



Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Land and Water Conservation Fund – Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program



2026 Preapplication Guide

The information in this guide is provided as a summary of P26AS00125 Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP) Recurring Notice 5 Year - Notice of Funding Opportunity. All applicants must also follow the NPS Notice of Funding Opportunity available for download from [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

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I. Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program Overview

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program is a 50/50 matching reimbursement grant program that supports the acquisition of land and water for parks and other outdoor recreation purposes in qualifying areas. It also funds the development of new outdoor recreation facilities and the renovation of existing ones that expand public access to outdoor recreation.

The ORLP is a sub-program of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State and Local Assistance program, operated by the National Park Service in partnership with designated lead agencies in each state.

The ORLP is a national competition. The minimum award amount for the 2026 grant cycle is \$300,000 and the maximum award amount is \$15,000,000. Up to \$120 million is available in this grant round.

Eligible primary applicants include state lead agencies and federally recognized Indian Tribes. In Virginia, the state lead agency is the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Local governments—such as towns, cities, counties, and park districts—may apply as subrecipients through DCR. This guide is designed to aid these entities in preparing preapplications to apply as subrecipients through DCR. Nonprofit organizations and private entities are not eligible.

A defining feature of the ORLP program is its requirement that projects be located within a qualifying area, defined as:

- An urban area with a population of 25,000 or more in the most recent census,
- Two or more adjacent urban areas with a combined population of 25,000 or more, or
- An area administered by a federally recognized Indian Tribe.

Because VA DCR submits projects to NPS on behalf of subrecipients, the process occurs in several stages. Project sponsors must first submit preapplications to DCR by September 10, 2026. DCR will review all submissions and work with the highest-ranking sponsors to prepare materials for NPS submission by their November 1, 2026 deadline. NPS expects to announce initial selections on May 1, 2027; this does not guarantee funding. After initial selection, sponsors will work with DCR to complete the full application, including environmental reviews. For planning purposes, sponsors should anticipate an estimated grant start date of May 1, 2028.

The ORLP is a match-reimbursement program, requiring applicants to finance project costs upfront and request periodic reimbursements. The program reimburses up to 50% of eligible costs, and recipients must provide at least 50% of the final project cost. Awarded entities will enter into a subrecipient grant agreement with DCR outlining the maximum funding amount, scope of work, and project requirements.

The preapplication deadline for the 2026 VA ORLP grant cycle is **4:00PM on Thursday, September 10, 2026**. All applications must be submitted electronically via email to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov by this deadline. Applicants are responsible for delivery by the deadline; late submissions will not be accepted.

II. ORLP Program Purpose and Goals

ORLP was initiated in 2014 as a complement to the LWCF state formula grant program. In 2024, Congress passed the [EXPLORE Act](#), which further codified ORLP, established program priorities, and expanded eligibility to Tribal governments.

As stated in the [NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity](#):

The purpose of the ORLP Program is to 1) acquire land and water for parks and other outdoor recreation purposes in qualifying areas, and 2) develop new or renovate existing outdoor recreation facilities that provide outdoor recreation opportunities to the public in qualifying areas.

In accordance with the EXPLORE Act, the ORLP Program will make selections based on the extent to which a project:

- *Provide recreation opportunities in low-income communities in which access to parks is not adequate to meet local needs*
- *Provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and public land volunteerism;*
- *Support innovative or cost-effective ways to enhance parks and other recreation opportunities or delivery of services;*
- *Support park and recreation programming provided by local governments, including cooperative agreements with community-based eligible nonprofit organizations;*
- *Develop Native American event sites and cultural gathering spaces;*
- *Provide benefits such as community resilience, reduction of urban heat islands, enhanced water or air quality, or habitat for fish or wildlife; and*
- *Facilitate any combination of these goals.*

The EXPLORE Act states that the Secretary shall give priority to projects that:

- *Create or significantly enhance access to park and recreational opportunities in a qualifying area;*
- *Engage and empower low-income communities and youth;*
- *Provide employment or job training opportunities for youth or low-income communities;*
- *Establish or expand public-private partnerships, with a focus on leveraging resources; and*
- *Take advantage of coordination among various levels of government*

