

## **ENVIRONMENT – RECOVERY OF PROTECTED HABITATS AND PRIORITY SPECIES**

### **1. Summary of call**

The INTERREG VA Programme is making a call for applications under the specific objective: Recovery of Protected Habitats & Priority Species, objective 2.1.

**To promote cross-border co-operation to facilitate the recovery of selected protected habitats and priority species.**

The total value of call is €11 million ERDF

Opening Date: 07 October 2015

Closing Date: **08 January 2016 (15:00)**

Steering Committee: 04 March 2016

#### **The result indicator:**

**The percentage of selected protected habitats in or approaching favourable condition. The current baseline is 1% and the target for 2023 is 10%.**

#### **The output indicators:**

- **4,500 ha of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status**
- **25 conservation action plans**

Applicants will need to demonstrate their ability to achieve against the outputs indicated and project selection will prioritise those projects which have the maximum potential to deliver the result indicator provided above.

## 2. Essential information

This call for applications should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Cooperation Programme and associated Citizens' Summary;
- The Programme Rules;
- Guide for Applicants.

Please consult these documents before completing the application form as they contain essential information to assist you in making the best application possible.

Applicants may also find it useful to consult the 'Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation'. This toolkit has been developed by the Centre for Cross-Border Studies, as part of an INTERREG IVA funded project and is intended to be a practical guide to assist with planning cross-border projects. A copy of the toolkit can be downloaded from our website.

## 3. Project Selection Criteria

The following selection criteria will be used:

- a. Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the programme.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that the project proposed will facilitate the recovery of selected protected habitats and/or species and provide a conservation action plan to guide activities and provide a framework for future action.

- i. Only sites important to the following identified list of habitats and species may be chosen for investment:

**List of Habitats** - Alkaline fens, blanket bog, active raised bog, marl lakes, calcareous fens, petrifying springs with tufa formation, transition mires and quaking bogs.

**List of Species** - White-clawed crayfish, hen harrier, marsh fritillary, breeding waders (curlew, lapwing, redshank, snipe), golden plover, corncrake and red grouse.

- ii. Knowledge sharing of research data and outputs;

b. Quality of the project design and in particular;

Proposed activities must align with the EU Birds and Habitats Directive, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAF's) of the three countries and in particular selected protected sites and species of cross-border relevance. Details of the selected sites will be included on the SEUPB website. ([www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu))

c. Quality of project team and implementation arrangements;

d. Value for money;

e. Quality of cross-border co-operation with demonstrable added value;

f. Contribution towards sustainable development; and

g. Contribution towards equality.

#### **4. Background to INTERREG Programme**

The INTERREG VA 2014-2020 Programme is one of approximately 60 programmes across the European Union designed to promote greater levels of cross-border co-operation. Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland share a number of common features with other border areas across Europe where developmental problems are exacerbated by the existence of borders. Borders can distort infrastructure and communication networks resulting in reduced economic development and different policy approaches which hinder joined-up service delivery.

The INTERREG VA Programme has been designed to address many of these issues in order to promote greater economic, social and territorial cohesion across the region.

#### **5. Eligible Region**

The eligible area for the INTERREG VA Programme is:

- Northern Ireland;
- The Border Counties of Ireland (Monaghan, Leitrim, Cavan, Louth, Sligo and Donegal); and
- Western Scotland (Dumfries & Galloway, East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire mainland; South Ayrshire; Lochaber, Skye & Lochalsh, Arran & Cumbrae and Argyll & Bute and Eilean Siar/Western Isles).

Projects must comply with the cross-border requirements of Article 12 of 1299/2013 as detailed in the Programme Rules.

## **6. What is the theme “Recovery of Protected Habitats & Priority Species” going to achieve?**

A key challenge for the region is to address common environmental issues and to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy’s overall aim to “halt biodiversity loss by 2020”. Scientific evidence indicates that in addition to unsustainable development and use of natural resources, climate change is also likely to have a substantial effect on biodiversity in the region.

