USDA-FS Forest Health Protection – Washington Office

**Gene Conservation, Resistance and Restoration Project Proposals**

**FY23 Proposal Guidance & Evaluation Criteria**

**Introduction**

The following document outlines the Forest Health Protection (FHP) Gene Conservation, Resistance and Restoration (Gene CRR) program guidance and evaluation criteria. Proposals will be accepted annually and evaluated on a competitive basis for funding by WO FHP with support from NFS, and R&D staff.

The communication for this annual funding opportunity will be distributed from WO FHP to the Regional/Area/Center geneticists, Regional FHP contacts, and the other Deputy Program areas. Regional contacts will be responsible for circulating the request through appropriate networks and contacts within the FS including silviculture, botany, etc. as well as contacts in other Federal and State agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations. Once the proposals are completed, FS geneticists and/or FHP contacts at the Regional level will review and rank their proposals and provide that along with the proposals to WO FHP for review. **Proposals will be due on February 1st, 2023**

**Eligibility and Project Focus Areas**

Proposals for the Gene CRR program are open to all tree species in the U.S., and its associated territories, with greater consideration given to threatened, endangered and sensitive species. Proposals must be submitted using the included form and are limited to **2 pages in length**. Proposals should include a title, project lead and cooperators, focus area and tree species, objectives/activity planned, a brief project description, activity timeline, expected results and funding requested. The budget should include the amount requested from Gene CRR program as well as list project funding provided by other sources.

Proposals should address one of four focus areas:

* **Seed Collections for Gene Conservation:** Projects that will provide seed for conserving the genetic diversity of tree species that are declining or at risk of loss due to the effects of diseases, insects, climate change and/or associated factors.

* **Seed/Scion Collections for Resistance Screening:** Projects that will provide seed or scion of trees determined to be good candidates for resistance screening against diseases or insects as well as seed collections for regeneration/restoration purposes.
* **Enhancing Regeneration or Restoration:** Projects that will enhance the vigor and survival of existing trees, encourage natural regeneration and/or that involve growing and out-planting of seeds/seedlings for restoration.
* **Other Projects:** Projects that address critical gaps in information for high-priority tree species and/or that provide for education, outreach and technology transfer as it relates to gene conservation, resistance, or restoration.

***Note****: Whitebark pine receives annual dedicated funds through the FHP Whitebark Pine Restoration Program and as such, proposals involving that species that have a restoration objective are best directed to that program. However,* ***proposals focused on cone collections for gene conservation and/or resistance screening for whitebark pine can be submitted for Gene CRR funds.*** *If funds are needed to cover both gene conservation and operational cone collections in the same area at the same time, separate proposals may be submitted to each of these programs. Proposals focused on regeneration and restoration of whitebark pine will not be excluded from consideration for Gene CRR funds, but preference will be given to other tree species due to the funds available for these activities through the Whitebark Pine Restoration Program.*

**Project Evaluation Criteria**

Gene CRR proposals will be reviewed and grouped into three tiers (Low, Medium, High Priority) by the review team with emphasis on the following criteria:

* **Project Focus (Objectives, Background and Scope):** Does the project address one or more of the five focus areas above? Are the objectives clear? Does it address species that are currently listed as threatened, endangered, or sensitive? Does it relate to other high-priority tree species or other taxa? Does the project relate to or link to previously funded efforts and what is its urgency?
* **Technical Merit (Methods/Approaches):** Does the project describe the activities that will be accomplished and are the methods clear, realistic, and appropriate? Does the project indicate an awareness of similar efforts and follow standardized approaches and data collection? If applicable, does the planned data analysis seem appropriate?
* **Measures of Success (Timeline/Deliverables)**: Does the project have a clear, realistic, and appropriate timeline and is there a high likelihood of success? If applicable, has NEPA been completed? Does it identify risks that may affect the timeline and discuss alternative plans? Does it clearly identify the anticipated deliverables in terms of results, outcomes, and/or products? Does it indicate the importance of what will be learned and how this information will be used or shared?
* **Budget and Cost Efficiency:** Does the project provide a clear budget, and does it appear realistic and reasonable?Does the project indicate the amount of in-kind or contributed funds from other sources and how does this compare to the FHP request? Does the project leverage previous or ongoing efforts and investments from cooperators and partners?
* **Regional Priorities and Ranking:** Does the project clearly address local, Regional and/or National FHP program priorities and where was it ranked during Regional reviews relative to the other proposals?

**Additional Information**

* Projects selected for Gene CRR funding may have annual reporting requirements.
* Project funding that is to be provided to other federal agencies, or State/University and private partners, will need to be accomplished through interagency or cooperative agreements from the Regional Offices. In those cases, the authorities and conditions established for those agreements would apply in terms of project matching requirements, indirect costs/overhead, etc.
* Projects involving seed conservation will rely on cooperation from the USDA-FS National Seed Laboratory and the USDA-ARS National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation (NCGRP). The guidance surrounding seed collection and storage standards and processes is currently being reviewed and revised. All seeds placed in conservancy will be subject to the conditions listed in our current Material Transfer Agreement with the NCGRP.

**For additional program information or questions, please contact:**

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