



AQUATIC RESOURCE MITIGATION FUND GUIDANCE ON PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications are scored by the ARM Site Selection Committee using a point system established in Env-Wt 808.20, and the maximum number of points for any project is 100. The maximum number of points allocated for each category are listed below.

Project Categories

L = Land preservation by acquisition and/or legal protection

W = Wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation

S = Stream restoration without land acquisition

C = Stream crossings or dams without land acquisition

I = Invasive species management

1. Restoration and/or Enhancement of Aquatic Resources

Maximum 27 point possible— Check all that apply

If a project contains both wetland and stream restoration/enhancement activities, then the Site Selection Committee will allocate points under question 1 based upon the greatest improvement to aquatic resource functions.

1A. Wetlands

Project restores, enhances or replaces wetland types (NWI) and/or wetland functions & values that were lost in the HUC 8 watershed. In general, funds shall go towards projects or a suite of projects that provide the greatest potential to restore, enhance or replace ecological integrity, water quality, and wildlife habitat functions and values lost by the impacts in the HUC 8 watershed as documented in the program ledger, and/or the Compensation Planning Framework for the watershed.

Ecological Integrity: W, C, I

- a. _____ (up to 9 points) In general, projects will result in an increase in ecological/hydrologic integrity through a specific activity. The difference in value is based on anticipated change in value or score based on a pre-treatment assessment of the site. If more than one wetland is being affected, then the score shall be the difference in the aggregate of all Ecological or Hydrologic Integrity scores for all wetlands being treated. Greatest amount of points go to a project that results in a significant increase. No points would be awarded if there is no appreciable difference in Ecological or Hydrologic Integrity that will result from the proposed project.

Water Quality: W, C, I

b. _____ (up to 9 points) In general, projects will result in an increase in water quality functions through a specific activity. The difference in value is the anticipated change in value or score based on a pre-treatment assessment of the site. If more than one wetland is being affected, then the score shall be the difference in the aggregate of all Water Quality related functional scores for all wetlands being treated. Greatest amount of points go to a project that will result in an increase in water quality functions through one or more of the following activities: reducing/treating stormwater inputs, restoring hydrology, increasing recharge, stabilizing soils, installing filter strips, increasing flood storage, enhancing sediment trapping, or increasing nutrient uptake or transformation that results in a significant increase. No points would be awarded where there is no appreciable difference in water quality will result from the proposed project.

Wildlife Habitat: W, C, I

c. _____ (up to 9 points) In general, projects will result in an increase in wildlife habitat functions through a specific activity. The difference in value is based on anticipated change in value or score based on a pre-treatment assessment of the site. If more than one wetland is being affected, then the score shall be the difference in the aggregate of all wildlife-related functional scores for all wetlands being treated. Greatest amount of points will result in an increase in wildlife habitat function(s) by one or more of the following activities: replanting native species, increasing production export, restoring buffer area integrity, restoring hydrology for AOP, improving habitat structure, re-introducing native species and their habitat, or eliminating or controlling invasive species that results in a significant increase. No points would be awarded if there is no appreciable difference in wildlife function(s) will result from the proposed project.

1.B. Streams

Aquatic Organism Passage and Geomorphic Compatibility: S, C

a. _____ (up to 6 points) In general, upgrading road crossings and removing dams without land acquisition (C) projects improve aquatic organism passage and geomorphic compatibility of the stream. The project needs to identify the deficiencies of the crossing(s) proposed to be replaced and provide the scores for Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) and Geomorphic Compatibility according to the New Hampshire Stream Crossing Initiative scoring scheme. The deficient crossing documentation should provide information that notes its priority for replacement based on local or state planning if available. This question scores the stream restoration or improvement only; if land protection is offered, those points would be gained in Part 4. Tidal crossings will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Greatest amount of points will go to a project that will replace (or remove) a structure that indicates no AOP for all aquatic organisms (including adult salmonids); or is ranked as fully incompatible or mostly incompatible according to geomorphic compatibility score. Lower amount of points consider scores based on AOP and geomorphic compatibility scores with the least amount of points going to a project that will replace (or remove) a structure that has a score that indicates full AOP; or is ranked as fully compatible according to geomorphic compatibility score; OR project does not include a road crossing replacement or removal component.

