

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Open Project Selection Process for Local Government Projects

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources is seeking applications for Land and Water Conservation Fund projects for FFY25. Please review the information below for information about requirements of the LWCF and how to apply.

Preliminary grant funding applications are due by
5 p.m. on June 25, 2025.

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Background

Authorized by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 established a federally funded program to provide 50/50 matching grants to state and local governments for the purpose of acquiring and/or developing public outdoor recreational areas and facilities. The program is administered nationally by the United States Department of the Interior, National Parks Service (NPS) with the supporting revenues generated from offshore oil and gas leases. The LWCF is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of quality public outdoor recreational resources as well as to stimulate non-federal investments in the purchase, development, maintenance, and protection of these highly valued outdoor recreational areas. Per section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act, “No property acquired or developed with assistance under this section shall, without the approval of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, be converted to other than public outdoor recreation uses.”

The LWCF is managed at the state level by state governments. To be eligible to receive a program apportionment, each state must develop a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and appoint an official State Liaison Officer. All eligible projects must reflect the states’ policies and priorities of its current SCORP. In Maryland, this is the Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (LPRP). In Maryland, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Land Acquisition and Planning Unit, is responsible for managing the program, coordinating grant rounds for project funding, and monitoring past project sites for program compliance. Since its start, the LWCF program has funded over 400 projects in Maryland.

Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) Overview

Financial assistance will be granted to state and local governments for the acquisition and/or development of public outdoor recreational areas and facilities. To qualify, proposed projects must meet a priority outdoor recreation need as identified in the current Maryland Land Preservation & Recreation Plan (LPRP), which serves as the Maryland SCORP. The project must also address recreation needs for the community and general public and be tied to the County’s Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP).

As per these OPSP Guidelines, and pending DNR approval, successful applicants may amend projects to increase the cost of a locally sponsored project, including the federal share, without further OPSP competition.

For details on LWCF background, project eligibility, grantee compliance and commitments, and grant application process, please read the LWCF Competitive Grant announcement, found on the [LWCF webpage](#).

The following pages outline the criteria that will be used to evaluate all preliminary applications. Projects receiving the highest score will be selected to apply to the National Parks Service for funding. The NPS will review project applications and, if approved for LWCF assistance, will provide a project start date.

Project Scoring Criteria

The following criteria are used by MD DNR staff to rank and select preliminary applications that should proceed to application to the NPS. Applicants are advised to make specific reference to the qualities described below in the preliminary application, including in the project narrative and budget.

Purpose and Need of the Proposal (30 points)

1. Project aligns with specific goals and needs-based planning objectives from the County Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plans (LPPRP) that addresses a local recreation need for the community and the general public. (0 – 12 points)
 - a. Please make reference to specific goals and objectives that were included in the [County's LPPRP](#).
2. Recreational use is consistent with preserving, or will improve, the ecological value of the parcel. (0 – 3 points)
3. The project provides a unique recreational experience for users and the application provides a clear understanding of why it should be funded. (0 – 5 points)
 - a. ‘Unique’ could be thought of as the following:
 - i. Creation of a new opportunity, either through acquisition or development
 - ii. Project is an expansion or connection of existing recreational opportunity
 - iii. Project is creative, resourceful, or innovative (more geared toward development projects)
4. Application is complete including all required attachments. The applicant has provided a clear project description and justification including what is proposed to be funded with the requested grant. The applicant has submitted all the required materials that are clear and self-explanatory (0 – 10 points).
 - a. If the application is incomplete, it may be eliminated from the process.

Alignment with the Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (12 points)

1. Projects aligns with the Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan’s goals:
 - a. **Promote the Benefits of Outdoor Recreation and Conservation of Natural Lands:** Promote the economic, cultural, health, and environmental benefits of outdoor recreation and conservation of natural lands. Seek to increase the public's understanding of these benefits to enhance interest and participation in recreating outdoors in Maryland. (0 – 1 points)

- b. **Increase Access to Open Spaces and Waterfronts:** Increase and improve opportunities for all segments of the population to access land and water-based outdoor recreation opportunities. (0 – 3 points)
- c. **Improve What's Already Available:** Improve the overall quality of outdoor recreation infrastructure at public parks and outdoor areas across the state. (0 – 3 points)
- d. **Develop an Informed Stewardship Culture:** Promote environmental education and use of parks and outdoor areas as teaching tools to foster a positive stewardship ethos among children, youth, and their families. (0 – 2 points)
- e. **Meets the General Goals, Actions, and Strategies of the Maryland LPRP:** When assessed holistically, the project advances the objectives of the LPRP. (0 – 3 points)

Capability of the Applicant to Complete the Project (16 points)

- 1. Evaluation of the readiness of the applicant to complete the LWCF project is assessed differently for acquisition and development projects. (score either a or b)
 - a. **Acquisition:** Acquisition projects are considered “project ready” when the following work has been completed: have UASFLA or ‘Yellow Book’ appraisal(s) (cannot be older than one year from project submission); purchase agreement completed; and application indicates the applicant is ready to acquire the property. (0 – 8 points)
 - b. **Development:** Development projects are considered ‘shovel-ready’ when the following work is complete or will be completed prior to notification of award: conceptual and design development phases; final construction plans. In addition, the application indicates the applicant is able to complete the NEPA process and bid and award construction in a timely manner. (0 – 8 points)
- 2. The timeline provided is realistic and the project applicant will complete the project within three years. (0 – 2 points)
- 3. The applicant has demonstrated an ability to properly administer grants in the past, including LWCF, Program Open Space, Community Parks and Playgrounds, and Local Parks and Playground Initiative projects. (0 – 4 points)
- 4. The application includes evidence of public comment/engagement or an explanation of public comments/engagement will be conducted prior to the start of the project. (0 – 2 points)

Budget Evaluation (8 points)

- 1. The budget submitted is sufficiently detailed. (0 – 6 points)
- 2. The budget seems realistic given the scope of the project. (0 – 2 points)

Consistency with the LWCF Program (8 points)

1. The project is consistent with the requirements of LWCF grant assistance. The application does not include information that indicates the project may be inconsistent with LWCF requirements. (e.g. structures not in support of outdoor recreation; agriculture; indoor recreation; luxury facilities; overhead power lines; potential conflicts with protecting the LWCF boundary in perpetuity) (0 -8 points)
 - a. *Project will be flagged if not in LWCF compliance/consistent with the LWCF program and may be eliminated from scoring.*

Maryland Department of Natural Resources Criteria (26 points)

1. The project is submitted by a county that had a timely submission of the 2022 County Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan. (0 – 10 points)
 - a. Municipalities will be omitted from this criterion and will have an overall score divided out of 90, rather than 100.
2. The project is in a jurisdiction that spends its Program Open Space and/or Community Parks and Playgrounds funds in a timely manner. (0 – 11 points)
3. The project is in a jurisdiction that has had few or no LWCF conversions in process. Applicant jurisdictions that have LWCF conversions in process will receive a lower competitive score. The ability and timeliness of the jurisdiction to proceed and deal with the LWCF conversion will also be accounted for in the scoring process. No new grant applications will be approved if the local applicant is not cooperative in the conversion process and has not made any effort to complete the conversion by the application deadline. (0 – 5 points)