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## Natural Resource Condition Assessment Program – Focused Condition Assessments (NRCA-FCA)

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### FY 2019 Guidance

Associate Directorate: Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (NRSS)

NRCA-FCA Fund Source Contact: Jeff Albright (970-225-3528)

Guidance for Proposals Submitted for Funding in FY 2019-2020

NRCA Program Website: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1439/nrca.htm>

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This guidance pertains to two FCA funding calls in FY2019:

- **January 15, 2019** – Regions submit FCA project proposals **for FY2019 funding**
- **May 1, 2019** – Regions submit FCA project proposals **for FY2020 funding**

*The off-cycle call in May is being done to shift the NRCA-FCA fund source away from approving and funding projects in the same fiscal year. As a result, next year's (FY2020) call will be for FCA projects proposed for funding in FY2021, the following year's call (FY2021) will be for projects proposed for funding in FY2022, etc. A one year lag between project approval and actual funding/startup brings this fund source into better alignment with other NRSS fund sources. It also provides extra time for pre-project planning and coordination tasks ahead of a project's official start date.*

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### FUND SOURCE INTRODUCTION

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NRSS partners with Regions to fund and oversee Focused Condition Assessments (FCAs) in national park units (parks). A variety of study approaches and products are possible as described in this national guidance and at the NRCA Program web site.

Parks should consider requesting FCA funding if:

1. A pressing issue or critical data/knowledge gap is prompting the need to assess current conditions for one, or a few closely related, park natural resources.  
*[if a broader-scope assessment of issues and park resource conditions is desired, the park should consider requesting a Streamlined Assessment instead of an FCA]*
2. Existing data and information, combined with expert judgement, are nearly or fully adequate to assess (one or more) indicators of condition for each resource studied.  
*[a limited amount of new data collection is allowed to supplement the existing information base; indicators must relate to the pressing issue or information gap]*
3. The study is timely; the park can point to an ongoing or near-term management effort or activity that will make use of the resource condition data/info developed by the FCA. *[FCAs are tied to active management projects and information needs]*

Regions coordinate with parks to identify and prioritize FCA study needs for their Region. Where it makes sense, multiple parks can team up and propose a combined study that will give each park the same resource assessment and a consistent set of reporting products.

Based on their expected allocation of FCA funding, Regions forward their highest priority FCA projects to NRSS for a minimum requirements review by the NRCA Coordinators Group and formal approval by the Associate Director, NRSS.

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## FUND SOURCE GOALS

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FCAs strengthen our understanding of current resource conditions in parks, and improve delivery of best available science for use in park planning and management activities. Use of NPS Inventory & Monitoring (I&M) and other NRSS data/expertise in FCA project work is encouraged. This helps demonstrate value for the science (data, information, expertise) that the Service has already invested in and continues to develop and acquire over time.

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## BASIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

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Parks, Regions, NRSS divisions, and partners collaborate to identify, then implement, study opportunities that meet the following FCA objectives and minimum requirements:

**A. Each FCA addresses an immediate or near-term information need in a park.**

- 1. Purpose:** Project requesters need to succinctly describe the question(s), issue(s), and/or data/knowledge gaps driving the need for a study.
- 2. Use:** If not part of their purpose statement, requesters also identify an ongoing or upcoming management effort where they will use FCA developed information.
- 3. Scope:** As a practical matter, most FCAs assess current conditions for just one to a few closely related natural resources due to budget and timeframe constraints.

**B. FCAs are modestly funded, shorter timeframe projects.**

- 1. Cost:** \$20-60,000 per project is typical; funding is received over 1-2 fiscal years (*cost determining factors = scope, complexity, single vs. multiple park study, etc.*).
- 2. Timeframe:** 1-2 years from the official project agreement/contract start date to study completion and delivery of final products.
- 3. Salary support for NPS Staff:** Although most FCAs are led by an external Principal Investigator (PI), FCA funding can be used to provide limited salary reimbursement for NPS staff that have a major role in the project work (e.g., in cases where they serve as the project PI or a primary contributing analyst/author). (*salary reimbursement must be clearly identified in project planning and budget materials; pre-approved from the regional and national NRCA leads is required*)

