

Agency: U.S. Forest Service

Fiscal Year 2026

Unit/Forest name: National Forest or Grassland

Priority: WO will fill

State(s) and Congressional District(s)

Example AZ-1, NM-2, MT-at large

District:

Location: Please provide a general description of the location of tracts. If possible, provide context so that reader can understand location relative to nearby towns, population centers or important features, such as highways or other roads.

Proposed for FY 2024		
Interest	Acres	Cost
Fee	Fee acres proposed	Costs proposed
Easement	Easement acres proposed	Easement costs proposed
Other		
Acquired to Date		
Protected	Acres acquired so far	Acquisition costs so far
In Process		
In Process	Acres currently being acquired	\$\$ for acres currently being acquired
	Remaining	
Remaining	Acres remaining for acquisition	Cost for remaining acquisition

Type of Project:

State the type of project: single acquisition; phased acquisition (identify which phase); or on-going project. All types of projects must disclose if there is an appraisal and purchase option between the FS and landowner or conservation partner.

For all proposed tracts, please:

- List each tract by priority order
- Include the name of each tract, the acreage, cost, Forest Service unit and Congressional District
- Include the acreage of each phase of the project
- Include the cost of each phase of the project
- Indicate if the stated cost is based on an UASFLA (Yellow Book) appraisal, USPAP appraisal, or an estimate based on market research
- Indicate if there is a signed purchase option between the FS and landowner or partner; or if a partner has an option with the landowner
- **For projects over \$4 million, please state if the project can be phased over multiple years and if so, which tracts would be acquired in which year and what the proposed dollar is for each year.**

Scoring Criteria For each criterion that requires a written narrative, information should include how the tract(s) proposed for acquisition reflect(s) Congressional direction, Administration priorities, and the Forest Service Chief’s Priorities as described in the FY2026 Core Criteria and Guidance document.

1.) Recreation / Recreational Access: Up to 20 points for recreational value

This criterion evaluates the degree to which the acquisition creates or enhances opportunities for recreation and access to recreation on National Forests and Grasslands.

- Does the acquisition solve a specific access problem or overcome a barrier to access?
- Does the acquisition increase or enhance recreation for Justice40 communities, and if so, which ones?
- Is the proposed acquisition along a National Scenic or Historic Trail? (These projects will be strongly

considered.)

- What is the size and configuration of the tract relative to National Forest System lands?
- Would the acquisition open or increase recreation on other publicly accessible lands, and if so, to how many acres of other lands?
- What types of key recreational access needs would the land provide? Would this access include significantly new or improved recreational opportunities?
- Has the public indicated that more or improved access is needed in this area?
- Would this acquisition address recreational access needs included in the Region's response to Sec. 4106 of the Dingell Act identifying areas available for recreation that had no (or significantly restricted) public access? These areas can be found in the Forest Service report at [John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#) These projects will be strongly considered.

2.) Watershed Protection / Climate Resilience - up to 15 points. (See additional factors to consider in the FY2024 The Forest Service's Watershed Condition Framework provides a nationally consistent, science-based approach to evaluate watershed conditions and apply integrated improvement and restoration techniques based on local characteristics. Acquisitions can protect high functioning watersheds already resilient to climate change or provide needed opportunities to restore impaired watersheds and increase their functioning and resilience. Support for acquisitions should be described in terms of how a particular tract fits in with Forest Service watershed management goals once the tract is acquired, and not the condition of the parcel while in private, State, or other ownership. Points to consider when evaluating a project's potential to enhance climate resilience and protect watersheds:

- Potential to enhance or restore freshwater and brackish wetlands, spring, seeps and karst areas, streams and rivers, ponds, or lakes;
- Carbon sequestration or potential for carbon sequestration (e.g., forests, forest restoration, highly productive plant communities, peatlands);
- Areas that provide habitat that would be reduced elsewhere due to climate change;
- Habitat types and ecosystems that are naturally resilient to climate change effects (e.g., forests, spring systems);
- Areas that provide opportunities for infrastructure decommissioning, re-connecting fragmented landscapes, or restoring impacted systems;
- Land that offers opportunities for cost sharing and partnerships for implementation of the USFS Climate Change Response Network;
- Watershed functions (water detention, groundwater recharge, stabilization of sediment and soils, conveyance of materials (water, sediment, seeds nutrients, organisms; and/or
- Ecosystem processes (connectivity, habitat complexity-biodiversity, nutrient, water, and material cycling)

Points will be awarded based on the degree to which acquisitions contribute to climate resilience and watershed improvement. More points will be awarded to tracts that support Administration and Forest Service objectives regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation, ecological restoration, and resiliency.

