are open to the public. A press release also is issued to notify the media of both the workshops and the availability of application materials, and the DNR Web site is updated with workshop information and all pertinent materials. In addition, notification of the application cycle, the Open Project Selection Process, and all necessary forms and materials are available on the DNR's Web site at www.michigan.gov/dnr-grants under "Grant Programs" "Land and Water Conservation Fund" and "Forms and Publications."

Program Assistance

Outreach and technical assistance is provided to potential applicants through the public workshops held throughout the state. Written guidance is also available in the application guidelines booklet which is updated annually and available in hard copy format on the internet. Workshops and the guidance booklets assist applicants with formulation of project proposals, preparation of applications, site planning, facilities standards, public participation methods, planning requirements and procedures as well as application procedures, forms and one on one opportunity to meet with staff responsible for reviewing the applications.

Affirmative Action

Efforts are made to ensure that Michigan's LWCF assistance is available to all residents in a non-discriminatory manner, including minority, senior and persons with disabilities user groups. All application materials and guidance documents are available in alternative format and large print versions. Additional points are awarded to projects that go above and beyond minimum state and federal accessibility requirements and that strive for a universally accessible design.

CONCLUSION

In many instances, there will be projects proposed that will symbiotically meet more than one goal of this plan, providing significant efficiencies and benefiting a greater number of people than a project targeted to meet only one goal. For example, an urban waterfront project that focuses on reducing erosion and filtering storm runoff from parking areas through a wetland restoration provides universally accessible river-side trails to promote fitness and transportation while also providing water access and adds accessible fishing piers and near shore fish habitat restoration will meet a number of goals. The innovation and partnerships that are involved in such projects further strengthen their capability to serve the needs of a diverse population and grow community support for long-term maintenance. In summary, Michigan's 2008-12 SCORP strives to maintain and grow the strong tradition of outdoor recreation and environmental integrity across the state. It builds on successes of the past, targets ongoing and emerging needs and highlights universal access for all residents and visitors.



Marquette Commons Ice Rink in Marquette, Michigan