



Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program GRANT SCORING CRITERIA

Only projects that are on working lands (in general, lands that are under special ad valorem tax valuation for farming, ranching, timber production or wildlife), and propose to (1) conserve water or protect water quality, (2) conserve native wildlife species through protection of their habitat, (3) conserve rare or sensitive species, (4) demonstrably contribute to preservation of a landscape of conservation lands, or (5) protect productive open-space land threatened by fragmentation or development, may receive funding from the Program. The Council will not consider any applications that are administratively incomplete. At the Program Coordinator's discretion, administratively incomplete applications may be returned with a request for additional information.

In accordance with Texas Natural Resources Code § 183.060, the Council has adopted scoring criteria that will be used in evaluating applications. The Council may emphasize factors of special interest during the project selection process. Points are awarded for those values which will clearly be protected by the conservation easement.

Discussion: With the changes to the scoring criteria recently approved by the Council, I thought it would be helpful for our partners to see the thoughts and reasons behind some of the changes. This is not an all-inclusive review of the criteria, merely some of mine and Ted's thought process as we tried to make the criteria clearer to applicants while addressing some of the lessons learned during the first 2 years of the program.

Chris Abernathy

Applications will be assigned a score in accordance with the following criteria. The bullets listed for each scoring category provide guidance.

- Threat of development or other conversion to productive working lands (30)
 - Near a population center
 - In an area experiencing or expected to experience rapid development
 - Demonstrable pressure to sell for development
 - Conversion would result in significant loss of productivity

Working lands is clearly the mission of the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program. The mission of the TPWD is to manage and conserve natural and cultural resources and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. In my opinion, this program can meet both missions by protecting habitat, sensitive species, and water quality on those lands that are currently considered to be contributing to the food and fiber industry.

The numeric score for this criterion was increased from 20 to 30 to place a greater emphasis on working lands.

- Value (20)
 - Cost effective for conservation benefits and region
 - Conservation easement donated or offered at bargain sale price
 - Applicant, donor, grant, or other funding source contributing to project
 - Significant preservation of natural resources and/or agricultural productivity for the money

This new criterion captures both issues at hand

- Watershed value (20)
 - Protects headwaters systems, springs, creeks, wetlands, riparian buffers, or other sensitive watershed features
 - Has quantifiable aquifer recharge value
 - Land uses, and/or landscape position contribute to maintenance of watershed processes that protect water quality, quantity and seasonality
 - Water quality best management practices are in place. Examples include:
 - Buffer zones adjacent to streams/riparian/wetland areas

- BMPs to minimize sediment and nutrient loading in runoff
- Agricultural practices that minimize water consumption

BMPs offer a tangible method to evaluate a landowner/manager's dedication to protecting resources. Obviously, the BMPs must be current and actually working to provide the protection necessary.

BMPs should be tangible and measurable (i.e. controlled sediment loading, stable streambanks, grazing practices in place and evident, etc.)

- **Fish and wildlife value (15)**
 - Protects habitat(s) that are considered to be a high priority for conservation due to rarity or rate of decline
 - No or few examples of target habitats are currently in conservation
 - Supports conservation or recovery of federal or state listed species, Texas Conservation Action Plan (TCAP) species of greatest conservation need, or species in decline
 - Conserves particularly mature, diverse or healthy habitat(s)
 - Fish and wildlife best management practices are in place. Examples include:
 - Designation and protection of sensitive habitat zones
 - Bank stabilization; erosion control
 - Consolidation of infrastructure

As stated previously, these BMPs should be long standing practices. Fencing of sensitive areas should be employed. Watering sites should be located away from streams and rivers. "High impact" areas should be located on uplands.

This numeric score was reduced to create more points for the threat of development criterion.

- **Contribution to a conservation landscape (10)**
 - Contiguous with lands already protected for conservation
 - Offers additive watershed, habitat, agricultural viability, or aesthetic values
 - Conserves migration routes, terrestrial or aquatic corridors or critical habitat buffers
- **Terms of the conservation easement (5)**
 - Conservation easement is perpetual
 - Easement holder is accredited and stable
 - Conservation easement prohibits fragmentation and encourages stewardship

This numeric score was reduced because it is anticipated all TRFLCP easements will be perpetual. The additional points were given to the threat of development criterion.