

## REQUEST FOR STATEMENTS OF INTEREST AND QUALIFICATIONS FOR HOSTING National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management



The Instream Flow Council (*IFC*) and American Fisheries Society (*AFS*) are requesting statements of interest and qualifications (“RFIQ”)<sup>1</sup> from institutions and organizations (or teams of institutions and organizations) that wish to be considered for hosting a National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management<sup>2</sup> (Center) on a long-term basis (or serving as a network affiliate<sup>3</sup>).

The objectives for this Center are to provide key interdisciplinary leadership, training, research, development, networking, and support functions to empower water stakeholders<sup>4</sup> to achieve ecologically sustainable water conservation and management outcomes.

Specific details and background information about the Center can be found in a *Feasibility Assessment Report* prepared by the Steering Committee (SC) for this project. This report establishes the need, support, strategies, purposes, expectations, and pathways forward to develop the Center. The Center was initially referred to as the Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation Training Center (IFWLC) in the original Feasibility Assessment Report. A **Fact Sheet** near the end of this document provides key elements drawn from that report. The **online application link** and supplemental submittal information are located at the end of this document.

The IFC and AFS are seeking to partner with a host that has a combination of interdisciplinary expertise and capacity to integrate science and social elements into curricula for achieving ecologically sustainable riverine and lacustrine water conservation and management outcomes. Interdisciplinary science elements include hydrology, geomorphology, water quality, connectivity, and biology. Social elements include legal and institutional related laws, regulations, policies, and public involvement, including socio-economic expertise.

**Note:** *The SC will be hosting a pre-submittal webinar to provide perspective respondents with additional background information regarding this request and to share key issues such as funding, capacity, coordination, etc. Time will also be allotted for Q&A. (See **Timeline for Stage One below**).*

To determine your potential qualifications, refer to the **Questions and Issues** section **below** for examples of expectations and the types of skills and expertise needed to host the Center and

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<sup>1</sup> The IFC and AFS formed a Steering Committee (SC) to administer and implement this RFIQ process as part of an Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation Multistate Conservation Grant (MSCG) project: #F21AP01124. SC members are: Tom Annear, Doug Austen, Andy Brummond, Daren Carlisle, Christopher Estes, Thom Hardy, Allan Locke, Don Orth, Dudley Reiser, and Clair Stalnaker (and formerly Dave Weedman).

<sup>2</sup> Current name for the Center.

<sup>3</sup> Network Affiliates are not limited to the United States and include North America.

<sup>4</sup> Water stakeholders include entities and individuals participating in or impacted by the interdisciplinary scientific, legal, institutional, and public involvement elements and processes that govern water allocation and use decisions and outcomes.

ensure its longevity. **Please note** we are *NOT* asking you to provide answers to those questions at this time. The questions are provided as an aid for you to determine your institution’s qualifications for meeting this initial request. Depending upon your qualifications, you may, however, be requested to address these questions as part of a subsequent formal request for proposal (“RFP”) process (described below).

Please **note** that funding for the Host Center is currently not available and is not part of this Request<sup>5</sup>; see section on Funding under the Questions and Issues section. A companion Business Plan and other legal business-related instruments required to develop the Center are being crafted as part of this final project phase.

## Host & Networking Affiliate Selection Process

The selection process consists of the following four stages:

- **Stage One:** The SC will review all online RFIQ applications received and will develop a short-list of candidate institutions and organizations or teams of institutions and organizations that will progress to Stage Two. *The RFIQ process is part of Stage One only, and is simply asking for interest and qualifications.*
- **Stage Two:** The short-list of candidates that were selected from those that submitted in Stage One will be invited to a virtual meeting with members of the SC to provide a greater understanding of the overall vision for the Center, as well as address any process questions.
- **Stage Three:** A formal Request for Proposals (RFP) will be sent to the short-list set of candidates. Resulting proposals for this stage should include written responses to the questionnaire below (and other requested information within the RFQ) and be accompanied by an introductory cover letter that describes the characteristics and attributes of your institution that make it well suited for hosting the Center.
- **Stage Four:** After reviewing the proposals, SC members will schedule individual on-site visits and virtual meetings with the top candidates. SC members will review facilities and engage in more detailed discussions involving governance and administrative details of the Center’s operations.