The investment by the programme in this area will try to promote an integrated approach by the relevant statutory agencies to environmental management across the entire programme region. This will result in the development of collaborative cross-border approaches that will increase the achievement in meeting the targets of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the Biodiversity Strategy.

The need to protect the environment is one of the key themes in the EU 2020 Strategy. It is also one of the needs and priorities identified in Socio Economic Profile of the Region and in the Position Papers from the European Commission for the United Kingdom and Ireland. The investment by the programme in this important area will be aimed at ensuring that designated habitat sites of cross-border importance and identified areas for priority species will achieve or be approaching favorable conditions. These include national designated areas (areas of specific scientific interest (ASSI), sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs), natural heritage areas (NHAs)) and European designated areas (special protection areas (SPAs) and special areas of conservation (SAC)). Other areas for breeding wader species and marsh fritillary that are not designated may also be considered where they are important to the ecological functioning of habitats within the designated site network. In many cases sites will be close to, or straddle the border. However other sites further from the terrestrial border, including those in Western Scotland, may be included, where the site is of cross-border significance.

The three jurisdictions have prioritised 7 protected habitats and 7 priority species. These have been selected from habitats and species common to all three jurisdictions and include habitats that have an important role in connectivity between protected areas and protected species that migrate across the eligible region.

Increased levels of integration in the planning and management of the environment across the region will result in the development of best practice methodologies and increased levels of public sector efficiency. It will also lead to increased awareness of and responsiveness to the potential threats of climate change to habitats and species.

## 7. Anticipated Actions

It is anticipated that the programme will fund the following types of actions;

- Development of habitat mapping of protected habitats and sites of cross-border relevance;
- Development and implementation of conservation action plans for protected sites of cross-border relevance;
- Tangible conservation actions for protected habitats and species;
- Conservation management and protection activities to encourage sustainable natural regeneration of specie populations;
- The development and sharing of best practice and enhancement of skills in ecosystem management;
- Development and use of databases to assist conservation actions;
- Removal of invasive species;
- Research into species and habitats, including the impact of climate change, which supports the actions within the programme; and
- Education and Outreach activities.

## 8. Budget and co-financing rate

€11m million ERDF is available under this call. Successful projects will be offered a grant in Euro.

The maximum intervention rate that can be applied is 85%. This means that applicants are required to bring a minimum of up to 15% match funding to the eligible project costs over the lifetime of the project. Applicants may request 15% match funding from the Member States through the application process. Please refer to the Programme Rules for further details on match funding.

However, please be aware the intervention rate (grant rate) may decrease depending upon the State Aid implications of your project. It is the responsibility of the Lead Partner to ensure that State Aid cover and compliance is in place. The application should clearly outline the process to ensure and demonstrate State Aid compliance.

The level of grant aid may also be adjusted to take due account of anticipated future revenue streams. Please consult the Programme Rules for further details.

Grants and payments may take any of the following forms:

- Reimbursement of eligible costs actually incurred and paid;
- Standard scales of unit costs;
- Flat rate financing, available for overhead costs or salary costs.

The above options may be combined only where each option covers different categories of cost or where they are used for different projects forming a part of an operation or for successive phases of an operation. Flat rate financing for overheads is available for this call at a rate of 15% of staff costs.

## **9. Application process**

A two stage process will be in place for this call as detailed in the Guide for Applicants. Full details of the assessment process, including admissibility criteria are available in the Guide for Applicants.

You can apply online through the SEUPB website. (Note: the online process will not be fully operational until the end of December 2015. In the interim an application form is available from SEUPB).

Completed applications should be submitted to [applications@seupb.eu](mailto:applications@seupb.eu) or SEUPB, M-TEK II Building, Armagh Road, Monaghan H18 YH59.

## **10. Contact Us**

For general enquiries about this call please contact the SEUPB on: Tel: +353 47 77003.

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