Within the context of these statutory priorities, the ORLP Program will also prioritize projects that further Secretarial and Executive Orders, including [Executive Order 14313](#), “Establishing the President's Make America Beautiful Again Commission” and [Secretarial Order 3442](#), “Land and Water Conservation Fund Implementation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

III. Key Provisions

ORLP is a national competition. Only highly qualified projects that are expected to compete well will be submitted to NPS. Before submitting a preapplication, consider your project's eligibility, competitiveness, timeline, and your entity's ability to coordinate the project based on the following key provisions:

Qualifying Area Requirement

The project must be located in a qualifying area, defined as:

- an urban area that has a population of 25,000 or more in the most recent census, or
- two or more adjacent urban areas with a combined population of 25,000 or more in the most recent census; or
- an area administered by a federally recognized Indian Tribe or an Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian community organization.

The census-designated urban areas with populations of 25,000 or more in Virginia are:

- Blacksburg-Christiansburg, VA
- Bluefield, WV-VA
- Bristol, TN-VA
- Charlottesville, VA
- Danville, VA-NC
- Fredericksburg, VA
- Hagerstown, MD-WV-PA-VA
- Harrisonburg, VA
- Kingsport, TN-VA
- Lynchburg, VA
- Martinsville, VA
- Richmond, VA
- Roanoke, VA
- Staunton-Waynesboro, VA
- Suffolk, VA
- Virginia Beach-Norfolk, VA
- Washington-Arlington, DC-VA-MD
- Williamsburg, VA
- Winchester, VA

Note that the geographic boundaries of these urban areas often differ from the boundaries of the cities they are named after. For example, the Richmond urban area boundary includes Richmond and portions of Henrico County, Chesterfield County, Dinwiddie County, Prince George County, Hanover County, Colonial Heights, Hopewell, and Petersburg. It is highly recommended you review the urban area maps found on the U.S. Census [TIGERWeb](https://tigerweb.census.gov/) platform.

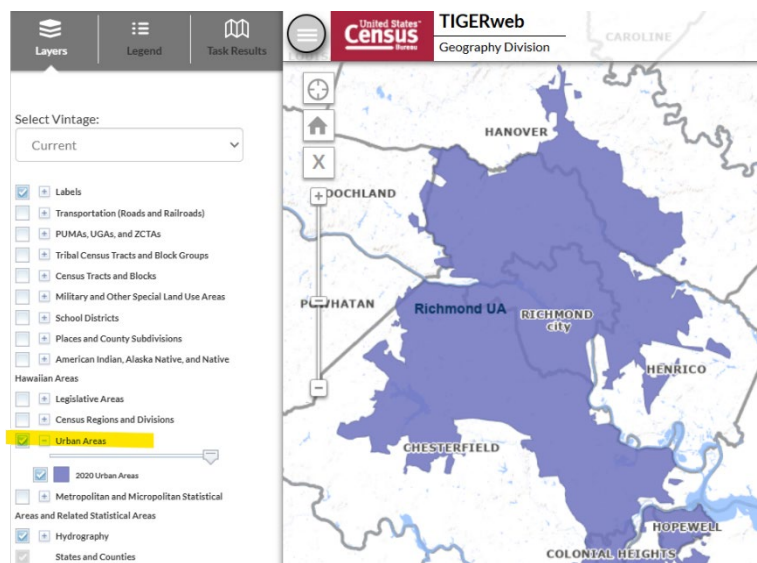


Figure 1 - TIGERWeb map with Urban Areas Layer highlighted

The TIGERWeb map can also be used to identify census-designated urban areas with populations less than 25,000. These areas are considered qualifying areas if they share a border with an adjacent urban area and the combined population is at least 25,000. Population tables for all designated urban areas can be found on the U.S. Census [Urban and Rural](#) webpage or by using the identify tool in TIGERWeb as outlined below.