Stream Connectivity Potential and Habitat Enhancement: S, C, I

b. _____ (up to 6 points) Project will reconnect fragmented instream habitat and significantly **increase the amount of upstream aquatic resources** accessible to anadromous, diadromous, or resident fish species and **re-establish a connection** between upstream and downstream habitat for fish, freshwater turtles, amphibians, mussels, or aquatic plants. In addition, the project will restore access to or **enhance** stream reaches determined as “high quality habitat” or having a “high restoration” potential. Greatest amount of points would go to a project that reconnects or enhances a **significant** length of stream miles within the watershed (HUC 12) identified as having “high quality” habitat or “high restoration potential” and no points would go to a project that does not improve the connection between upstream and downstream areas or enhance in-stream habitat.

Drainage Area: S, C, I

c. _____ (up to 3 points) Project will contribute to stream passage or enhance habitat that will potentially affect a broader area of the HUC 8 watershed or service area. The larger the watershed area above the activity, the more likely the project will improve the aquatic organism passage and/or habitat at a broader scale. Note that the watershed area should be calculated from the stream crossing location or the lowest point of the enhancement/restoration activity in the Project Area. More points go to tier 3 crossing and the least amount of points go to enhancement of ephemeral stream habitat.

Water Quality: W, C, I

d. _____ (up to 6 points) Project will implement a best management practice (i.e. buffer creation/enhancement or storm water treatment) which will result in an increase in water quality. If more than one best management practice is proposed, the improvement with the greatest treatment will be considered for scoring. For a buffer improvement to receive full points, the buffer improvement must pertain to both sides of the stream. Points will also be distributed based on the amount of water quality improvement relative to the receiving stream reach and identified impairments to the stream. Greatest points will go to a project that results in a buffer enhancement/creation with a width greater than 100 ft., or stormwater treatment prior to discharge to a stream or river with a 75% or greater pollutant load reduction. No points will go to a project that does not provide water quality improvements.

Hydraulic Vulnerability: S, C

e. _____ (up to 6 points) The project will improve a stream reach, or remove a crossing that overtops, which degrades water quality and instream aquatic habitat by increasing sediment loads into the river, eroding stream banks, and are susceptible to washouts of road fill material. Project will replace or remove a stream crossing or enhance stream/riparian areas that are known to experience flooding and have been identified as a past or potential flood issue, or is predicted to overtop/fail during specified flood intervals based on a hydraulic capacity model. Greatest amount of points will be awarded to a project that will improve stream passage and hydraulic capacity of a stream crossing that lies within a flood-prone area that is frequently flooded; OR that is predicted to frequently fail/overtop by a hydraulic model (generally a 2 - 25 year or greater storm event). No points will be awarded to a stream passage improvement project that lies in an area that is not considered prone to floods AND **passes** a two-year and greater flood by a hydraulic model.

2. Overall Environmental Significance

Maximum 27 Points Possible – Check All that Apply

Drinking Water Benefits: L, W, S

a. _____ (up to 9 points) Project is located within an area evaluated for drinking water supply potential such as a source water protection area or wellhead protection area, is in an area that overlays a high-yield stratified drift aquifer, or is located within groundwater protection areas or water supply intake protection areas. This question simply evaluates whether a project location overlaps with wellhead protection areas, GA 1 or GA2 areas, or is located within a lower yield stratified drift aquifer (<1,000 acre ft/day)

Wildlife Habitat: L, W, S, C, I

b. _____ (up to 9 points) Project will benefit endangered, threatened or special concern species and/or exemplary natural communities documented to occur on the property. Greatest points will go to a project that will help protect a known high quality/significant endangered wildlife/plant population (Rank = B or better) or Exemplary Natural Community and no points will be awarded to a project that has no endangered, threatened, special concern species (wildlife or plants), or exemplary natural community known or potential based on application, NHB datacheck, and committee knowledge.

c. _____ (up to 9 points) Project is located in or in close proximity to NH WAP highest quality wildlife habitat. Greatest amount of points are awarded if a project is in a Tier 1 (State Ranked) area. Point range can vary for how significant the project is for the WAP area. No points will be awarded if the project is not in or near (within 250 m), or contributes to a Tier 1 (Highest Ranked State), 2 (Highest Ranked Biological Region), or 3 (Supporting Landscape) area.