3.) Threatened and Endangered Species and Habitat – up to 15 points:

Land acquisition provides an opportunity to protect or restore habitats for fish, wildlife, and plants at risk. Proposals are scored based on the tract or tract's capacity to contribute to the recovery of endangered, threatened, proposed or candidate species as classified under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and their potential to benefit populations of designated Forest Service Species of Conservation Concern or Regional Forester Sensitive Species. A Threatened and Endangered (T&E) scoring table must be included for points to be awarded under this criterion. Narratives should include enough background information to provide context for points awarded in the table. See Appendix 2 for the T&E scoring table.

4.) Tract Location (Forced Ranking):

This criterion supports the specific language in the LWCF authority for the Forest Service that directs the Agency to acquire lands with higher levels of protection like Congressionally Designated Areas (CDA) such as Wilderness. It also recognizes that Forest Plans designate areas for specific uses or needs such as an inventoried Roadless areas, proposed Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers areas, Wilderness Study Areas, and old growth or mature forests. To find out if the project contains old growth or mature forest, a national map is available in the [Climate Risk Viewer](#). Additionally, there are 21 priority landscapes identified in the [10 Year Wildfire Strategy](#) recognized by this criterion. The [initial 10 landscapes](#) were designated in 2022, along with [11 additional landscapes](#) added in early 2023. Please ask the WO if there are any questions about which designations are eligible. Points are awarded by a forced ranking, as described in the table below.

Points	Description
15	Acquisitions within a priority Wildfire Strategy landscape
15	Acquisitions within a Congressionally or Presidentially Designated Area such Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River Corridors, National Scenic Areas, National Recreation Areas, National Historic and Scenic Trail Corridors, National Monuments or other special management or emphasis areas designated by Congress or the President of the United States.
10	Acquisitions that are within an Inventoried Roadless Area, Wildlife Management Area, proposed Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, or Wild and Scenic River Corridor, research natural areas, old growth or mature forest, or other special designation per National Forest System (NFS) planning goals within National Forest or Grassland boundaries.
7	Proposed acquisition protects some vital function or feature of an adjacent tract with a special designation. An explanation of the importance of the tract should be included in the “Additional Information” section. An example would be acquisition of a tract to prevent incompatible development directly adjacent to a Wilderness. Tract can be inside or outside of the NFS boundary.
5	Proposed acquisitions that are within NFS boundaries but not included in a special designation.

If there are multiple tracts, points for each tract will be totaled and divided by the number of tracts to create an average point score for the project.

5.) Connecting Communities/Partner Support (Up to 15 points):

This criterion evaluates a project based on the degree and breadth of public support for the acquisition. The focus is on partnerships and community support and involvement, particularly in Justice40 communities such as Tribal areas. Projects with support letters from Tribal communities will be strongly considered.

- Does the acquisition help the Forest Service work in partnership with the local community and provide a benefit? Example: acquisitions that support gateway community planning, locally used trail systems, or youth education.
- How is the acquisition part of an effort by the Forest Service to add value to the community? More points will be awarded to projects that clearly demonstrate that the acquisition provides an economic benefit for the local community or helps deliver a needed service to the community.
- Is there a broad variety of partners and supporters?
- Why is this support important?
- Is there archaeological value, Tribal or local or national cultural or historic value?

Letters of support are strongly encouraged to supplement the nomination, particularly from locally elected officials, members of Congress, adjoining landowners, Tribes, local organizations focused on environmental justice, and community members. Please ensure that the letters are from the current year and submitted with the proposal. Support letters submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. If there is support without letters, please list those supporters and this will be taken into consideration for additional partial points. Links to videos may be included, if applicable.

6.) Regional Ranking (Up to 20 points):

This criterion is scored during the Regional evaluation and regions must explain the rationale for how the points were awarded. Points should be awarded based on importance to LWCF, Administration, and Forest Service goals not captured by the other criteria listed here that speak to the significance of the proposed project. Points should not be used to bring lower-ranking project scores up to match the scores of higher-ranked projects.