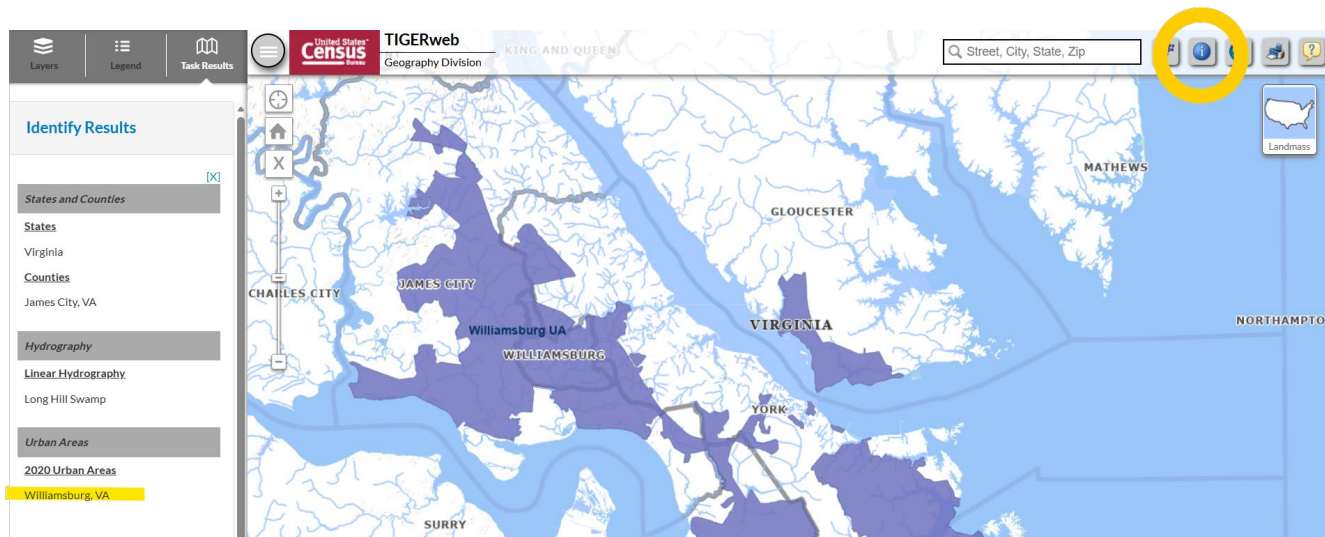


Figure 2 - To see the urban area population, first click the identify icon, then click within the urban area on the map, then click the urban area name from the Identify Results menu on left side of screen.

United States[™] Census Bureau TIGERweb Geography Division	
Geographic Identifier	95411
Name	Williamsburg, VA Urban Area
Urban Area Code	95411
Base Name	Williamsburg, VA
Legal/Statistical Area Description Code	67
MTFCC	G3500
Functional Status	S
Decennial Population Count	89585
Decennial Housing Count	38974
Centroid Latitude	+37.2870962
Centroid Longitude	-076.7481608
Internal Point Latitude	+37.2837950
Internal Point Longitude	-076.7453918
Land Area (Square Meters)	180953917
Water Area (Square Meters)	2649057
MAF/TIGER OID	270214485566006

Figure 3 - After clicking the name of the urban area, an information box will pop up. Look for Decennial Population Count.

In Perpetuity Requirement

The EXPLORE Act requires that no property acquired or developed with assistance under the ORLP Program will, without the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, be converted to other than public outdoor recreation use. The Secretary may approve a conversion only if the Secretary finds it to be in accordance with the state's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and only on such conditions as the Secretary considers necessary to ensure the substitution of other recreation properties of at least equal fair market value and of reasonably equivalent usefulness and location (see [16 U.S.C. § 8464\(b\)\(4\)\(C\)\(i\)](#)).

Therefore, as a condition of the grant, the NPS requires that language be recorded against the deed of the assisted park/recreation property advising that the property was acquired and/or developed with Federal funds from the LWCF and that the property must be preserved for outdoor recreation uses **in perpetuity** and cannot be converted to any use other than public outdoor recreation use without the written approval of the Secretary of the Interior.

Alignment with LWCF Law and Policy

As a program under the NPS LWCF State and Local Assistance Program, ORLP projects must align with the purposes and requirements of the LWCF Act and the [NPS LWCF Manual](#).

Cost Share and Eligible Costs

The program requires a 1:1 cost share, provided through 50% reimbursements on eligible expenses. Project sponsors must be able to cover costs upfront and receive periodic reimbursement.

Only two federal sources may be used as match: FHWA Recreational Trails Program funds and HUD Community Development Block Grants. All other matching funds must come from state, local, non-governmental, or private sources, including cash or in-kind contributions such as land, services, or materials.