**Timeline** (schedule remains subject to adjustment by the SC):

- **Stage One** – Request for Statements of Interest and Qualifications (RFIQ)
  - RFIQ posted November 16, 2024
  - Pre-submittal **webinar**<sup>6</sup> for interested parties on December 9, 2024
  - RFIQ responses by January 21, 2025
  - SC notification of short-listed candidates by February 15, 2025

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<sup>5</sup> Actions to secure Center funding are being pursued independent of this MSCG project related RFIQ process.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.instreamflowcouncil.org/multistate-conservation-grant-project-contact-form/> to complete online contact form to receive Stage One pre-submittal webinar email notifications and other project updates.

- **Stage Two** – Virtual Meeting with invited short-listed candidates
  - Invitation circulated to candidates to participate in virtual Q&A processes meeting with the SC on or near February 16, 2025
  - Virtual Q&A processes meeting held in early March, 2025
- **Stage Three** – Request for Proposals (RFP) circulated to short-list candidates
  - RFP released/sent in mid-March, 2025
  - Proposals due by April 15, 2025
- **Stage Four** – Proposal Review and Scheduling of On-site and Virtual Visits – TBD

## **Requested Information for Stage One**

Interested parties should use the online application submission form ([link is included at the end of this document](#)) to submit contact information and a brief statement (no more than five (5) pages), including:

- 1) a description of their overall qualifications including facilities, technical staff, financial, structure of the institution or organization, and administrative support capacity, and
- 2) a general statement expressing the institution's or organization's desire to work cooperatively with the IFC and AFS to achieve the goals and objectives identified in [the Feasibility Assessment](#). Links to websites that further demonstrate qualifications should be embedded in the application submittal. Letters of interest and qualifications should be detailed enough to allow the SC members to determine your institution's or organization's expertise and qualifications for hosting the Center or becoming an affiliate to the Center. As noted in the timeline above, a webinar for potential applicants will be hosted by the SC to address questions related to this stage and overall processes in December.

The Statements of interest and qualifications applications should be submitted prior to midnight Pacific Time, **January 21, 2025**.

## **Questions and Issues**

These questions and issues frame the types of information needed by the SC to assess the skills and ability of candidate institutions and organizations to host a National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management, or participate as an affiliate. Answers are not requested for the Stage One RFIQ process as noted above. Feedback from these questions will be used in stages two to four to assist with selection of the host institution for the Center including its affiliates<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Affiliate candidates will be required to meet a subset of the host requirements as part of the RFP phase.

### Philosophical Compatibility:

- As noted in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) document for the Center posted on the IFC website ([www.instreamflowcouncil.org](http://www.instreamflowcouncil.org)), the Steering Committee will be promoting the application of comprehensive (integrated) strategies for achieving Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation and Management. These strategies include integration of eight (8) interdisciplinary elements: **hydrology, geomorphology, connectivity, water quality, biology, laws and regulations, institutions and organizations, and public involvement**. Overarching socio-economic elements are also included.
  - How does this interdisciplinary approach align with your institution's or organization's educational philosophy and capacities?
  - Would this approach enhance or detract from your institution's or organization's functions?

### Administration:

- Instruction at the host Center location will include a combination of on-site, virtual, and remote techniques and formats depending on the needs of clients and the physical location of instructors.
  - Do you have adequate (i.e., not fully committed) classroom capacity, office space, and other training-related facilities that can be used by the Center?
  - What issues do you anticipate, if any, from conducting training at remote locations or other institutions?
  - What issues do you anticipate, if any, from instructors affiliated with other institutions/organizations providing instruction at your institution?
  - Would your institution or organization have the ability to handle collection of course fees, provide continuing education certification credits, and other non-salary course elements?
- Scientific and technical field training will be an important aspect of the Center.
  - What streams, lakes, and reservoirs are potential candidates for providing such training through your organization?
  - What existing training does your institution or organization offer related to the 8 elements and their integration?
  - Per the Feasibility Assessment, the Steering Committee envisions a setting where most of the major decisions associated with the Center will be handled by an Executive Governing Board (EGB) comprising 3 Instream Flow Council (IFC) members and 2 members from the American Fisheries Society (AFS) with interdisciplinary expertise in applying and integrating the 8 scientific and social elements. The EGB would be assisted by a number of volunteer representatives from other prominent agencies and organizations associated with achieving ecologically sustainable water conservation and management (both ecological and anthropogenic). This format is important to ensure the Center maintains the focus identified in the Feasibility Assessment. How does this format align with your expectations or requirements for administering the Center?