7.) Management Efficiencies and Cost Savings -not scored

This criterion is not scored but the information is important and required by Congress. Consider the following:

- How does the acquisition improve the ability of the acquiring unit to perform its work and deliver benefits to the public with greater efficiency and lower costs?
- Will it consolidate forest ownership and allow the Forest Service to better manage goals, such as improving climate change refugia, mitigate fire risk, etc.? If so, how?
- How does the acquisition make a net positive contribution to management efficiencies measured in terms of verifiable cost savings or other quantifiable efficiencies?

8) Urgency of Acquisition (10 Points)

Describe the circumstances and readiness of the purchase. Factors to consider include:

- Has a willing seller been identified and does the landowner have realistic expectations?
- Has an initial appraisal been initiated? Or, has market research been initiated?
- Does the Forest Service or a partner have a signed purchase option with the landowner?
- Has a partner purchased the tract and are they holding it for Forest Service acquisition?
- Is the landowner ready to wait until funding is secured?
- Is this land under threat of development if not purchased quickly?

9) Threats to the Integrity of the Land (forced ranking, up to 10 points)

Many forests have significantly fragmented ownership within the unit boundary which make forest management difficult. The integrity of the land can be at risk due to altered fire regime, ecological conversion, and development. Additionally, guidance from the White House Council on Environmental Quality encourages Federal agencies to promote greater connectivity to sustain biodiversity. Connectivity also enables wildlife to adapt to fluctuating environmental conditions by conserving wildlife corridors. By acquiring land that increases ecological connectivity with other NFS lands, the Forest Service can manage the land to help address these threats.

Points	Description
10	Provides ecological connectivity or has unique resources in a unit that has less than 2/3 publicly owned lands and connects to current NFS lands
5	Connects to current NFS lands

10) Even Geographic distribution (Up to 10 points, National Panel score)

This criterion is aimed at ensuring an even distribution of projects throughout the country, per the 2019 Dingell Act. Once all projects are ranked, the National Panel will consider how the projects are geographically distributed across the country.

11) Benefits to Justice40 Communities: (Up to 10 points)

In response to [Executive Order 14008](#), this criterion takes into consideration the Justice40 Initiative. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) launched the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#) to ensure benefits of Federal programs are reaching communities overburdened by pollution. This tool also helps identify communities that meet the threshold for at least one of the tool’s categories of burden and corresponding economic indicator or are on the lands of a Federally Recognized Tribe.

Use the [Screening Tool](#) to determine if your project is located in a disadvantaged community, and award points as follows:

Points	Description
10	Acquisition project is located in a Justice40 ¹ community
5	Acquisition project is located in a partial Justice40 ² community

¹In the Screening Tool, a “Justice40” community is called a “disadvantaged” community.

²In the Screening Tool, a “partial Justice40” community is called a partially disadvantaged community.

Additional Information: Optional

Additional Information Page

Use this page to include any additional pertinent information. If used to supplement the information provided for one of the 11 criteria, identify which criteria you are supplementing.

Photos and Other Attachments

Limit your attachments to the following documents and/or links:

- One page of photos – not to exceed 1 megabyte
- Current support letters – no more than 1 year old
- Legislative map – See Maps section below for more information
- Link to video, if applicable

Maps

Maps must be submitted in the legislative map standard outlined in [Interim Directive 1510-2011-1](#). Proposals may include as many maps as necessary, within reason. Include the following:

- Vicinity map that shows where the tract(s) are in a landscape context relative to NFS boundaries, roads, cities, and other protected lands
- Individual maps for each tract, if applicable
- Use green to represent National Forest and Grassland areas and Red to indicate tracts proposed for acquisition
- Map features need to correspond to locations, features and other elements described in the narrative. For instance, if the narrative describes a trail, be sure to show the trail on the map

Unobligated Balances

Unspent funds from prior years' appropriations and projects with unobligated balances two (2) years old or older will be taken into consideration. Large unobligated balances affect a Region's ability to prioritize new projects.

Forest Service Policy

The following policy guidance can be found in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 5400-Landownership:

1. Give priority to acquisitions that would consolidate National Forest System lands within existing National Forest boundaries (FSM 5403.1, Policy 1), providing there is no indication of opposition to the acquisition of the property;
2. Acquisitions should meet goals and objectives of Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Service Manual 5403.1, Policy 11);
3. Nominate properties as free of encumbrances as possible. Avoid acquisitions subject to special conditions or covenants that limit the rights of the United States to manage the lands for National Forest purposes (Forest Service Manual 5403.1, Policy 21). *Nominations with outstanding mineral estates must be clearly identified in the Land Acquisition Proposal Form.*