The following may also count toward the non-federal share: existing state or local government-owned lands not currently used for recreation (for acquisition projects) and property donated between a state and its subdivisions.

LWCF ORLP grants may be used only for acquiring or developing lands and facilities that will provide outdoor recreation opportunities to the public. Funds cannot be used for, including but not limited to:

- Incidental costs related to land acquisition such as appraisals or title work,
- Facilities that support semi-professional or professional athletics such as baseball stadiums or soccer arenas,
- Indoor facilities such as recreation centers or facilities that support primarily non-outdoor purposes like dining facilities or overnight accommodation (such as a lodge or hotel), or
- Acquisition of lands, or interests in lands, that completely restrict access to specific persons (e.g., non-residents of a community).

Buy America Preferences for Infrastructure Projects

Buy America preferences apply to Federal awards for infrastructure projects. Reference [2 CFR Part 184 - Buy America Preferences for Infrastructure Projects](#) for further guidance. The subrecipient will be responsible for complying with the BABA requirements for the entirety of the project, from bidding through construction and these requirements should be factored into cost estimates.

IV. Program Requirements

To be eligible for either an acquisition or a development grant, the project must involve publicly owned land and the project sponsor must possess sufficient legal title and control of the property to ensure that it can be managed and maintained for outdoor recreation in perpetuity and otherwise remain compliant with the conversion provisions of the LWCF Act (see [54 U.S.C. 200305\(f\)\(3\)](#)).

Outdoor recreation areas and facilities assisted by the LWCF must be open to the general public and not limited to special groups. Chapter 3 of the [NPS LWCF Manual](#) describes project eligibility requirements in detail.

Acquisition of land may be in fee simple or a lesser interest (e.g., a perpetual easement) if sufficient rights, including the right for the public to access and recreate on the site, would be provided.

On the development side, LWCF assistance is available for a wide range of outdoor recreation uses and the facilities needed to support the use and enjoyment of these areas. These include community parks, sports fields, picnic areas, water-based recreation facilities such as open-air swimming pools, trails, campgrounds, etc. Certain kinds of support facilities, such as restrooms, may also be eligible.

To be eligible for the funding, States must have a current State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in place that assesses demand and need for outdoor recreation resources within its borders and sets priorities for the use of LWCF funds. The most recent SCORP in Virginia is the 2024 [Virginia Outdoors Plan](#) (VOP). The proposed project must align with priorities within the VOP.

V. Preapplication Procedures and Selection Process

Preapplication Procedures

1. Read this guide and the full [NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) in its entirety.
2. Download the VA ORLP Preapplication form from the DCR website at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/orlp>. A complete preapplication will include this form and a series of attachments. A checklist and summary of the documents are included at the end of this manual. Each document should be saved and submitted as a separate file.

If you are unable to download or use the preapplication form, please contact recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov or 804-786-1119 to obtain an alternative format of the preapplication.

3. Complete the preapplication form and prepare the listed attachments as described in the NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity.
4. Submit the preapplication as separate attachments or as a zipped file attached to one email to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov by **Thursday, September 10, 2026 at 4:00 pm**.

Selection Process for NPS Submittal

1. Preapplications received by the deadline undergo a preliminary review by DCR Recreation Grants staff to verify application completeness and project eligibility.
2. All eligible and complete preapplications are scored by DCR staff members in alignment with the criteria described in Section VIII of this guide and in the NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity.
3. Project sponsors of the highest scoring project(s)* will be contacted to review program requirements and confirm their desire to proceed with NPS submittal.

**Given the highly competitive nature of this national program, DCR anticipates submitting no more than five projects to NPS for this ORLP round.*

4. DCR Recreation Grants staff will work with the project sponsor(s) to finalize documents for NPS Grants.gov submittal by target date of October 23, 2026.

DCR Recreation Grants staff may perform a site inspection of the proposed project location prior to NPS Grants.gov submittal.

5. NPS notifies DCR of project(s) selected to move forward (estimated May 1, 2027).
6. Project sponsors work to finalize environmental review and collect other necessary documentation for full application submission by fall 2027. Official grant awards are anticipated by May 1, 2028.