- The Steering Committee envisions a setting where the Center can function with sufficient autonomy so that it is relatively insulated from external political and budgetary issues that might compromise performance of the functions described in the Feasibility Assessment including its long-term existence.
  - What factors do you foresee within your institution or organization that might influence this vision either positively or negatively?
- The long-term goal envisioned by the Steering Committee is for the Center to function in an uninterrupted, long-term manner (i.e., permanently).
  - Do you believe your institution or organization is well-positioned to facilitate this goal?
  - If for any reason the original association becomes unsuitable for either party, the EGB may consider moving the Center to another location and host. What issues do you anticipate that may complicate this process?

### **Funding:**

- Considering the Steering Committee's intent to retain relative independence and minimize the risk of political influence to sustain the Center for the long term, we hope to fund the Center in large part with private funds in combination with supplemental funding from grants and partners.
  - How would this financial structure fit within your administrative structure and requirements? For instance, how might this arrangement mimic or differ from the function of Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units at universities?
  - Would your institution or organization want or be able to invest its own funds in the Center?
  - If so, what requirements or expectations might you have, including those that are related to insulating the Center from political or budgetary issues that could negatively impact its functions and existence?
  - What are the types of Center costs or facilities you would be willing to fully or partially fund (i.e., normal office support such as copiers, office equipment, lighting, heating, etc.)?
- In a best-case scenario, the Steering Committee will be requesting seed money from one or more philanthropic sources to address most major expenses associated with the Center (e.g., salaries, benefits, travel, etc.) We intend to establish an income-generating foundation or endowment from which the Center might function largely on income generated by those funds.
  - Is this the sort of situation where the Steering Committee could place its dedicated funds in your institution's funds (for management and investment) and draw on those funds as a sort of reimbursable account?
  - Other considerations to be addressed would include the overhead charged by the host and the ability of the Steering Committee to terminate its relationship with the host and withdraw all of their funds if the Center's governing board chose to do so for any reason at any time in the future as part of terminating the relationship. What overhead charges does your institution charge for entities such as the Center?

- To minimize our costs for employee benefits, would it be possible to tap into the employee benefits program within your institution?
- How would this differ if the Center employees are paid by the Center versus being employed by your institution or organization? If appropriate, compare this request with the function of your Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit or similar entity where, for example, external funding is used to pay for people who are employees of your institution.

### **Instructors / Curriculum:**

- As noted above, the Center will instruct in the integration of eight (8) interdisciplinary elements to provide clients with a comprehensive set of tools for achieving ecologically sustainable water conservation and management. We will likely provide basic introductory instruction in each element and emphasize the requirements and rationale for their integration. More detailed instruction will be provided to advanced students. Though we have a well-developed sense of what instruction might look like, we realize there is much more to know and much knowledge (methods and models) to be developed. We would expect all our instructors to promote integration of all elements but do not expect all trainers to be experts in all 8 fields. We will likewise encourage and conceptually support research and methodological development by instructors based on these concepts. It is not essential that instructors already be employed by your institution or organization as the Steering Committee may establish a network of experts nationally and have them teach virtually or travel to teach at the central location on a temporary basis as needed. Although preferred, it is not essential that your institution be capable of offering expertise in all 8 areas.

### **Selection of instructors is an area that will be explored and addressed by an Executive Governing Board.**

See Appendix G below (from the [Feasibility Assessment](#)) for a preliminary example of the kinds of topics we expect to offer.

- What are your thoughts on how your faculty or staff might factor into providing instruction in these 8 elements and especially their integration?
- Could Center scientists be given University faculty status and be eligible to collaborate with other faculty in applying for grants and carrying out joint projects?
- Because of our focus on consistent, comprehensive instruction, it is important that the Center scientists be considered lead instructors, and any additional instructors would commit to training on an as-needed basis for at least 3 calendar years once the Center begins functioning. Having the same full-time instructors over a period of time is important to facilitate networking, information exchange, and program development.
  - How does this format align with your vision of the Center and the potential use of your staff as instructors?
- We anticipate that specific class offerings such as those in Appendix G (below) and training manuals will be developed by instructors once they have been hired. (Note: Other advanced

courses will be developed on element integration, use of emerging technologies, analytical procedures and processes for application, analyses, and forecasting outcomes for sustainable water management schemes.)

