

Request for Proposals (RFP) to Develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the New Jersey Highlands Region

RFP Issued: July 13, 2023

Question & Answer Cut-off Date: August 18, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

Submittal Deadline: October 6, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

I. Request to Submit Proposals

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) is soliciting proposals consisting of a Statement of Qualifications, Technical Proposals, and Rate Schedule & Budget from firms with varied expertise in all facets of open space and recreation planning. The proposed project is to develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the Highlands Region which, after public and key stakeholder input, will identify specific properties, establish priorities for preservation, and align potential funding sources for land preservation needed to accomplish the conservation and recreation goals of the region, as well as be a plan to effectively utilize and leverage resource-based recreation in the Region. It is recommended that any respondent review the Highlands Council's [Open Space Rule at N.J.A.C. 7:70](#), the [Regional Master Plan \(RMP\)](#), the [NJ Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan](#) and the [RMP Land Preservation and Stewardship Technical Report](#). In addition, as partial funding may come from a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), respondents are encouraged to review the [Highlands Conservation Act Grant Program – Capacity Building Cooperative Agreement](#) documents.

II. Background

The Highlands Region is a physiographic area of northern New Jersey, comprised of 88 municipalities within parts of seven counties. The Highlands is a diverse landscape with both rural and densely developed areas. The geographic boundaries of the region are established in the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, see N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq. (Highlands Act), which also created the Highlands Council. The Highlands Act states that the goals of the Regional Master Plan (RMP) shall be to preserve to the maximum extent possible any environmentally sensitive lands and other lands needed for recreation and conservation purposes; preserve farmland and historic sites and other historic resources; and preserve outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, on publicly owned land. To help meet these goals, the Highlands Council seeks to develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the region.

III. Scope of Services

The objective of this project is to develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the Highlands Region. The Plan will catalog existing open space and recreation lands, identify additional properties that may be appropriate for either open space and/or recreation, and provide a framework for acquiring future open space and recreational opportunities. The Plan will be developed with the benefit of significant outreach before, during, and after the plan adoption to address equity amongst all stakeholders within the State.

The Plan shall incorporate environmental justice principles to ensure that proposed open space and recreation projects have equitable benefits for all populations, and climate resiliency principles to address the impacts of climate change on the region.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan proposal shall include the following tasks:

Respondents may propose modifications to the proposal outline, as long as the overall goals of the Plan are satisfied.

A. Public and Stakeholder Outreach

The Team will develop an outreach and stakeholder engagement program to ensure effective engagement with Highlands communities, enhance stakeholders' understanding of the project, and facilitate meaningful participation. Effective engagement shall incorporate appropriate outreach to the diverse population of the Highlands, including non-English speaking individuals and residents of overburdened communities as defined in New Jersey's Environmental Justice Law (dep.nj.gov/ej/communities). In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) shall be included as a stakeholder and in other outreach tasks to ensure their substantial involvement in the project.

Deliverables shall include:

- An Outreach Plan devised to facilitate meaningful input with both the general public and identified stakeholders. A draft shall be submitted to the Highlands Council for review prior to commencement of sessions.
- Documentation of each outreach session along with a summary of key findings and relevant outcomes.

B. Inventory of Resource-Based Recreation Assets

Recreation, for purposes of this Plan, is intended to focus on resource-based recreation, which is dependent on a healthy environment. Many resource-based recreational pursuits rely substantially on the availability and quality of a particular resource. Resource-based recreational activities occur in natural environments, which may also have historical, archaeological, and scenic significance. A clean and healthy environment is necessary for these activities, including camping, hiking, kayaking, and cross-country skiing. For instance, water quality directly affects enjoyment when fishing in streams and ponds. Clean water is essential for sustaining the fish that anglers catch. If a stream has degraded water quality such that fish cannot survive, fishing cannot occur.

The team will develop the following materials:

- a. Inventory of publicly accessible, resource-based recreation assets, including exact location(s), physical characteristics/features, relevant facilities, such as restrooms, and permitted activities.
- b. Inventory of publicly accessible historic resources, including location(s), structures and landscapes, hours/days of operation, recreation/historic activities, and access limitations.
- c. This initial analysis may include properties that are adjacent to existing facilities that may provide enhanced public benefits related to accessibility and land preservation.