- C. FCAs emphasize analysis and interpretation of existing data and information.**
- 1. Best Available Science:** FCAs draw on a growing body of scientific data and information from parks, NRSS and Regions, park partners and other outside sources as relevant to assessing natural resource conditions in and around parks
  - 2. New Data Collection:** Up to 30% of the FCA funding received from NRSS can be used to collect new data for analysis with the existing data/information; if additional funding support for data collection is required it must come from other sources.
- D. FCA projects include a strong condition assessment component paired with additional—related or complementary—resource analyses and interpretations** (risk or vulnerability assessment, evaluation of resource condition targets/goals, etc.).
- 1. FCA Project Types:** Parks can request funding for the following types of projects; see *FCA Project Types* in **References** for more information on these options—
    - 1) Landscape- or Watershed-Scale Condition Evaluation
    - 2) Vulnerability Assessment
    - 3) Restoration Design
    - 4) Effectiveness Evaluation
    - 5) Other (for studies that don't fit, or combine elements of, the above types)
  - 2. Resource-Indicator Assessment:** All FCAs evaluate and report on current conditions for at least one park natural resource; study scope and approach can vary but at least one “indicator of condition” is assessed for each natural resource.

Parks, Pls, and authors can find additional FCA guidance and reference materials at the NRCA Program guidance page: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1439/nrca-guidance.htm>

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## **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION, APPROVAL, AND RELEASE OF FUNDS**

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The NRCA-FCA fund source is not part of the Servicewide Comprehensive Call (SCC) but timing and other aspects of the annual FCA funding call are transitioning to be in-sync with the SCC. Two important differences between FCAs and the SCC will continue:

- Regions (not a national panel, as for SCC) decide which FCA project proposals to forward to the Associate Director, NRSS, for funding approval; for FCAs, the NRCA Coordinators Group provides a national-level minimum requirements review of the proposals forwarded to NRSS for funding approval; issues or questions arising from this review may require changes to the proposal or identify things that need to be clarified/modified in a finalized Study Plan or Statement of Work (SOW)).
- FCA proposals/projects are not entered into PMIS; for FCAs, important project details, including status information, are tracked in an online Sharepoint application (“Condition Assessment Project Tracking”); data input is done by FCA project managers, not parks; parks and Regions can access the application to check on status for active projects and run queries to identify FCAs of potential interest to them; see **References** for additional information and a link to the Sharepoint site.

Important FCA project submission/approval steps and dates are provided in the table. Given extenuating circumstances this year, Regions can contact the national NRCA coordinator if they need additional time or assistance to accomplish the following.

Steps	Comments	FCA Proposals for Funding in FY2019	FCA Proposals for Funding in FY2020
<p><b>1) FCA project proposals are submitted to Regions</b></p>	<p>Regions establish their own rules/process (and determine who can submit) funding proposals for these park-based condition assessment projects. Information on study options and minimum requirements are posted at the NRCA guidance page.</p> <p>Parks and others use the NRSS <i>FCA Proposal Form</i> to submit project proposals to their Region's NRCA coordinator; Regions can add additional instructions or information fields if they want.</p> <p>Parks are encouraged to collaborate with I&amp;M networks, regional staff, and NRSS divisions to help them develop strong proposals.</p> <p>Parks can team up and submit a shared, multiple-park proposal that gives all participating parks the same resource condition assessment and a consistent set of reporting products.</p>	<p>Due date is set by Region</p>	<p>Due date is set by Region</p>
<p><b>2) Regions rate proposals and forward their highest-rated group to NRSS for funding approval</b></p>	<p>Regions establish their own rating criteria and project prioritization/selection process.</p> <p>Regions identify their highest-priority proposals and send them to the NRSS NRCA Coordinator by the date(s) indicated. The total amount of FCA funding requested should be in line with the Region's expected level of NRCA funding for the year.</p> <p>Regions can choose to forward 1-2 proposals below their funding "cut line" if they want those projects to be considered in the event that extra funding becomes available for FCA studies that year.</p>	<p>Due at NRSS January 15, 2019</p>	<p>Due at NRSS May 1, 2019</p>
<p><b>3) The NRCA Coordinators Group provides a national level review of all proposals received from Regions</b></p>	<p>This group includes the 7 regional NRCA coordinators and the national NRCA coordinator. They review all proposals forwarded by Regions to ascertain if they appear to meet the minimum requirements for all FCA studies.</p> <p>In some cases, the group will ask questions or send suggestions and/or examples of good study design elements to project requesters. Requesters may be asked to revise their proposal or address the feedback as study planning goes forward.</p> <p>Group recommendations for which proposals meet the minimum requirements (or are problematic) are given to NRSS leadership.</p>	<p>Process and date to complete this TBD (to deal w/extenuating circumstances this fiscal year)</p>	<p>Completed by June 1, 2019</p>
<p><b>4) NRSS provides formal notice of approval for FCA Project Proposals</b></p>	<p>The Associate Director, NRSS, notifies regional Science Chiefs regarding funding approval for their FCA projects and identify outstanding issues or contingencies, if any.</p>	<p>NRSS notifies Regions within two weeks of getting their proposals</p>	<p>NRSS notifies Regions by June 15, 2019</p>

