The Climate Adaptation Fund 2013 Grants Program Applicant Guidance Document

This Applicant Guidance Document is designed to assist potential applicants in both understanding the programmatic priorities of the WCS Climate Adaptation Fund and determining the key elements of a strong proposal. The Applicant Guidance Document serves as a supplement to the Climate Adaptation Fund Request for Proposals (RFP), which contains additional information about the application process.

A strong proposal to the Climate Adaptation Fund will feature a wildlife conservation project with the following characteristics:

- **Designed with climate adaptation in mind;**
- **Conducts on-the-ground implementation, not research or planning;**
- **Focused on the functionality of ecosystems, rather than conserving individual species;**
- **Proposes conservation goals and actions that are grounded in the best available science;**
- **Designed for long-term conservation impact;**
- **Creates the potential for impact at a landscape scale; and**
- **Serves as a model for others.**

Further explanation for each element of a strong proposal:

1. The proposal demonstrates that a project is designed with climate adaptation in mind

The Climate Adaptation Fund seeks projects designed specifically to address climate change and its impact on wildlife and habitat, while working to achieve specific adaptation objectives. Consistent with this focus on project design, the Climate Adaptation Fund seeks projects that are developing or advancing implementation methods or management techniques based on climate adaptation science. The application requires all applicants to explain exactly how their project is different from general conservation efforts due to its focus on climate adaptation. Differences might be in WHAT actions you're taking, WHY you have chosen a particular set of actions, WHERE those actions will take place, HOW MUCH of any intervention will take place, or how you have changed your PRIORITIES to take certain actions over others.

For all of these projects it will be critical to show your work by providing the scientific basis and adaptation rationale of the project design. We want to know how you have connected the dots from the best available science to your proposed goals and actions, through your formal or informal adaptation planning process (i.e., are the conservation actions proposed developed from a local/regional climate change vulnerability assessment, down-scaled climate models, a local expert-driven process for determining climate risks and recommended actions, and/or some other adaptation planning process?).

Example of a project designed with climate adaptation in mind:
A project focused on carnivore adaptation in the Northern Rockies is using climate science and expert opinion to project future movement patterns for a suite of carnivore species. Based on that science, the project partners changed their approach. Using the Adaptation for Conservation Targets (ACT) Framework to develop adaptation strategies for protecting critical habitat (Cross et al. 2012), the conservation practitioners switched their focus from protecting higher-elevation habitats that will be highly vulnerable to negative impacts of climate change to restoring low-elevation riparian habitats expected to be increasingly important as species are forced to move in search of resources.

2. The proposal demonstrates that a project conducts on-the-ground implementation, not research or planning

The Climate Adaptation Fund is designed to support a limited set of conservation projects – those developed specifically to demonstrate tangible, on-the-ground solutions to climate-driven problems. Applications for funds to support conservation-planning activities will not be considered. Conservation and adaptation planning processes that have identified what actions are necessary and where to take them should be completed before the project start date. Also, due to this singular focus on applied, "shovel ready" projects, the Fund is unable to support applications for projects whose primary purpose is to undertake scientific research, data analyses, or vulnerability assessments.

The Climate Adaptation Fund does, however, place a high value on monitoring activities in an adaptive management framework that help inform the efficacy of a climate adaptation project. Grant funds will support data collection as part of monitoring activities to track progress and determine the ecological effectiveness of conservation interventions. The Fund will also support activities to document the processes, tools, methods, and results of the project to share with others (as long as these activities are part of a grant for an applied project, not a stand-alone endeavor).

3. The proposal is focused on the functionality of ecosystems, rather than conserving individual species

The Climate Adaptation Fund is focused on projects designed to promote ecosystem functionality across landscapes, rather than those designed to protect or conserve individual species. Protecting and enhancing ecosystem functions will help conserve the processes and conditions necessary to support current and/or future suites of species. Within this context, the Fund seeks projects focused on accommodating, rather than resisting, climatic changes, and facilitating system transitions to future climate change-induced conditions.

4. The proposal demonstrates that proposed conservation goals and actions are grounded in the latest science

A strong proposal to the Climate Adaptation Fund links proposed conservation activities to climate impacts. These goals, strategies and actions should be supported by explicit scientific rationale. Applicants will be asked to identify and cite the specific sources of empirical research, modeling, vulnerability analyses, or other rationale that informs the project's implementation activities.

In writing your proposal it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- Is it clear what specific climatic changes the project addresses? For example, rather than referring generally to "climate change", the proposal references specific elements of climate change that are relevant to the project, such as changing precipitation patterns, rising temperatures, or other pressures within a particular landscape or ecosystem.
- Does the proposal clarify what's known about the projections for those impacts and address uncertainty in those projections?
- How has the available science informed the conservation goals and actions prescribed by the project? In what ways has the consideration of climate change altered project goals or actions?
- Does the proposal clarify how uncertainty could affect the outcomes of proposed activities of the project? Proposed projects should articulate how the chosen strategies and actions would address a range of possible future conditions to account for uncertainties in models that project climate change and species response to climate change, and in ecological and human responses to climatic shifts.

