# **Attachment 2-A: California Department of Fish and Wildlife Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act Enhancement and Restoration Projects Assessment**

(September 1, 2023)

## **Background**

The purpose of this attachment is to provide guidance on how enhancement and restoration projects supported by the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund (WJT Fund) will be evaluated and prioritized. Projects that qualify for funding should have the overall goal of reducing threats to and/or restoring resources to degraded or potential future western Joshua tree (WJT) habitat. Resources that are important components of WJT habitat include, but are not limited to, reproducing adult individuals, non-reproducing juvenile individuals, seeds/seed bank, native nurse plants, suitable soils, pollinating moths, seed dispersers, and advantageous genetic traits/adaptations. Threats to WJT habitat that may be reduced by enhancement and restoration projects include but are not limited to invasive plants, wildfire, erosion, vehicle impacts, grazing impacts (herbivory, trampling, soil compaction), and other pests or diseases (weevils, beetles).

## **Minimum Qualifications**

* Project will be conducted by the owner or the property or their agent, unless otherwise approved by CDFW.
* Project area has been degraded by impacts that may be reduced by the project.
* Clearly written project proposal with objectives, methods, and goals.
* Commitment to maintain and monitor the project for 2 years and report results.
* Project consultation with desert restoration expert with 5 years of desert restoration experience. Resumes must be submitted for approval.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Projects will be evaluated based on the provided point scoring system.