Deliverables shall include the following:

- An ESRI geodatabase and physical document including all existing recreation and historic properties, along with noted attributes for identification. Geodatabase should include appropriate attribute information and metadata.

C. Identification of Recreational Needs and Recreation Opportunities

The Highlands Region is home to over 800,000 people but provides recreational resources to millions more. The region and its vast array of natural and cultural resources is within a 2-hour drive of over 20 million people. This locational advantage brings with it both a positive attraction and a cautionary message to plan thoughtfully.

The team shall develop metrics to identify the overall recreational land needs of the region and where a ‘gap’ may exist between existing available recreation facilities and the ultimate ‘need’ for recreational lands. These metrics may be apportioned according to sub-regions within the Highlands. Once the outstanding need has been ascertained, potential recreational lands should be identified.

The following materials shall be developed:

- a. Identification of additional recreational areas and how each may address unmet need, including geographic location(s), accessibility, and potential linkage to existing recreation facilities.
- b. Identification of enhancements and improved access to existing resources to address unmet need.
- c. Preparation of a narrative explaining the development of the metrics and the identification of potential recreational facilities to address the identified needs.

Deliverables shall include:

- Narrative report;
- Comprehensive listing of all identified potential recreational resources;
- ESRI geodatabase of all resources developed for this task Geodatabase should include appropriate attribute information and metadata.

D. Identify Land Preservation Goals

After identifying the locational needs for resource-based recreation, the Highlands Council intends to build upon existing recreation assets with additional open space acquisitions and preservation of farmland and other high resource value lands. Identifiable goals must be established to guide future property pursuits.

The team shall:

- a. In collaboration with stakeholders and Highlands staff, establish goals for future land preservation, taking into account the need for sustained water quality, critical habitats, natural resource protection, recreation and climate resiliency.
- b. Conduct a locational analysis of lands capable of meeting the above established goals. Although identification of specific properties is not required at this stage, potential resource protection mechanisms should be gauged and documented with the type of protection(s) anticipated.

- c. In collaboration with stakeholders and Highlands staff, establish goals for future agricultural preservation, taking into account important farmland soils, concentrations of existing agricultural lands, and potential for agricultural support industries.
- d. Identify specific agricultural lands that may be appropriate/available for protection either through farmland preservation, Highlands Development Credits purchase, or other available mechanisms.

Deliverables shall include:

- Narrative report including an overview of all collaborative discussions, the locational analysis, and explanation of any identified lands;
- ESRI geodatabase of all identified lands. Geodatabase should include appropriate attribute information and metadata.

E. Establish a Priority Ranking System

A ranking system shall be created to assist in prioritizing land preservation. The property prioritization should consider various factors, including recreational needs, environmental constraints, economic viability, development pressure, agricultural preservation, and social equity.

- a. Based on the goals identified above (Task D), establish parameters and metrics for use in evaluating the lands within the Highlands Region for future open space. The parameters should take into consideration lands that may not qualify for other traditional preservation/acquisition methods due to size or other site constraints but may have high resource value.
- b. The metrics should be based on a variety of factors such as: recreation potential, farmland/agricultural value, forest resources, environmentally sensitive areas/resources, habitat and habitat connectivity, water resource protection, historical, archaeological and scenic resources, and other environmentally significant characteristics. Proximity and contiguity with existing preserved lands shall be considered.

Deliverables shall include:

- Draft ranking system with a full explanation of its development and applicability shall be submitted to Highlands staff for review and comment.
- Final ranking system that incorporates any edits/comments received from Highlands staff.

F. Identify Properties for Preservation

Using the ranking system devised under Task E, create a spatial database of properties/parcels that may be appropriate for acquisition/preservation.

- a. Properties may be identified based on their potential for various open space uses, including water resource protection, natural resource protection, cultural resource protection, passive recreation, trails, agriculture, etc.
- b. Identified properties shall be evaluated for preservation potential based on availability of funding and willing seller(s).

Deliverables shall include:

- ESRI geodatabase and static document that identify properties for preservation. Geodatabase should include appropriate attribute information and metadata.

G. Create an Acquisition and Funding Plan

- Once properties have been identified and prioritized, the plan must identify the various available preservation programs that may be appropriate for each property. The plan should include a methodology (may be developed as a template) that the Council can follow to pursue future acquisitions.
- The team shall research and identify funding resources for land preservation in the Highlands Region. The resulting database shall include federal, state, county, and non-profit programs as well as available incentives for property owners.
- ESRI geodatabase that shows the geographies of funding partners.