<b>5) Pre-project planning and coordination work is completed; time and level of effort needed will vary by project</b>	NRCA-FCA project managers assist parks with the following study planning tasks:  1) Preparation of a Project Agreement Form for electronic signature by parks, the regional NRCA coordinator and the national NRCA coordinator.  2) Preparation or refinement of an existing project Study Plan or SOW; level of detail should be scaled to the complexity and funding level for the project (less complex and lesser funded studies don't require as much planning or documentation); there is no standard format or template – parks use the format required for the Cooperative Agreement, Contract, or Interagency Agreement they want to implement with a project Partner/PI.	NRSS reallocates FCA project funding to Regions/parks in the agreed-upon fiscal year(s)	NRSS reallocates FCA project funding to Regions/parks in the agreed-upon fiscal year(s)
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## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

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Primary roles and responsibilities for NRSS and Regions are listed below.

### **The NRSS shall:**

- a. develop and maintain servicewide FCA guidance, tools, and templates;
- b. lead an annual FCA proposal review that includes NRCA regional coordinators, and possibly NRSS divisions, to informally suggest options for strengthening individual study proposals;
- c. provide technical assistance to parks and study investigators working on FCAs (analysis, authorship, expert panel participation, peer reviews, etc.) as requested and available;
- d. provide final formatting, publishing, and web posting support for FCA project deliverables (scientific reporting products, public communication materials, metadata documentation in the Data Store);
- e. have overall responsibility for accomplishing NRCA program goals, and developing any FCA project accountability data and reporting information as may be required by DOI, OMB, etc.

### **Regions shall:**

- a. work with parks to identify and prioritize their FCA study needs, which are then forwarded to NRSS for national-level review and funding approval;
- b. participate in FCA proposal reviews and other NRCA program leadership meetings;
- c. provide technical assistance to parks and study investigators working on FCAs (analysis, authorship, expert panel participation, peer reviews, etc.) as requested and available;
- d. provide the project management support needed to help parks submit 'financial aid' proposals for DOI review and approval, initiate formal project agreements and contracts, accomplish official ATR/COR duties, and strive to address issues/problems as they arise;

- e. oversee completion of management/policy and technical peer reviews for draft FCA products as well as author responses and content changes resulting from those reviews.

Most of the hands-on responsibility for managing FCA projects currently sits with Regions. Some Regions have indicated they do not have staffing capacity, at least at present, to handle project ATR/COR and peer review management duties (see “d” and “e” under the “Region Shall” list). To address this, Regions are being given an opportunity to shift most of this workload to NRSS and the NRCA Program. Regions that choose this option will forego a portion of their FCA funding allocation so NRSS can hire one or more FCA Project Managers to provide this hands-on support to those Regions and their parks.

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## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

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Every FCA is currently expected to produce at least one technical reporting product (typically, a peer-reviewed article or report) and at least one public communication item (e.g., a Resource Brief or web article) targeted to less technical audiences. As indicated in the “NRSS Shall” duties (see “d”), the NRCA Program will provide final formatting and other publication/web posting assistance to parks and PIs. The program can also help parks and PIs develop public communication materials for non-technical audiences. See *Technical Reporting & Public Communication* links in **References** for more information.

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## REFERENCES

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### 1. [FY2019 Project Proposal Form](#)

Notes:

- a) *The FY2019 Proposal Form was released too late to be used for the 1<sup>st</sup> call (proposals due at NRSS January 15, 2019).*
- b) *If convenient, Regions/parks can switch to the FY2019 form for use in the 2<sup>nd</sup> call (proposals due at NRSS May 1, 2019) OR continue using the FY2018 form.*

### 2. [Project Agreement Form](#)

Notes:

- a) *Ideally, this form will be signed before release of project funds to Regions/parks. Due to extenuating circumstances this may not be feasible for all FCA Projects that are funded and initiated in FY2019.*

### 3. [FCA Project Types](#)

### 4. Condition Assessment Project Tracking

- a. [Introduction: goals and practical uses](#) (1 page)
- b. [Key information fields in the project tracking application](#) (1 page)
- c. [Link to Sharepoint application](#)

### 5. Technical Reporting & Public Communication

- a. [Project deliverables: technical and non-technical report elements](#) (1 page)
- b. [Communication planning for individual FCA projects](#) (3 pages)