* **Restoration Design** – **(1-15 points)** The design of a project will be evaluated based on its completeness and clarity of objectives, methods, goals, and a plan to maintain and monitor the site. Proposals should be reviewed and approved by a specialist with desert restoration experience.
	+ Excellent (15 points) – All aspects of restoration design are clear and well-defined. Goals and objectives are specific, measurable, and realistic. The proposal includes detailed methods that outline all aspects of the project from start to finish and includes timelines for implementation. Project is “shovel ready” meaning that all necessary agreements and/or compliance (if applicable) are complete.
	+ Fair (9 points) – All or most aspects of the restoration design are included but some are unclear. Some additional steps are required before the project can be implemented. Goals are qualitative.
	+ Poor (3 points) – Elements of the restoration design are included but some are missing important details. There is no clear path or timeline towards implementation.
* **Urgency and Severity of Threat** – **(1-15 points)** The project should alleviate one or more threats to WJT and its habitat such as low population size, lack of important resources, invasive plants, wildfire, erosion, vehicle impacts, grazing impacts or other pests or diseases. Projects that alleviate more urgent and severe threats will be ranked higher than projects that alleviate less urgent and severe threats.
	+ Severe and urgent threats alleviated – (15 points) Threat requires immediate action. Effects are substantial and irreversible with permanent consequences such as extirpation of a population or local genotype.
	+ Moderate and semi-urgent threats alleviated – (9 points) Threats are increasing in size and magnitude and are likely to have severe consequences in the next few years, such as significant reductions in population viability. Threats are reversible but only with extensive external input.
	+ Minimal and non-urgent threats alleviated – (3 points) Threats have been ongoing and are not likely to cause any significant impacts to the resource in the immediate future. Consequences of the threat may be a minor or seasonal reduction in population viability. Effects are easily reversible with little to no lasting effects.
* **Problem resolution - (1-15 points)** Projects that alleviate threats over longer time periods will be ranked higher than projects that alleviate threats over shorter time periods.
	+ 15 points – Project will implement specific actions that will result in resolution of the issue(s) or threat(s) for long periods of time (decades or longer). There is a high likelihood that project goals will be achieved. Actions are performed on one-time basis (although the duration of implementation may be long, such as a five-year planting project with five additional years of monitoring and supplemental watering). The project benefits are expected to be self-sustaining for a decade or more after completion of the project.
	+ 9 points – Project contributes to the resolution of the problem(s) but will not fully resolve the issue(s). Some cyclic ongoing maintenance will be required to achieve project goals. The project benefits are expected to be self-sustaining for one to several years after completion of the project.
	+ 3 points – Project will contribute basic information about the problem(s) but does not directly lead to resolution of the issue(s). The project benefits are not expected to be sustainable after the completion of the project.
* **Maintenance and Monitoring Plan - (1-15 points)** Regular maintenance and monitoring of the site and local conditions are needed to ensure ecological processes are heading in the intended direction, and that adjustments are made accordingly. The frequency of maintenance visits will vary based on project activities and timeframes. For example, nursery plants may need regular watering in the years after initial installation but require less frequent watering in later years after they become established. Plants may also need more frequent watering in warm, drier months. The site characteristics that are monitored, and their frequencies, will also vary based on the project activities; however, more points will be given to projects that consider a full range of factors that may contribute to the success of the restoration project. For example, monitoring invasive grasses may help detect when fuel reduction treatments are necessary. Annual reporting to CDFW and NFWF will be required for a minimum of 2 years, and projects with longer commitments will receive more points.
	+ 10 points – Project includes a detailed schedule for regular maintenance and monitoring for 10+ years. The rationale for the frequency of maintenance visits is clearly explained and cost effective. The monitoring plan considers a wide range of ecological aspects that may affect the success of the project. Quantitative trigger points for adjustments to management actions are incorporated into the plan.
	+ 5 points – Project includes a detailed schedule for regular maintenance and monitoring for 5 years. The rationale for the frequency of maintenance visits is explained but some aspects are unclear or not cost effective. The monitoring plan considers some important ecological aspects that may affect the success of the project.
	+ 2 points – Project includes minimal maintenance and monitoring for 2 years. The rationale for the frequency of maintenance visits is unclear and not cost effective. Monitoring of one ecological aspect will occur annually.
* **Collaboration/Stakeholder Engagement (1-10 points)** Projects that have been endorsed or supported by a diverse group of stakeholders and that will be implemented by many partners will rank higher than projects that were developed by and will be implemented by few individuals.
	+ High (10 points) – Project demonstrates collaboration and co-management with multiple local/regional partners including, but not limited to, tribal entities, other governmental agencies, diverse stakeholders, educational groups, and local communities.
	+ Moderate (6 points) – Project demonstrates collaboration and/or co-management with a local/regional partner.
	+ Low (2 points) – Project has potential for collaboration and/or co-management but entities are not specifically identified.
* **Cost Effectiveness - (1-10 points)** Projects that will supplement funds from the WJT Fund with other funds and resources to implement the proposed project will rank higher than projects that rely heavily or entirely on the WJT Fund.
	+ High (10 points) - WJT funds represent less than 25% of the total project cost.
	+ Moderate (6 points) - WJT funds represent 25-75% of the total project cost.
	+ Low (2 points) - WJT funds represent greater than 75% of the total project cost.
* **Land Assessment Score (1-10 points)** (see Attachment 2a)
	+ 21-25 score (10 points)
	+ 16-20 score (8 points)
	+ 11-15 score (6 points)
	+ 6-10 score (4 points)
	+ 1-5 score (2 point)
* **Land Conservation Status (1-10 points)**
	+ High conservation status (10 points) - Primary use is land conservation. These include conservation easements, conservancy lands, preserves, parks, sovereign lands devoted to conservation practices.
	+ Some conservation status (6 points) - Areas with one or more uses including federal land with alternative uses (e.g. Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, US Bureau of Reclamation, Dept. of Energy, Dept. of Defense), sovereign lands with one or more uses other than conservation.
	+ No conservation designation (2 points) – No official conservation status; however, an agreement may be in place with private/residential landowner.

## **Enhancement and Restoration Project Assessments Scoring Sheet**

**Name of Assessment Scorer:**

**Name of Project:**

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| **Criterion** | **Point Score** | **Notes** |
| Restoration Design(1-15 points) |  |  |
| Urgency and Severity of Threat (1-15 points) |  |  |
| Problem Resolution (1-15 points) |  |  |
| Maintenance and Monitoring Plan (1-15 points) |  |  |
| Collaboration/Stakeholder engagement (1-10 points) |  |  |
| Cost Effectiveness(1-10 points) |  |  |
| Land Assessment Score (1-10 points) |  |  |
| Land Conservation Status(1-10 points) |  |  |
| TOTAL(Out of 100 points) |  |  |