3. Proximity to Conserved Lands and Landscape Connectivity

Maximum 19 Points Possible – Check All that Apply

Benefits to Nearby Conservation Land: L, W, S, C, I

a. _____ (up to 4 points) Project is adjacent to lands protected in perpetuity. This question does not require that project PROTECT land. Greatest points will be awarded to a project if it is adjacent to protected land. No points are awarded if the project is not adjacent to protected lands.

Landscape Connections L, W, S, C, I

b. _____ (up to 4 points) Project provides or contributes to a connection between lands that are currently unconnected and which are protected in perpetuity. For the purposes of this question and aquatic systems projects (not riparian buffers), public waters (major rivers, lakes/ponds > 10 acres) are considered protected. This question does not necessarily require that project protect land. Greatest points are awarded if the proposal protects land & creates a new connection between two separate protected lands (L projects only). No points are awarded if there is no contribution to a connection of protected lands.

February 2021

c. ____ (up to 4 points) Project contributes to linkages or over-land connections among and between one or more aquatic resource areas. This question involves linkages to aquatic resources over land (terrestrial). Greatest points are awarded if the site includes wet-dry-wet "land" connection protection. "Wet" can include vernal pools and surface water (flowing or ponded). No points are awarded if no connection.

d. ____ (up to 4 points) Project lies within a large unfragmented block of land, relative to the HUC 10 watershed. For this question, use unfragmented lands layer from the WAP, unless specifically derived by the applicant for the purposes of answering this question. Greatest points are awarded to projects that lie within one of top five unfragmented blocks. No points are awarded if the project is not within, near, or contributes to one of the five large unfragmented blocks.

Distance to Impact Location

e. ____ (up to 3 points) Project is located within the same sub-watershed (HUC 10) as the impact area(s) that generated the funds. Greatest points awarded if in the same watershed, any part or amount. No points awarded if not in the same watershed.

4. Overall Mitigation Potential

Maximum 19 Points Possible – Check All that Apply.)

Protection of Valuable Aquatic Resources and Upland Buffers: L only

a. ____ (up to 6 points) Project will contribute to the protection of most or all of an aquatic resource. 'Aquatic resource' includes any surface waters and/or wetlands including vernal pools. This question requires that the project PROTECT land legally and permanently. Greatest points awarded to a project that protects wetland acreage > 100 acres; or 6 or more documented vernal pools and their critical terrestrial habitat will be mostly to fully legally protected following the completion of project. No points are awarded to a project where protection is non-permanent or unknown.

b. ____ (up to 10 points) Project will protect an upland buffer that protects an aquatic resource. 'Aquatic resource' includes any surface waters and/or wetland type including vernal pools. Greatest points are awarded to a project where an aquatic resource identified as a regionally or locally important, high value, or prime wetland or surface water and an upland buffer of $\geq 200'$ will be fully legally protected following the completion of the project. Full or nearly full points can be awarded if a portion of the aquatic resource is already protected and the proposed project completes protection. No points are awarded if the project has no permanent protection to the aquatic resource buffer.

c. ____ (up to 3 points) Project will protect most or all of the watershed of the aquatic resource(s) within the project area. This question pertains to the watershed of the aquatic resource within the HUC 12 watershed(s) where the resource occurs. The watershed of a vernal pool may be very small and the entire watershed can be easily protected. Large rivers are unlikely to meet these criteria unless they are headwater areas.

February 2021

5. Cost-Effectiveness and Partnerships: L, W, S, C, I

Maximum 8 Points Possible – Check All that Apply

a. _____ (up to 3 points) Project will provide a cash and/or in-kind donation match of at least 30%.

3 points - \geq 30% cash/in-kind match provided

2 points - \geq 20% cash/in-kind match provided

1 points - \geq 10% cash/in-kind match provided

0 points - $<$ 10% of cash/in-kind match provided.

b. _____ (up to 3 points) Project area is identified in a federal, or state environmental priority plan other than the WAP. Plans under this question must include a spatial component. In other words, project area needs to be mapped as a priority area. It is not enough that an action is listed in a plan without a spatial reference. Examples of plans with a spatial component include: NH Coastal Plan, Quabbin to Cardigan, Merrimack River watershed plan, Blanding's turtle conservation plan for northeast, etc. A list is available from the mitigation program. Greatest points awarded to project noted in a plan, no points awarded if not included in a recognized plan.

c. _____ (2) Project is supported by the host municipality.

2 points – yes, letter submitted by town

0 points — no letter submitted

Total Score _____ out of 100 points