

# The Watershed Initiative



The Watershed Initiative is a competitive grant program to encourage the protection and restoration of the country's water resources. Following the completion of its inaugural year, EPA is continuing the program by issuing the second call for nominations of watershed proposals. The President's fiscal year (FY) 2004 budget, which is now before Congress, requests \$21 million for the Watershed Initiative. Once funds become available, EPA plans to select up to 20 watersheds throughout the country for grants to support promising watershed-based approaches to improving water quality. Under the Watershed Initiative, EPA will advance the successes of watershed partnerships that have performed all of the necessary assessments and are ready to implement on-the-ground restoration activities.

The **October 9, 2003** *Federal Register* notice and other information is located on the web site at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/initiative>. In general, the nomination and evaluation process is similar to that of last year. This year, however, EPA will place a somewhat larger emphasis on (1) market-based approaches to water quality protection and restoration, and (2) specific approaches to decreasing hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico. Nominations must be received on or before **January 15, 2004**.

## The 2004 Selection Process

Nominations must be submitted by Governors or Tribal Leaders. Governors or Tribal Leaders may prepare or solicit watershed proposals in a manner most appropriate to their needs and nominate the most meritorious to EPA. Therefore, watershed organizations interested in pursuing a Watershed Initiative grant are required to obtain the support and approval of their Governors or Tribal Leaders. Governors or Tribal Leaders are limited to two watershed nominations within their jurisdiction, yet may nominate an unlimited number of watersheds that cross state, tribal, or national boundaries. Interjurisdictional nominations only need to be nominated by one Governor or Tribal Leader, however, the appropriate water agency of the adjacent jurisdiction must be a partner and supporter of the project.

## Nomination Materials

In general, the nomination must contain:

- (1) A one-page cover letter signed by the Governor or Tribal Leader,
- (2) A title page containing the name of the watershed along with the 8-digit HUC code, nominee contact information, and, if warranted, whether the nomination addresses hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico,
- (3) A 150-word abstract,
- (4) A workplan describing the watershed and watershed planning efforts, details of the proposed projects, expertise of those managing the projects, and outreach activities,
- (5) Budget form, and
- (6) Letter(s) and certification(s) of support.

Maps and supplementary technical information are optional. The narrative portion of the nomination must be no more than ten double-spaced pages long, using a 12-point conventional font and 1 inch margins. The title page and 150-word abstract will not count toward the 10-page limit. Appended project budget form, map, letters of support, and match certifications will not count toward the 10-page limit. The entire submission package should be printed on one side only of an 8½"x11" page and not bound.

Nominations will be reviewed and ranked at both the regional and national level by water management experts from EPA and other federal agencies. Once selected, watershed organizations will be asked to complete the standard Agency grant application package and submit a negotiated final workplan to EPA. Grants will range from \$300,000 to \$1,300,000. Partial funding or funding of particular projects may be awarded. A minimum **non-Federal match of 25%** of the total budget is required.

Complete details as to what information should be provided in each of these components and the page limit for each section are found in the **October 9, 2003 Federal Register** notice. **Please do not rely solely on the information presented here.** To ensure a fair and equitable evaluation of the nominations, please do not exceed the prescribed limitations. Failure to adhere to any of the requirements may result in disqualification. Contact information and details on where to send your nomination are also listed in the *Federal Register* and on the Watershed Initiative website.

## Evaluating Nominations

Watersheds will be reviewed, evaluated, and scored based on the following criteria, with a possible total score of 60 points.

💧 **Innovation** (10 points). While the Agency recognizes that there can be innovative approaches that are not market-based, maximum points will be awarded to proposals that incorporate market-based approaches to water quality.

💧 **Environmental Results** (30 points). Successful nominees must demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the watershed ecology, present a sound approach for combating threats or impairments to the water system, and be likely to achieve measurable, quantifiable environmental results in a relatively short time period. For this criterion, reviewers will focus on the following components:

💧 **Feasibility**      💧 **Experience**      💧 **Tangible Measures**      💧 **Integration**

💧 **Broad Support** (10 points). Watershed plans that incorporate a wide variety of federal, state and local participation will be favored.

💧 **Outreach** (5 points). Proposals will be judged on the design and breadth of their outreach program.

💧 **Financial Integrity** (5 points). Points will be awarded based on the adequacy of the budget information provided, and whether the budget is reasonable and clearly presented. Proposals that exceed the minimum match requirement or can certify a broad range of leveraging capacity will be scored higher.