VI. Award Timeline

The anticipated timeline for the 2026 ORLP grant round is as follows:

May 2026	NPS announces five-year notice of funding opportunity
July 2026	DCR opens preapplication grant round
September 10, 2026 4:00pm	Preapplication submission deadline
By September 18, 2026	DCR contacts selected project sponsors
September 21-25, 2026	DCR meets with selected project sponsors

October 2026	Project sponsors and DCR prepare and update remaining application documents
October 23, 2026	Deadline for all application documents to be submitted to DCR
November 1, 2026	NPS submission deadline
May 1, 2027	Preliminary project selections by NPS (estimated)
May-November 2027	Environmental compliance for selected projects
May 1, 2028	Projects awarded by NPS (estimated) for three year period of performance

VII. Preapplication Submission Requirements

The following checklists are provided to aid project sponsors in organizing their preapplication materials. Detailed instructions for all of the items except the VA ORLP Preapplication Form are provided in the [NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity](#). NPS has provided a template for the Budget Narrative. Please name all files with the Park Name followed by the document name. For example, *Riverside Park-VA ORLP Preapplication Form* and *Riverside Park-Project Abstract Summary*.

Submit all preapplication documents as separate attachments on one email or as an attached zipped folder to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov by **Thursday, September 10, 2026 at 4:00 pm**.

If your email with all attachments exceeds 50 MB, contact recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov at least two business days prior to the deadline to discuss using an alternative submission method. If you do not receive a reply acknowledging receipt of your electronic submission within one business day of submission, please contact DCR at the email or phone number listed above to ensure your preapplication was received.

Required Document* Checklist

Check	Document	Notes
☐	VA ORLP Preapplication Form	Available at https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/orlp
☐	Project Abstract Summary	Must include, in plain language: • Award purpose • Activities to be performed • Expected deliverables or outcomes • Intended beneficiaries • Subrecipient activities (if known at time of award)
☐	Project Narrative	The proposal is a narrative description that should specifically address each of the review criteria

Check	Document	Notes
		(see the Application Review Information section on page 17 of the NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity). The project narrative must be under 10 pages, in font size of 11 or larger, and have 1-inch margins. The 10-page limit includes all text and figures. Only include information that is pertinent to the proposal. Detailed requirements for each of the three required sections are provided.
☐	Budget Narrative	Applicants should use the recommended budget template.
☐	Project Timeline	One page maximum. Detailed timeline showing all project milestones, and measures that will provide quantifiable progress towards reaching the project's milestones. Each planned contract must be listed with an expected date for bidding.
☐	Project Site Map(s) and Rendering(s)	Includes map or aerial photo delineating project area and proposed boundary, site analysis map, and plan or sketch of planned site features as outlined in NPS ORLP Notice of Funding Opportunity.
☐	Letters of Commitment for Secured or Potential Contributions of Cost Share	If these are not in hand at time of preapplication, provide a document that summarizes all potential contributions.

**The NPS notice of funding opportunity also lists SF-424, SF424 A-D, Indirect Rate Agreement, Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement, SF-LLL, Conflict of Interest, and Uniform Audit Reporting Statement as required documents. These documents will be completed by DCR staff in coordination with applicants after selection and prior to NPS submission and are not required to be submitted with the preapplication.*

Optional Document Checklist

Check	Document	Notes
☐	General Letter(s) of Support	If an applicant includes letters of support from elected officials, community members, or other supporters, they must be uploaded with the application to NPS. These are not needed for DCR preapplication review, but can be submitted if they are in hand.
☐	Site and Process Photos	Applicants may choose to provide photos of the site and proposed development. These could include site features or constraints, community engagement, or current uses. These are also optional for DCR preapplication review but encouraged for submission to NPS.

VIII. Scoring Criteria

Preapplications submitted to NPS will be evaluated alongside other national projects using the five criteria outlined below. To ensure Virginia projects are competitive at the national level, DCR will apply these same criteria when reviewing and selecting projects for submission to NPS. While no longer a strict eligibility requirement, whether the project provides recreation opportunities in low income communities is expected to be weighted heavily.