Deliverables shall include:

- Confidential matrix/database that pairs potential funding sources with identified properties and their priority ranking.

H. Outreach for Acquisition

Re-engagement with stakeholders shall commence with the finalization of the Acquisition and Funding Plan. Stakeholders may be drawn both from those previously identified during the initial outreach as well as individuals and groups that have expressed interest and expertise during the development of the open space and recreation components of the project. It is envisioned that these stakeholders will become partners in the implementation of the Plan.

- Development of a Stakeholder Engagement Plan will include identification of public and private organizations that may be partners in future acquisition efforts. These stakeholders will be the core group involved in property acquisition efforts. They will assist in the development of a program to solicit the owners of lands identified in the Acquisition and Funding Plan.
- An Outreach Program will be devised in collaboration with USFWS and the core stakeholder group. Using the Acquisition and Funding Plan, the Program will consist of a coordinated approach for outreach to potential land sellers.
- In collaboration with the core group, conduct outreach activities targeted to the potential land sellers. A section shall be added to the confidential matrix/database (deliverable from Task G) to record results, comments, further actions, and information related to each specific property.

Deliverables shall include:

- Stakeholder Engagement Plan;
- Outreach Plan;
- Updated confidential matrix/database with all relevant information obtained during the outreach efforts.

I. Final Report and Highlands Council Presentation

- Produce a Final Report in both hardcopy and pdf versions.

- b. Present the Final Report to the Highlands Council at a regularly scheduled public meeting.

Please note that items listed in the above scope of services will be funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and may have additional administrative requirements related to federal grants.

Timeframe

The Council anticipates that the timeframe to complete Tasks A through I will take approximately fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) months. The Project Team shall prepare regular progress reports for Highlands Council review (a progress report form shall be supplied).

The Project Team's ability to devote sufficient resources to these tasks in the expected timeframe should be reflected in its detailed schedule (see Section IV, B.2), although Teams may propose alternative timeframes that achieve a reasonable completion of the Scope of Services in an expedited manner. The Highlands Council will consider the Team's proposed timeframe in awarding the proposal.

IV. RFP Submittal Requirements

A. Proposals must include the following items:

1. Contact Information: Provide the name and address each of the Team members, telephone number, and electronic mail address of the individual(s) responsible for preparation of the proposal who may be contacted in the event of questions or notification, and the location of the office, if other than that shown above at which the services to be provided hereunder will be performed.
2. Understanding of the Scope of Services: A statement of the Team's understanding of the project described in the Scope of Services and the Highlands Council's needs and commitment that the Team is able to perform the Scope of Services within the required timeframe.
3. Technical Approach and Proposed Work Plan: A detailed description of the Team's approach for satisfactorily completing the Scope of Services set forth in Section III above including any alternate suggestions for implementation. Include a detailed schedule that includes a description of all tasks and activities, significant milestones and anticipated deliverables.
4. Statement of Qualifications: Provide the following:
 - a. Type of business (e.g. corporation, limited liability company, 501(c)(3));
 - b. Number of years in business and number of years providing relevant services;
 - c. Type of services provided;
 - d. Description of your firm's past experience that is most relevant to this project;
 - e. Detailed organizational chart; and
 - f. Explanation of the experience of each member of the Team assigned to perform the Scope of Services, including experience on similar projects, key personnel

qualifications and relevant experience. Resumes of all qualified professionals who will be responsible for assisting with or completing assigned tasks shall be provided.

5. **Work Examples:** Provide at least three (3) examples of previous projects, work product, publications and reports, demonstrating direct experience with the type of work outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above. For each of these examples, provide the following information:
 - a. Name and address of client;
 - b. Year(s) during which work was performed;
 - c. Contract amount; and
 - d. Details of work performed.
6. **Staffing Plan:** Provide an organizational structure (flow chart), showing all personnel who will work on executing the Scope of Services, including the identity of any alternate personnel, sub-consultants or sub-contractors the Team intends to utilize to perform the Scope of Services.
7. **Staffing Matrix:** Provide a staffing matrix that graphically depicts the key personnel identified in Paragraph IV.A.6 above, who worked on the example projects listed in Paragraph IV.A.5 above, and what his/her role was with respect to each example project. Also list the roles and responsibilities each of those personnel will have with respect to the proposed project outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above.

