

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes Habitat Initiative

Fact Sheet and Q&A for State Workshops

Overview

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI) aims at advancing the recommendations of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC). The GLRC is a strategy issued in 2005 for protecting and rehabilitating the Great Lakes; it outlines the challenges that the lakes face, and the simple, common-sense steps needed to protect and restore them. A primary goal of the GLHI is to identify high-value habitat restoration and conservation projects among the Great Lakes states that are ready for near-term implementation. These projects will be uploaded into a database to help the Corps and other agencies identify prospective projects for funding. More information is available online at <http://glhi.org>. The Great Lakes Commission is providing a supporting role by working with its Member States to collect information about ongoing state projects as well as identify future projects to protect and restore Great Lakes habitat.

Why Should States Participate?

This project will assist the states by compiling information that can showcase state progress in protecting and restoring habitat around the Great Lakes and to demonstrate the ongoing need for restoration activities. It will also help the states communicate to the Corps, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other federal agencies about which projects are most important to the Great Lakes states in order to help direct federal funding. This effort will help ensure that the GLRC extends to on-the-ground actions to protect and restore habitat across the Great Lakes basin.

Approach

In consultation with Public Sector Consultants and the Corps, the Great Lakes Commission has designed a Web-based data collection form for gathering information on ongoing and potential habitat protection and restoration projects within the Great Lakes states. Although the Web form is still under development, a draft can be viewed at http://gis.glin.net/dropbox/wetlands_input.php. The database will be compatible with and build upon the NOAA National Estuaries Restoration Inventory database available at <https://neri.noaa.gov/>.

The goals of the state workshops are to

- brief agency personnel on the GLHI,
- engage state agency personnel in support of habitat restoration as part of the GLRC,
- inform agency personnel about the specific data being collected for the GLHI and the benefits of state participation,
- assist agency personnel by walking through the online data submittal process, and
- collect state agency feedback on the project and learn about state initiatives.

When should project entries be completed?

For the Corps to report on Great Lakes projects under its 2-year Habitat Initiative, projects should be submitted by June 15, 2007. However, ongoing submission of projects is highly encouraged to assist federal agencies in assessing the region's habitat protection and restoration needs on an ongoing basis.

Contact Information

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Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q: What is the purpose of the Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI)?

A: To develop an implementation plan to protect, restore, and manage habitat in the Great Lakes Basin. Specifically, we intend to identify high-value habitat restoration and conservation projects that are ready for near-term implementation. The implementation plan will be aligned with the goals of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) strategy.

Q: Why is the Corps leading this Initiative?

A: The Corps of Engineers is responsible for the protection of wetlands through the regulation of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In addition, the Corps plans, designs, and constructs projects for aquatic habitat protection and restoration through a number of national and regional authorities, such as the Great Lakes Fishery & Ecosystem Restoration program. The Corps has also led other basin-wide investigations in support of the International Joint Commission and under Corps authorities. Congress provided \$4 million to the Corps in 2006 for regional investigations that addressed issues of large, multi-jurisdictional watersheds. The Great Lakes Habitat Initiative was the largest of five studies selected for funding in a national competition.

Q: What other agencies and groups are involved in the Habitat Initiative?

A: The Habitat Initiative has a Steering Committee and Project Delivery Team consisting of members from federal, state, tribal, and local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most of the participating agencies and groups were on the team of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration that developed the portion of its strategy on habitat and species needs.

Q: What will the Habitat Initiative offer to state agencies that can increase wetlands and aquatic habitat protection and restoration in the Great Lakes region?

A: The Habitat Initiative will provide states and other potential project sponsors and proponents with information that will accelerate the protection and restoration of Great Lakes wetlands and aquatic habitat. Specifically, the Initiative will create an inventory which outlines a wide range of site-specific restoration projects that are ready for near-term implementation and provides a summary of available funding programs that can be used for habitat restoration projects. This data will increase opportunities for new partnerships between project sponsors, proponents, funding agencies, and organizations, and demonstrate the capabilities of existing funding authorities to deliver site-specific actions in response to the goals of the GLRC.

Q: If there is a project in the database that is recommended by an NGO *and* by a state that falls within the same geography, how will the Corps or other federal agencies determine which has higher priority?

