A fish with orange and yellow spots

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**EBTJV Review Team FY25 Project Recommendations**

**March 6, 2024**

**Overall summary**

The EBTJV project review team is recommending 6 on the ground brook trout conservation projects and the EBTJV operational funding for FY25 to the National Fish Habitat Partnership. The review team was extremely pleased with the quality of all eligible applications.

The projects collectively remove 9 barriers to aquatic organism passage, (2 dams and 7 culverts), reconnecting a total of 34.5 miles in priority brook trout catchments. A total of 9 acres of riparian habitat will be restored. Four of six occur in allopatric brook trout catchments, two will restore (repatriate) brook trout, including one restoration which will follow the removal of non-native rainbow trout.

The total for on the ground projects is $299,870, and will bring an additional $1.1M in nonfederal funds (4:1 match) and a total of $1.87M in nonfederal and federal contributions.

**FY 25 Review Team Members**

Jacob Rash (NC), Matt Kulp (GSMNP), Merry Gallagher (ME), Jim Habera (TN) Adam Kautza (MA), Mark Staley (MD), Brad Fink (VA), Will Duncan (FWS), Lori Maloney (Coordinator)

**RFP and review process**

The FY 25 review team met in the fall of 2024 to review program priorities, timeline, and make any needed revisions to the RFP. The only revision for FY25 was to shift the date for initial consultation with state agency points of contact from December to January.

The RFP was released in November 2023, with a final deadline of February 9, 2024. Proposals were accepted by file submission to the EBTJV website. Five members of the review team reviewed and scored applications according to a scoring rubric which has been developed over many years and which was most recently rescaled and revised for FY23.

The RFP addresses 25 application elements. Many of these elements ask if the projects address criteria of the ACE ACT:

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ACE act HARD criteria

*Has this project been evaluated by your FHP to address elements outlined by the America’s Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act?*

*1:1 Federal:Non-federal Match*

*Pertinent Sponsor Experience & Project Management Ecological benefits*

*Measurable Goals and Objectives*

*Appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation Plan*

*Meets At Least 1 FHP Objective*

ACE act SOFT criteria (considered in overall FHP package to NFHP)

*Meets at Least 1 NFHP Objective*

*Supports FHP and NFHP Assessment Findings*

*Well Defined Budget*

*Leverages Other Funds to Implement the Project*

*Address the causes and process behind declines*

*Includes an Outreach/Education Component*

*Improves Recreational Fishing Opportunities*

*Increases Public Access*

*Advances Conservation Specified by Existing Management or Conservation Plans (ie state agency plans or Magunson Stevens)*

*Project Will Be Carried Out With Partners (federal, state, and local governments, Indian tribes, and private entities)*

*Is this project being implemented by a Tribe or implemented with tribal funds*

In addition to these hard and soft criteria, the EBTJV application asks about EBTJV priorities and places a strong emphasis on well-developed projects that address the root cause of decline in the catchment, and which have been planned with input from a state or federal agency biologist in the EBTJV network.

Seven applications were submitted; one was disqualified because it did not have a state letter of support and it also did not meet the core requirements of the ACE Act.

The review team met on March 6, 2024 to agree upon a ranking and project submission list, including EBTJV operational funding, to recommend to the EBTJV Steering Committee on March 19.

The review team agreed that the EBTJV operations funding request should be increased to $125,000 to reflect the costs of inflation and to meet needs for fulfilling the EBTJV mission. Although this reduces the amount that can go to projects, the review team felt that this was acceptable and that by increasing EBTJV capacity we may be in a better position in several years to support partners and projects in more ways.

The review team was extremely pleased with the quality of all eligible applications for this round and recommends that they are all funded. The total for on the ground projects (excluding operations) is $299,870, and will bring an additional $$1.1M in nonfederal funds (4:1 match) and a total of $1.87M in nonfederal and federal contributions. The total NFHP ask including EBTJV operations is $424,870.

The projects collectively remove 9 barriers to aquatic organism passage, (2 dams and 7 culverts), reconnecting a total of 34.5 miles in priority brook trout catchments. A total of 9 acres of riparian habitat will be restored. The majority of projects occur in allopatric brook trout catchments, two will restore (repatriate) brook trout, including one restoration which will follow the removal of non-native rainbow trout. Nearly all the projects address in-stream habitat and propose large wood addition to improve hydrology, sediment sorting, and habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and fishes. In addition to meeting the hard ACE Act criteria, each of the on-the-ground projects meets at least nine of the soft criteria. In particular, the projects are all expected to benefit recreational fishing for wild brook trout. Applicants utilized well thought out methods, timelines, and partners, addressed a state or local level planning need, contained a monitoring plan, and incorporated public outreach.

The review team agreed upon the following ranking (below).