Personnel	Role	Example Project	Example Project	Example Project
Jane A. Smith	Chief Economist	X		X
Joe A. Smith	Market Analyst		X	X
Jane A. Doe	Planner		X	

8. **Sub-contractors:** If applicable, submit a statement of the Team's intent to sub-contract. If sub-contractors, sub-consultants or any alternate personnel are to be utilized in the performance of the Scope of Services, list each sub-contractor and identify responsibilities, tasks, schedule, and costs and provide resumes of key personnel. All sub-contractors must be approved by the Highlands Council prior to utilization of the sub-contractor. The Team is fully responsible for any sub-contractor.
9. **Statement of Availability:** Provide an affirmative statement detailing the Team's availability over the eighteen (18) months and its ability during that time to work interactively with Highlands Council staff remotely or at our offices in Chester, NJ.
10. **Litigation/Disciplinary Action:** If any member of the Team, or any principal therein (in his or her official capacity with the Team), has been engaged in any litigation as a defendant involving a sum of \$100,000 or more and/or subject to any professional

disciplinary action over the last three years, provide a description of the litigation and/or disciplinary action.

11. Concurrent Project(s) of a Substantially Similar Nature: The State is restricted from paying for duplicative concurrent work. Accordingly, if the Firm is currently engaged or will be engaged in the near future in any contracts with a substantially similar scope of work to this RFP, the Firm shall provide a detailed description of that project and scope.
 12. References: Provide no less than three (3) references, including at least two (2) clients for whom services have been provided within the past three years regarding efforts similar to those outlined in the Scope of Services in Section III above. Provide the contact names, positions and phone numbers for representatives of each entity listed as a reference. The Highlands Council reserves the right to contact references for information that may be used in the evaluation process.
 13. N.J. Business Registration Certificate. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:32-44, the Team must provide proof of valid business registration with the Division of Revenue in the Department of Treasury.
 14. Acceptance of Contract Terms. A statement certifying that the Team has no existing or foreseen conflicts to perform the services requested by the Highlands Council as envisioned under the above Scope of Services and accepts the Council's Contract Standard Terms and Conditions attached as Appendix D.
 15. Certifications/Disclosures. The Team must provide certification and disclosure documents in compliance with Public Law 2005, Chapter 51; Public Law 2005, Chapter 271; and Executive Order 129 (codified as P.L. 2005, c. 92). Certification forms relating to these provisions are attached hereto as Appendices A, B, and C respectively.
- B. Technical Proposals must include the following items:
1. A detailed approach for achieving satisfactory results regarding the Scope of Services of Section III above; and
 2. A detailed schedule and flow chart of tasks for completion of the Scope of Services.
- C. Cost Proposal, Rate Schedule & Budget: The Proposal must include in a separate sealed envelope (please mark as confidential):
1. A rate schedule that details fully loaded project hourly rates, which includes all overhead and profit that may be incurred in performing the project;
 2. An overall project budget and detailed fixed fee proposal broken out by task based on the Scope of Services;
 3. Note: All direct expenses shall be billed at cost.
- D. Submittal Requirements: A PDF of the complete Proposal, including Statement of Qualifications, Technical Proposal, Rate Schedule & Budget and all certifications must be received no later than **5:00 p.m. EST on October 6, 2023**. The complete Proposal shall be provided electronically via e-mail to Chief Counsel Gabrielle Gallagher (gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov). Late Proposals will not be considered.

V. Restrictions on Communications with Highlands Council Staff

Any questions regarding this RFP must be submitted via email to: gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov. Note that all questions regarding this RFP must be

submitted by email no later than 5:00 p.m. {Monday}, {August 18, 2023}. Respondents to this RFP are instructed not to communicate in any other manner than as set forth immediately above with any other representatives of the Highlands Council during the submission process, and not to communicate with any representatives of the Highlands Council during the selection process for this contract, unless such communication was initiated by a representative of the Highlands Council in connection with any request for clarification to a response. In the event that any Addenda or clarifying communication arises out of a question submitted by a respondent or Team, the said clarification and response or Addendum shall be issued to all respondents. Only the interpretations and/or corrections issued as a written Addendum to the RFP by a representative of the Highlands Council shall be binding. No other source is authorized to give information regarding any explanation or interpretation of the RFP.

