

391-5-13-.03 Recreational Trails Program (RTP).

(1) Purpose. The purpose of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is to provide grant assistance on an 80/20 matching basis to eligible applicants for acquisition of real property and/or development of recreational trails for public trail usage, and for non-routine maintenance and assessment of existing public trails. Lands and facilities that receive funding from this program must be for trail usage or directly support trail usage; must be open to the general public without discrimination during reasonable times and hours; and must be properly maintained and operated for public recreational usage. The RTP is a federally funded program through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Georgia Department of Natural Resources was designated as the agency responsible for administering the National Recreational Trails Fund Act with the Commissioner serving as the principal official for coordinating with the FHWA. Administrative responsibility was assigned to the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites and program implementation has been assigned to the Grants Administration and Planning Unit.

Specific criteria which address recreational trail issues as identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) are used to evaluate the grant applications.

(2) Eligible Applicants. All legally constituted entities (state and federal agencies, cities, counties, recreation commissions, or recreation authorities with legislative sanction) may apply for grant funds under this program. Eligible applicants must apply for grants under this program in a manner and format prescribed by the Department. Applications and related instructions for applying may be received by writing to the Department at the following address:

Department of Natural Resources

Grants Administration and Planning

2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive

Suite 1352

Atlanta, Georgia 30334

(3) Application Procedures. The typical calendar of an annual funding cycle follows:

Sept.-Oct. Public announcement of the Application Process.

November Applications due (specific deadline assigned each year in the public announcement).

December-January Staff reviews, evaluates, and ranks applications.

February Funding recommendations are presented to Commissioner for action.

March-April Staff completes package for formal application of funds for FHWA.

June FHWA approves program of projects and notifies DNR.

July Staff completes paperwork for formal commitment of funds with applicants.

September The cycle begins again.

Eligible applicants shall make application to the Department of Natural Resources by the specified deadline in the manner and format outlined in the program application. Each application package shall include responses to program criteria for which the

applicant seeks points, including appropriate justification and supporting documents. All grants are subject to applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations (including but not limited to environmental compliance specified in NEPA and GEPA and non-discrimination laws) and each application must include appropriate compliance documentation as specified in the grants manual. Applications must be received by the specified deadline. Contact the Department of Natural Resources at the above address for a copy of the criteria and formal grant application procedures. It should be noted that FY 93 was the first year of federal funding for this program, and that funding was not appropriated for FY 94. The above schedule may be altered, but the same basic process will be followed.

(4) Program Criteria. Each applicant must provide information to specific questions regarding the nature, purpose, and type of trail which will be developed. These questions provide a certain amount of data, and include serious consideration of socio-economic and land-use issues, as well as any negative impact on natural resources, potential involvement with hazardous wastes, air quality, permitting requirements, and Section 4(f) violations. An applicant's justification should address in detail the following criteria:

Describe the proposed project in relation to a greenway corridor, greenspace, or active recreation park and the provision of recreational opportunities in the community. Identify the greenway corridor, greenspace, or park and the management authorities or agencies.

Describe how the project will mitigate and minimize impact to the natural environment as relates to existing trail systems.

Describe the degree to which the proposed project will facilitate access to and increase trail usage by persons with disabilities over and above that which is required.

Describe how the proposed project will add to the existing supply of lands dedicated and protected for trail development and usage. (This applies only to acquisition projects.)

Describe how the proposed project will provide a new recreational opportunity where there are no available trail recreational opportunities.

Describe the degree to which the proposed project responds to citizen identified needs in the sponsor's comprehensive planning process. Copy of section of comprehensive plan that identifies the need must be provided.

Describe the degree to which the trail project involves public/private partnerships between trail users, private interests within the area and public agencies. (Letters of support do not constitute a commitment.)

Describe the degree to which the sponsor proposes to use grant funds to leverage greater public and/or private investments.

Describe the degree to which the project provides viable connections or linkages to other trails, greenways, scenic corridors, natural, cultural, and recreational resources or community activities.

Describe how the trail project can accommodate a variety of motorized and/or non-motorized trail activities (hiking, equestrian, interpretive, water sport, multi-use, ATV, mountain biking, biking, etc.).

Describe the degree to which the sponsor has received previous funds for projects that have not been completed. (This applies to sponsors who have received Trails grant awards in the past.)

The above mentioned criteria and requirements can be found in their entirety in the policy, procedures, and implementation manual for the **Georgia Recreational Trails Program**. This manual is available from the Department of Natural Resources at the address listed in “(2) Eligible Applicants”.

(5) Review of Grant Applications. Applications received from eligible applicants are reviewed by the grants staff to determine both program eligibility and a ranking score. Specific criteria, as outlined above, are used to evaluate the grant applications and a numeric score is assigned. Grants are recommended for funding on the basis of the score, and the fact that only one grant per year per applicant will be issued. A grant ceiling is usually set at the beginning of the application cycle based on the level of appropriation. All funds are allocated on an annual basis.

(6) Awarding of Grant Funds. Upon completion of the review and ranking of all applications by staff and the review of staff recommendations by the Advisory Committee, funding recommendations are presented to the Commissioner of Natural Resources for review and action. Following action by the Commissioner, the grants staff prepares a single application package and submits it to the Federal Highway Administration for approval. Once approval is received, grants staff completes the paperwork including the contracting process with the grant recipients. The grant period is normally not more than two years, and funds will flow to the grant recipient on a reimbursable basis as the work progresses. A grant recipient's land and/or facilities are subject to periodic inspections by grants staff for appropriate

operation and maintenance and compliance with applicable state and federal laws.

Authority O.C.G.A. Secs. 12-3-32, 12-3-5; Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (P.L. 109-59, 119 Stat. 1144); Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (P.L. 102-240, 105 Stat 1914); Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 20.219; and 49 CFR Part 18. **History.** Original description entitled “National Recreational Trails Fund (NRTF)” submitted May 26, 1994. **Submitted:** Dec. 30, 2002. **Submitted:** Grant description entitled “Recreational Trails Program (RTP)” Sept. 28, 2006.