**Recommendation of Technical Review Panel to the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Steering Committee for funding project under RFP Topic 2:**

***Collaboratively Restoring Aquatic Connectivity while Increasing Resiliency for Culverts and Road Stream Crossings to Future Floods***

Summary Recommendation

The Technical Review Panel and North Atlantic LCC Staff recommend that the Steering Committee select the proposal titled *Increasing Resiliency for Culverts, Road and Riverine Ecosystems via Collaborative Culvert Assessment in the North Atlantic Region* submitted by Scott Jackson - University of Massachusetts Amherst, Keith Nislow - U.S. Forest Service and Erik Martin - The Nature Conservancy to receive the full ($150,000) funding amount requested under the September 2013 North Atlantic LCC Request for Proposals (RFP).

Background

On April 10, 2013, the North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee approved a science need developed by the aquatic sub team of the LCC Technical Committee to address the need to have a more comprehensive and consistent approach to identifying, categorizing and prioritizing road stream crossings for aquatic connectivity and resiliency to future floods. North Atlantic LCC staff then worked with members of the Technical Committee and other partners to develop an RFP to solicit projects to address this science need. On September 6, WMI announced the [RFP](http://wildlifemanagementinstitute.createsend4.com/t/ViewEmail/j/2C638147E2676265/8CCF6D99191902EFC9C291422E3DE149) Two proposals were submitted in response to the RFP, which closed on October 4, 2013

Review Process

Andrew Milliken, North Atlantic LCC Coordinator, chaired the Technical Review Panel with Jan Rowan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Reviewers consisted of volunteers from the LCC Technical Committee as well as recommended experts with a wide range of geographic and agency experience. The review panel consisted of the following nine members including one non-voting member:

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| **Reviewers** | **Organization** |
| Diana Day | Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission |
| Steve Gephard | Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection |
| Alan Heft | Maryland Department of Natural Resources |
| Andrew Milliken | U.S. FWS, North Atlantic LCC |
| David Paulson | Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife  |
| Jan Rowan | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fisheries Program |
| Scott Schwenk  | North Atlantic LCC (ex-officio) |
| Paul Wagner | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers |
| Susan Wells | U.S. FWS, Fisheries Program |

Following an initial screening by WMI, the proposals were reviewed by the full panel. The reviewers scored the proposals according to a set of criteria listed in the RFP and were encouraged to provide comments that explained their reviews. Based on these comments, the P.I.s were asked and answered several additional questions. On October 29, the panel discussed the proposals by teleconference and reached consensus on the recommendation.

Results of the Reviews

All reviewers scored the proposal by the University of Massachusetts, U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy higher (range 67-79, average 77.8) than the proposal submitted by Trout Unlimited (range 58-75, average 71.4) but in all cases the differences in scoring were fairly small.

Eight reviewers participated in the teleconference to discuss the proposals. Following discussion, the consensus among reviewers was that the proposal by the University of Massachusetts, U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy be recommended for funding. Strengths identified for the UMass/USFS/TNC proposal were the experience of the project team, the existing database that they would start with, the link to LCC projects, the partner network and approach identified and the willingness to initially maintain the database. The strengths identified for the Trout Unlimited proposal included the field testing of protocols and the proposed outreach. Neither proposal proposed to complete the project for the entire Northeast Region.

Finally, if the UMass/USFS/TNC is selected, reviewers recommend that several issues be considered prior to finalizing the project scope of work and during performance of the project:

* All states in the Northeast Region including Pennsylvania should be included in the project team and initial steps
* An approach for training partners to use the protocols should be included and could potentially be developed by volunteer partners

Supplemental Information: Proposal Review Criteria

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| 1. Degree to which the project addresses the needs and tasks of the RFP. Consider the degree to which: 1) there are clear objectives, deliverables, and timelines, and 2) the proposed methods can accomplish the objectives and deliverables according to the proposed timeline |
|   | Tasks 1): Assemble and coordinate a team of Northeast partners  |
|   | Task 2): Assemble existing spatial data and maps  |
|   | Task 3): Compile a comprehensive online GIS database  |
|   | Task 4): Assess existing approaches and field protocols |
|   | Task 5): Recommend standardized protocols and standard data fields |
|   | Task 6): Identify existing data gaps and prioritize areas for new field surveys  |
|   | Task 7): To the extent that funding allows, conduct surveys in priority areas  |
|   | Task 8): Complete report of results and recommendations  |
| 2. Scientific and technical merit |
| 3. Engagement of partners |
| 4. Demonstration that products will be accessible and useful in conservation and resource management decision-making |
| 5. Degree to which project builds upon, rather than duplicates, existing efforts |
| 6. Geographic scope |

Supplemental Information: Proposal Description by University of Massachusetts, U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy

Principal Investigator: Scott Jackson, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Co-Principal Investigators: Keith Nislow - U.S. Forest Service and Erik Martin - The Nature Conservancy

In order to conduct assessments of river and stream continuity and set priorities for restoring aquatic and terrestrial connectivity at a regional scale such as that of the North Atlantic LCC project it is necessary to reconcile disparate approaches for road-stream crossing assessment and knit them together into a compatible system for use across state lines and over large areas. The goals of the project are 1) to create a network of individuals and organizations working together to assess barriers, set priorities and implement projects to restore river and stream continuity and enhancing the resiliency of transportation infrastructure and 2) create an infrastructure of GIS data, assessment protocols, scoring algorithms, databases and data sharing applications to support road-stream crossing assessments and priority setting for the restoration of aquatic connectivity. During the period January 2014 through June 2015 a project team made up of key players in the Northeast involved in road-stream crossings assessment and prioritization will identify and compile data from crossing assessments that have already been conducted, evaluate and reconcile assessment protocols and scoring systems, and make recommendation for protocols to be use throughout the region. This project will produce GIS data by state and for the region identifying road-stream crossings, identify data gaps and areas that are priorities for road-stream crossing assessments, and make recommendations for an online database to store, score and make available data on road-stream crossings across the North Atlantic region.