General Requirements and Information

- A. If submitted by a corporation (joint venture, associated teams, etc.), the Proposal shall be signed by a corporate officer authorized to do so. If submitted by an individual, that individual shall sign the Proposal. If the Team is a general partnership, one or more of the partners shall sign. If a limited partnership, the managing partner(s) or general partner(s) shall sign.
- B. The Highlands Council reserves the right to require the submission of additional information regarding experience and qualifications as it may deem necessary and may consider any available evidence on the financial, technical, or other qualifications and abilities of the Team.
- C. This RFP does not commit the Highlands Council to award a contract to any respondent or Team or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation or mailing of the Proposal.
- D. The Highlands Council reserves the right to reject all Proposals, or abandon all or part of this Project, prior to award of any contracts, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq. Proposals may be rejected for any or all of the following reasons:
 - Not responsive to this RFP;
 - Team is not authorized to do business in the State of New Jersey;
 - Failure to include any required information with the submittal; and/or,
 - Failure to disclose any existing or potential conflict of interest.
- E. The Highlands Council reserves the right to waive any and all irregularities and informalities in the Proposals and to request clarification of qualifications prior to qualifying a Team.
- F. The selected Team must provide certification and disclosure documents in compliance with Public Law 2005, Chapter 51; Public Law 2005, Chapter 271, and Executive Order 129 (codified as P.L. 2005, c. 92) prior to the award of any contract. Certification forms relating to these provisions are attached hereto as Appendices A, B, and C respectively.
- G. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:32-44, the selected Team must provide proof of valid business registration with the Division of Revenue in the Department of Treasury prior to the award of any contract.
- H. If awarded the contract, the selected Team shall be required to comply with the requirements of N.J.S.A. 10:5-31 et seq. and N.J.A.C. 17:27-1.1 et seq. regarding affirmative action.
- I. After the receipt of proposals, the Highlands Council reserves the right to negotiate with any number of Teams it chooses in its discretion prior to awarding a contract.

- J. Documents/information submitted in response to this RFP generally shall be available to the public except as permitted by the common law, and State law, including the New Jersey Open Public Records Act, N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et seq.

VI. Team Selection Process

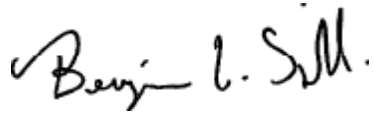
- A. Based upon the Proposals, taking into consideration staff's recommendation, and its own determination as to which proposal is most advantageous to the needs of the Highlands Council, the Council may issue a contract award. In selecting the most qualified Team for the services of this RFP, the Highlands Council will consider the following:
1. The background, qualifications, skills, and experience of the Team and its staff;
 2. The Team's degree of expertise concerning the area at issue;
 3. The Team's proposed technical approach to the issues raised in the project description or specifications;
 4. The Team's capacity to meet the requirements of the project at issue within the timeframe established by the Highlands Council;
 5. The rate or price to be charged by the Team;
 6. The Highlands Council's prior experiences with the Team;
 7. The Team's familiarity with the work, requirements, and systems of the Highlands Council;
 8. The Team's references;
 9. Interviews with prospective Teams;
 10. Geographical location of the Team's offices; and
 11. Familiarity with all applicable State and federal laws and regulations.
- B. Upon selection of the qualified Team, the Highlands Council and the Team will execute a professional services contract, on a time and materials basis on a "total costs not to exceed" basis. The professional services contract will include the Highlands Council's Professional Services Contract Standard Terms and Conditions, which are attached hereto as Appendix D.

VII. Term and Termination

- A. The initial term of the professional services contract shall be for a period of twenty-four (24) months from when it is formally entered into by the parties and may be extended upon agreement by both parties that the detailed Scope of Work requires additional time for effective completion.
- B. The Highlands Council may, at any time, terminate the professional services contract in whole or in part for the Highlands Council's convenience and without cause when the Highlands Council determines in its sole discretion that termination is in the public interest. Upon receipt of an order of termination for convenience, the Team shall not proceed with any item of work, unless specifically authorized to do so in writing. In such a case, unless mutually agreed to by the parties, the Team will not be entitled to payment for any services provided after the effective date of such termination.

If there are any questions regarding this Request for Proposals, please contact Ms. Gallagher by e-mail at gabrielle.gallagher@highlands.nj.gov.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COUNCIL

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin L. Spinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and "S".

Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq
Executive Director
July 13, 2023