Criterion 1: Increasing Access to Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Maximum Points: 5

To what extent does the project support the following priorities:

- Create or significantly enhance access to park and recreational opportunities in a qualifying area;
- Provide recreation opportunities in low income communities in which access to parks is not adequate to meet local needs;
- Develop Native American event sites and cultural gathering spaces;
- Increase safety in parks, including facility related security installations within or adjacent to public parks and recreation areas; or
- Develop recreational sites such as shooting sports facilities (archery ranges, skeet fields, safe shooting areas) that promote firearm safety and hunter education.

Points	Scoring Description
5	The project will significantly improve or create outdoor recreation access in a qualified area, directly advancing some or any of the purposes listed above. There is strong evidence that the project responds to a critical recreation access gap, particularly in a low-income area .
3	The project improves recreation access in a moderate or incremental way, or alignment with the above LWCF and ORLP goals is present but not strongly demonstrated.
1	Minimal alignment with listed goals; benefits are limited or unclear.

Criterion 2: Alignment with Community Needs

Maximum Points: 5

To what extent does the project:

- Provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and public land volunteerism;
- Engage and empower low-income communities and youth;
- Provide employment or job training opportunities for youth or low-income communities; or
- Support park and recreation programming provided by local governments, including cooperative agreements with community-based eligible nonprofit organizations.

Points	Scoring Description
5	The project demonstrates a strong, structured community engagement process that identified and incorporated residents' needs into the overall project plan . The resulting project includes initiatives that expand economic opportunity for the community such as youth programs, job training opportunities, volunteer opportunities, and collaborative programming with local partners and nonprofits.
3	Some community engagement and youth/low-income support is described, but the depth of the engagement efforts, or their incorporation into the project are moderate.
1	Minimal evidence of community engagement or empowerment.

Criterion 3: Leveraging Resources in Support of Recreation

Maximum Points: 5

To what extent does the project:

- Take advantage of coordination among various levels of government;
- Establish or expand public-private partnerships, with a focus on leveraging resources; or
- Support innovative or cost-effective ways to enhance parks and other recreation opportunities or the delivery of services.

Points	Scoring Description
5	The project demonstrates strong multi-level government coordination (e.g. alignment with a relevant Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)), robust public-private partnerships , and clear innovation or cost-effectiveness in enhancing recreation services.
3	Coordination and partnership elements exist but are not well developed or only moderately contribute to overall project success.
1	Minimal coordination and no clear partnership or innovation strategy.

Criterion 4: Promoting Conservation and Ecological Benefits

Maximum Points: 5

To what extent does the project:

- Acquire land/water or interests that provide recreation and also:
 - Support ESA-listed species recovery;
 - Reduce or eliminate habitat threats (ESA or candidate species);
 - Address threats identified in a 12-month petition finding; or
 - Fulfill conservation strategies in a State Wildlife Action Plan;
- Create wetlands (subject to Safe Harbor Agreements) providing habitat, water quality improvements, flood mitigation, and outdoor recreation opportunities;
- Improve big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat (per SO 3362);
- Invest in natural infrastructure for shoreline stabilization and habitat restoration; or

- Provide benefits such as community resilience, reduced heat islands, improved air/water quality, or wildlife habitat.

Points	Scoring Description
5	The project meaningfully incorporates conservation elements alongside recreation benefits (e.g. increased native vegetation, nature-based solutions, permeable surfaces, stormwater management, reduced heat islands, etc.), demonstrates environmental, ecological, and community resilience outcomes , and aligns with the LWCF and ORLP goals above.
3	Conservation elements are present but modest, or alignment with LWCF and ORLP goals is limited.
1	Minimal or no integration of conservation or ecological elements.

Criterion 5: Project Feasibility

Maximum Points: 5

To what extent does the project:

- Have a sound and reasonable project plan?
- Have a clear, feasible, well-detailed budget, including a plan to meet the 1:1 match requirement and minimize administrative costs?
- Demonstrate the ability to complete the proposed scope of work and maintain the project in the long term.

Points	Scoring Description
5	Clear, reasonable plan; feasible budget; high likelihood of project success and meeting LWCF's perpetuity requirement.
3	Moderate feasibility; some gaps in the overall project plan or budget.
1	Limited evidence of feasibility.

IX. Contact Information

For questions on ORLP program eligibility, administrative requirements, and application procedures contact recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov or call Recreation Grants Coordinator Kellie Seaton at 804-786-1119.