A: The products of this effort may be used for a variety of applications by Great Lakes agencies and organizations. The project database is envisioned as an inventory of proposed actions that will enable users to examine these proposed actions by type or along political boundaries to identify opportunities for partnerships or select actions that are consistent with their strategic goals. The development and application of performance metrics is intended to identify and highlight “high-value” projects ready

for near-term action in a regional context. It is the responsibility of individual agencies and organizations to plan, prioritize, and fund projects consistent with their respective authorities and guidelines.

Q: How is the Corps planning to use the data/database?

A: The GLHI will identify site-specific actions that can be implemented under existing funding authorities to protect and restore wetlands and aquatic habitat in the Great Lakes region. This project will bridge the gap between the broad regional needs identified in the strategy of the Regional Collaboration and specific “on-the-ground” actions that could be implemented under existing authorities.

Q: Will the Corps use this database to determine which projects it will fund? Won't there be a competitive process for project selection?

A: The Corps of Engineers will use the project database to identify high-value habitat projects for budgeting under our existing habitat restoration authorities. Other agencies and organizations may also choose to use the information provided by the GLHI to support their budget planning and funding requests. Under constrained budget conditions, successful projects must be able to demonstrate their high value, whether they are competing for funds from a regional or national funding source. The GLHI will give projects from the Great Lakes an “edge” by demonstrating their value and ability to be implemented.

Q: How will the database be used by other federal agencies that issue habitat protection and restoration grants on a competitive basis with independent eligibility and proposal ranking criteria?

A: The capabilities of the project database will allow the application of many different types of evaluation or ranking criteria, depending on the agency's funding goals. The GLHI is not intended to replace or supersede an individual organization's existing budget guidance, policies, or evaluation procedures.

Q: Will the states have access to the database? Will they have access to all of it or only to projects in their state?

A: All states that request access will be provided access to the entire database as long as the data submitted does not have access restrictions placed on it. Each project entered has the option of allowing universal access, limited access to states and members of the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, or restricted access.

Q: How can states use/benefit from the data they enter into this database?

A: The products of this effort may be used for a variety of applications by Great Lakes agencies and organizations. States may use the project database to track both proposed and completed projects in the same geographic areas to ensure that on-the-ground restoration is occurring in a complementary manner. They may also use the database to help identify and track projects for proposed action. At a minimum, the GLHI will help bring attention to state programs, priorities, and contributions to the GLRC strategy.

Q: Since a database is only as good as the data it contains, who will maintain the database over the long term so that this effort continues to be useful?

A: This issue is currently being examined by the GLHI partners with the goal that it will be sustained over time. Sustaining data input over time will require a collaborative effort among federal agencies, state agencies, and NGOs. Leadership and funding for such coordination is a prerequisite.

Q: Why aren't NGOs invited to the state workshops?

A: NGOs are currently represented on the Project Delivery Team and will be encouraged to submit projects in a similar fashion. The state outreach meetings are designed to focus on state resource managers and their needs.

Q: I have dozens of projects and not enough time to enter all of them for the initial June 15 deadline. Which projects do I enter?

A: Pick ten or so projects that are ready for implementation and have high return on investment to protect or enhance habitat. "Ready for implementation" means that if your agency received funding tomorrow, there is a budget and workplan in place so that roles and responsibilities are well-defined and the project work could begin right away. Things like non-federal cost-share requirements or land acquisition, should already have been thought through (e.g., nonfederal cost share would be lined up, or the process for land or easement acquisition would be well-developed). High return on investment means that the project will have direct benefits to either protect or restore habitat; preferably benefits that are measurable in terms of habitat types and acres protected or restored.

Q: What if two people from different agencies enter the same project? In other words, what if the same project is entered twice, but with a different lead agency?

A: Quality assurance and quality control are important to the success of the database. Registered users will be able to view existing projects in the data base to see if their project is already entered. The projects entered into the database can be updated as new information becomes available by the project contact. Another party interested in modifying that project record must contact the listed project contact to obtain access to that record. Others can update that record only if the project contact provides them with their username and password. This is done in order to ensure that multiple parties involved in a single project communicate with one another and to protect the original project record from being corrupted by illegitimate users. An effort has been made on the database entry form to require geographic coordinates for all projects, which will allow redundant, duplicative, and/or competing projects to be identified whenever they overlap. In the context of project implementation, most funding programs will require a matching partner and additional outreach and personal contacts will need to be made prior to identifying a project for funding.