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**Proposal Guidance**

**FY 2025 NRCA Project Proposal Call**

**Associate Directorate: Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (NRSS)**

**NRCA Fund Source Contact: Tammy Cook**

**NRCA Program Website:** [URL-Link](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/science/nrca.htm)

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NRSS partners with regions to fund and oversee Natural Resource Condition Assessments. A variety of study approaches and products are possible as described in this national guidance and at the [NRCA Program website](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/science/nrca.htm).

Parks submit a project proposal to regions using the NRCA proposal form. 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. Regions panel proposals and identify and prioritize study needs for their region.

Projects selected by regions are recommended to the NRCA program for funding.

NRCA program office reviews selected proposals for adherence to fund source goals and requirements and recommends formal approval by the Associate Director, NRSS.

The Associate Director of NRSS issues a memo to regional directors that announces final results of the project spending plan and posts those results to the [NRSS Community Site](https://doimspp.sharepoint.com/sites/nps-sharenrss/SitePages/Funding-Requests.aspx).

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**BACKGROUND**

For 20 years, the National Park Service (NPS) [**Natural Resource Condition Assessment (NRCA) Program**](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/science/nrca.htm) has provided information on natural resource conditions and trends to park managers. NRCA offers a variety of condition assessment project options to support park resource management needs. The NRCA program will provide support through funding and other mechanisms to assist parks in evaluating those data to assess park resource conditions.

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**FUND SOURCE GOALS**

All NRCA projects are designed to strengthen our understanding of current resource conditions in parks and improve delivery of best available science to parks for their use in a wide variety of planning and management activities. The use of NPS Inventory & Monitoring (I&M) and other NRSS data and expertise in project work is encouraged. This helps demonstrate value for the growing body of science (data, information, expertise) that the NPS has invested in and continues to develop over time.

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

**Each project addresses:**

1. **Purpose:** Project requesters need to succinctly describe the question(s), issue(s), and data or knowledge gaps driving the need for a study.
2. **Use:** If not part of the purpose statement, requesters also identify an ongoing or upcoming management effort where they plan to use the study findings/products.
3. **Scope:** NRCAs are more wide-ranging and flexible in study approach, where existing (and potentially some new) data are synthesized and analyzed for a targeted/focused resource. Most projects are largely driven in partnership with an external PI and result in a peer reviewed report or journal article.
4. **Cost:** NRCAs are modestly funded, shorter timeframe projects. Funding is received over 1-2 fiscal years *(cost determining factors = scope, complexity, single vs. multiple park study, etc.).*
5. **Timeframe:**  < 3 years from the official project agreement/contract start date to study completion and delivery of final products.

**NRCAs emphasize analysis and interpretation of existing data and information.**

1. **Best Available Science:** NRCAs draw on a growing body of scientific data and information from parks, NRSS, regions, park partners, and other outside sources as relevant to assessing natural resource conditions in and around parks.

1. **New Data Collection:** Up to 30% of the funding received from NRCA 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.

**Examples of projects that are not appropriate for the NRCA funding call** include inventories, such as species lists and mapping efforts, projects centered around new field data collection, and other projects that do not explicitly assess the condition of natural resources.

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**Each NRCA is expected to produce:**

1. One (or more) Technical Report.
2. One (or more) Public Communication Product(s) (e.g., resource brief, web article, poster, recorded webinar, story map) targeted to less technical audiences.

**For NRCA projects that choose to publish a NRR report:**

* A NRR report template and peer review guidance are available from the NRCA website.
* [Regional NRCA coordinators](https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1439/nrca_contacts.htm) typically serve as report peer review manager on NRCA projects carried out within that region.
* The central office NRCA team provides final formatting of reports to all parks and PIs in all regions as they work to complete projects.

**Other support provided by the central NRCA team:**

* Assistance posting final data, reporting, and communication products to NPS DataStore and websites.
* Assistance developing public communication materials for non-technical audiences.

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**Selecting a Project Title**

Titles should reflect both the science and the management need for the project.

**Data Collection: What is allowed?**

NRCA study proposals can request up to 30% of project funding to collect new data to be analyzed with existing data. New data costs include personnel and travel costs for field data collection, equipment, laboratory or other pre-processing costs, and any other significant data acquisition and preparation costs. If data collection costs will exceed 30% of the FCA funding requested, the project proposal should be submitted to a different fund source, or other sources of funding need to be secured to cover data collection costs above the 30% level.

**Salary support for NPS Staff*:***NRCA funds may support seasonal/temporary staff. No FTEs. Prior approval from the regional NRCA coordinator/region and the national program office is needed for any proposals requesting salary support for NPS staff.Salary reimbursement must be clearly identified in project planning and budget materials.

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**TIMELINE: PROPOSAL SUBMISSION, APPROVAL, AND RELEASE OF FUNDS**

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| **Steps** | **Comments** | **NRCA Proposals Submitted in FY24 for Initiation in FY25** |
| **1) Parks and other NPS staff submit NRCA Program project proposals to their respective Region** | Proposals are submitted to Regions using the *Project Proposal Form*. | Due date  set by Region |
| **2) Regions rate proposals and forward their highest-rated group to NRSS for funding approval** | Regions, through the NRCA regional coordinators, will solicit, review, and select proposals to fund.  Regions send a list of their highest-priority proposals to the NRSS NRCA Coordinator by the date indicated. | Jan – March 2024 |
| **3) NRSS-NRCA program reviews proposals submitted for funding by regions** | Minimum standards review. Requesters may also be asked to revise their proposal or address deficiencies prior to program approval and funding for the project. | April – May 2024 |
| **4) NRSS provides formal notice of approval for NRCA Project Proposals** | The Associate Director, NRSS, notifies Regional Directors and Regional Science Chiefs regarding funding approval for their NRCA projects and identifies outstanding issues or contingencies, if any. | Determined by  AD, NRSS  (typically, June) |
| **5) Pre-project planning and coordination tasks in advance of release of funds to Regions/parks** | Parks/Investigators complete study planning with assistance from NRCA project managers: project planning and logistics information, identification of key project team members and technical leads, funding mechanisms such as agreements and contracts, project timeline and expected deliverables. | June – December 2024 |
| **6) Project Funding Distributed** | NRCA program funds are distributed for selected projects. | January 2025 |