A special note on science for projects working to address sea-level rise:
The Climate Adaptation Fund does support projects focused on sea-level rise, but requires additional scientific information to justify project rationale and assumptions. The Fund requires all applicants submitting sea-level rise projects to include spatially-explicit maps demonstrating the long-term sustainability of a project given 1m to 2m sea-level rise scenarios. Applicants should explain how proposed project sites and construction activities are designed to remain resilient to expected climate-driven storm surge events, as well.
Some common datasets and mapping tools for sea-level rise:

- *CRESIS offers geospatial sea-level rise data available at 1 km (for some areas) and 1.8 km resolution (globally).*
- *The University of Arizona Department of Geosciences provides finer resolution maps (30 m) for the US lower 48 states, using an elevation-based model.*
- *Digital Coast, NOAA Coastal Services Center provides a downloadable SLAMM model (ArcGIS software required).*

5. The proposal demonstrates that the project is designed for long-term conservation impact

The Climate Adaptation Fund seeks to support conservation projects with impacts expected to remain effective even in an uncertain future and leverages integrated conservation goals. These projects should address adaptation needs now without requiring repeated long-term investments of management resources to maintain habitat conditions, such as through unceasing efforts to prevent encroachment of invasive species or rising sea-levels. The Climate Adaptation Fund also prioritizes projects addressing functionality of systems likely to persist as climate changes rather than projects aimed at protecting ecosystems that are projected to be highly vulnerable to climate impacts over time.

Example of a project with the potential for long-term impact:
A non-profit watershed organization is working with state and federal agencies to restore previously degraded habitat for a variety of species that rely on mid-elevation mountain habitats of the Sierra Nevada range in California. Temperatures are expected to increase within the project landscape and species are expected to migrate upslope as their current habitat deteriorates and becomes unsuitable. Climate science suggests that suitable conditions for those species will persist further upslope in the long-term. Restoration activities are therefore targeted for those upslope forest lands to serve as potential future climate refugia for those species.

6. The proposal demonstrates that the project creates the potential for impact at a landscape scale

The Climate Adaptation Fund seeks projects that make a difference at the landscape level, either through landscape-scale efforts, or place-based efforts that directly support broader landscape conservation goals. These are essentially two types of projects. The first type is conducted at a scale that impacts an entire landscape. A project might create land-use designation changes over a large area, connect management practices on private lands to large adjacent public lands, tie together core habitat areas to create a larger connected landscape, include many collaborators, and leverage significant funding resources to take the project to scale. The second project type is a smaller, site-based effort, which implements critical pieces of a larger landscape conservation plan or has the potential to impact the broader landscape through replication of similar practices. These smaller projects may lend themselves to replicability through activities aimed at gaining stakeholder buy-in across a landscape, communicating project success to other conservation practitioners, and gaining public policy support to catalyze similar actions.

Example of a project with the potential for impact at a landscape scale:
In partnership with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service, a non-profit conservation organization plans to re-introduce beavers on public and private lands in southeastern Idaho. Beavers will be introduced to eight stream segments identified by a recent climate study as likely to benefit from increased water storage to ensure summer flows for a number of freshwater fish species vulnerable to climate impacts. The study identified an additional 56 stream segments as potential beaver re-introduction sites. Project partners are working to raise additional funding to replicate this project and introduce beavers to additional stream segments across the landscape in future years.

7. The proposal demonstrates how the climate adaptation project will serve as a model for others

The ultimate goal of the Climate Adaptation Fund is to catalyze a shift in the paradigm of managers and practitioners to consider climate adaptation in how we prioritize and implement wildlife conservation. For this reason, the Climate Adaptation Fund seeks projects that can relate a compelling story to other conservation practitioners about the development and implementation of a project that addresses climate adaptation solutions for various geographies, habitat types, and conservation outcomes. To that end, the Climate Adaptation Fund also encourages projects that implement innovative or novel conservation activities in response to climate pressures.

Climate adaptation projects can tell a good climate adaptation story in terms of development,

implementation, and outcomes. These projects serve to build a common knowledge base and a common language among those in the conservation community to support climate change science and on-the-ground activities. Communications activities are an important part of any adaptation project and should contribute knowledge to help build the adaptation field, publicize working models for applied on-the-ground adaptation actions, and reach stakeholders who are key to your project's long-term success.

APPENDIX

A quick guide to sources of science and information on climate adaptation

General adaptation knowledge and tools

The Yale Mapping Framework offers a menu of approaches appropriate for ecological assessments that support conservation planning in a changing climate. It provides guidance on appropriate strategies for climate-smart ecological assessments and the tools to implement them.
http://www.databasin.org/yale

The Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) is a clearinghouse for a wide variety of information about climate adaptation.
http://www.cakex.org/

Selected literature

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