

MNRCP Scoring Criteria

Revised May 15, 2023

MNRCP proposals are each given a score out of a potential total of 100 points, based on the point ranges listed for each criterion below. The criteria are designed to give a scoring advantage to restoration and enhancement projects, as these projects more directly address state and federal mitigation goals of “no net loss” of wetland functions and values. However, preservation-only projects are still permitted and there is no minimum score that must be achieved to receive funding.

1. Restoration / Enhancement: 0 – 20

Assesses the extent to which the project restores or enhances aquatic resources and addresses state and federal “no net loss” mitigation policies. Projects proposing only preservation would receive zero points in this category. Considerations include:

- The project will restore and/or enhance aquatic functions and values and will return the site to its previous, unimpacted state or provide additional or improved resource functions and values.
- Applicant has demonstrated overall long-term viability or natural sustainability of the restoration or enhancement components. A project that will naturally maintain itself without active intervention is preferred.
- Restoration or enhancement goals are clear, precise, and achievable with corresponding monitoring and adaptive management plans commensurate with the level of restoration or enhancement on-site.
- The methods to achieve the goals are clear and have demonstrated effectiveness. Conceptual plans should exhibit the proposed goals and objectives.
- The project uses a sound technical approach, including intended use of BMP’s and restoration standards (e.g., Stream Smart and CoastWise).
- Restoration area has adequate natural/habitat buffers (e.g., upland migration areas, riparian buffers).
- Long-term protection of the project site is in place or will be in place, if possible. If not possible (e.g., in subtidal areas or in-stream habitat), a mechanism/plan for long-term maintenance is included as part of the project.
- The functional lift provided by the restoration work is greater than the impacts associated with the work.
- For projects that include both restoration/enhancement and preservation, consider the relative costs proposed for both efforts. If a significant portion of the funds are used for the restoration work with significant resource gains, more points may be awarded in this category. If the majority of funds are used for preservation, fewer points should be awarded.

2. Existing and Proposed Conditions: 0 – 20

Assesses the specific habitats and resources on the project site and the program requirement that the project site include high quality and high functioning habitat and aquatic resources. Considerations include:

- The site has a mix of aquatic resources and intact, upland areas.
- The site has natural resources of significant value and/or rarity within the project site boundaries, including:
 - Rare or exemplary natural community types.

- Habitat that supports, or has the potential to support, RTE species and/or Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- Significant Wildlife Habitat, such as Tidal or Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat, Significant Vernal Pools, Deer Wintering Areas, Shorebird Nesting, Feeding and Staging Areas, or Seabird Nesting Islands.
- The site is relatively free of invasive species or, if present, invasive species are not significantly degrading the functions of the resources on site and a control plan is in place or will be in place.
- Historic land use should be considered to determine potential for contamination or other environmental factors
- For preservation projects, sites with recent and/or extensive resource or habitat disturbance should score at the low end of the scale.
- For restoration projects, if proposed restoration will improve recent disturbance, projects may score at the higher end of the scale.

3. Landscape / Seascape Context: 0 – 15

Assesses the extent to which the proposal meets the core program requirement to consider the location of a potential project relative to statewide focus areas for land conservation, priority aquatic habitat watersheds for stream restoration and conservation, priority habitat preservation areas identified by a state agency, or other regional or municipal conservation areas. Considerations include:

- The site is within or adjacent to habitat areas of statewide conservation significance (e.g., BWH Focus Areas, MDIFW/DMR aquatic habitat priority watersheds) or areas of regional conservation significance.
- The site is within or adjacent to public or private conservation lands to maintain and preserve habitat connectivity.
- The site is proximate to permitted impact sites.
- For restoration projects, projects on protected land with adequate habitat buffers, regardless of proximity to other conservation areas, should score higher in this category.
- The project addresses one or more regional conservation objectives as outlined in the MNRCPC Compensation Planning Framework.

4. Credit Value: 0 – 10

Assesses the credits that the project will generate relative to the cost of the overall project. Considerations include:

- The project will generate wetland and/or stream credits commensurate with the funds provided.
- The resources being restored, enhanced, or protected compensate in-kind for those that have been impacted within the biophysical region.
- The site does not include any management activities that will reduce credit generation (e.g., timber harvesting, open field maintenance), or if included, the project will still generate sufficient credits to justify the cost.

5. Level of Threat: 0 – 10

Assesses the extent to which the project site is under threat of adverse impact from development or other activities. Considerations include:

- Preservation-only projects must demonstrate a clear threat to resources which will likely occur if the parcel is not put under conservation protection (e.g., local development pressures, existing or past development plans for the site, in an area of potential mineral extraction, etc.).
- The natural resources on-site are under threat of adverse modification from sea level rise, extreme flooding, or other factors.
- Projects with meaningful restoration and enhancement components should score toward the high end by default since the threat aspect is not a requirement.

6. Climate Change and Habitat Resiliency: 0 – 10

Assesses the extent to which the project will be resilient to the effects of climate change and/or help to mitigate the potential impacts of climate change in the future. Considerations include:

- The project site demonstrates resiliency to the expected impacts of climate change, particularly the ability to maintain species diversity and ecological function. Consider the site's landscape diversity, microclimates, local connectedness, and presence of under-represented habitats that support biodiversity.
- For restoration/enhancement projects, proposed activities will increase carbon sequestration and/or storage, increase the ability of the site to capture and filter stormwater, or provide other solutions to reduce the effects of climate change.
- The site provides opportunity for salt marsh migration resulting from sea level rise.
- The project area provides habitat, or improves habitat conditions, for species that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

7. Environmental Justice and Equity: 0 – 5

Assesses the extent to which the project addresses environmental justice and equity concerns. Considerations include:

- The applicant is a member of a socially or economically disadvantaged community or represents an under-resourced community.
- The project site is within or adjacent to land managed by Indigenous tribes in Maine and/or the project will provide access for Indigenous tribes for cultural uses.
- The project site is in close proximity to socially vulnerable or underserved communities, including those that have historically borne disproportionate impacts of commercial and industrial development.
- The project site is identified in screening tools (e.g., Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, Headwaters Economics Neighborhoods at Risk tool, EPA EJScreen) as being located within a disadvantaged community that is subject to environmental, climate, health, or other socioeconomic burdens.
- The project improves the climate change resiliency of the surrounding community (e.g., reduced flooding, improved emergency vehicle access).

8. Readiness and Sponsor Capacity: 0 – 5

Assesses the extent to which the proposal demonstrates project readiness, capacity of the sponsor to carry out the project, and the likelihood of project success. Considerations include:

- The project has a qualified, capable sponsor willing to manage and/or maintain the project (e.g., land trust, municipality, state/federal agency, tribe, etc.).

- The applicant has the ability and capacity to complete the proposed restoration work plan and/or long-term management plan and provide monitoring, management, and stewardship of the project site.
- The project includes adequate budget to manage the project site long-term.
- For restoration projects, the project team includes qualified members with experience completing similar projects.
- The project includes additional funding or match funding.
- The project has support from the municipality in which it is located.

9. Other: 0 – 5

- The project provides value beyond ecological assets, including scenic/aesthetic, recreation, economic activity, job creation, educational opportunities, or other contributions to “Quality of Place”.