- Is this expectation compatible with the abilities and interests of staff at your institution or organization that might associate with the Center?
- Funding for these planning and early development phases of the project extend through April 30, 2025. During this period, we will complete development of a Center business plan and further refine and execute these processes for selecting and partnering with a host and network affiliates. We also envision beginning the process of identifying interested instructors and staff by this date and will continue independent efforts to secure Center funding. We also realize that the processes of bringing all these pieces together may extend beyond this current Center project end date.
  - How does this timeline align with your planning or budgeting cycles?

## Examples of Training Needs Related to the Eight Key Elements

**(Hydrology, Geomorphology, Biology, Water Quality, Connectivity,  
Law and policy, Institutions and organizations, and Public Involvement)**  
(APPENDIX G – *FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT*)

- **Hydrology** – this element broadly embraces aspects of natural hydrologic regimes. Regimes that reflect natural patterns of temporal variability such as intra- and interannual variability (includes open-water and ice-covered seasons) are essential for supporting the ecological condition of surface waters. Such patterns are driven by the hydrologic cycle and are critically linked to all other elements listed here and embrace elements such as, but not limited to the following:
  - The historic, present, and projected future hydrologic patterns of a specific water body that are tied to critical geomorphic, water quality, and life history requirements of target organisms, populations, or ecological communities.
  - Flow regimes and water levels affected by groundwater interactions.
  - Proposed water management changes (new flow and water level regimes that may be proposed).
- **Geomorphology** – this element broadly embraces the linkages between flow/water level, hydraulics, sediment transport, and channel form driven by elements of the flow and water level regimes such as, but not limited to the following:
  - Historic sediment transport load and channel change patterns at relevant temporal and spatial scales.
  - Changes to sediment transport load and deposition are anticipated.

- Changes in sediment transport load affect channel form and function, and over spatial and temporal timeframes affecting when these changes occur.
- **Biology** – this element broadly embraces the direct and indirect responses at the individual, population, and community levels of aquatic, riparian, and related ecological components of watersheds in response to the flow and water level regimes such as, but not limited to the following:
  - Predicted changes in habitat quantity and quality for species, life stages and or guilds assuming proposed changes in flow/water level regimes, and how might these habitat changes influence organisms.
  - The predicted changes in the distribution, relative abundance, and diversity of communities and populations (fish, macroinvertebrates, mussels, vegetation).
  - Natural patterns in species population and community dynamics are expected over annual, decadal, and longer-term temporal scales and how these patterns change given proposed water management practices.
- **Water Quality** – this element incorporates several key elements critical to the ecological functions of aquatic systems driven by the complex interaction of flow/water level regimes with physical, chemical, and biological responses that may include, but is not limited to the following:
  - Temperature – any significant changes of flow and water level regimes are likely to result in important changes in water temperature regimes. Ice dynamics and its effects on other elements will be a special focus.
  - Dissolved oxygen-low flows.
  - Turbidity.
  - Salinity.
  - Pollutants/nutrients originating from point and non-point sources.
- **Connectivity** – refers to the flow/water level exchanges and pathways within localized areas of a watershed that provides for movement of organisms, energy, and matter to, through and within lotic and lentic systems. This element relates to:
  - Physical, chemical, and biological properties and patterns.
  - Processes that include longitudinal, lateral, vertical, and temporal scales that maintain and restore connections between rivers and their floodplains and tributaries or lakes for all life stages of species.
  - These considerations may be critical for species’ survival in rivers, lakes and estuaries having extensive hyporheic zones.
- **Law** – the basic judicial and statutory frameworks (state, provincial, territorial, tribal/First Nation) and how they relate to the Center.



- The basic federal framework and how it relates to the role of states, provinces, tribes/First Nations, and other water stakeholders' ability to protect or restore flow or water level regimes.
  - Identify key features of successful laws so students can learn how to use existing laws to improve the implementation or coverage of existing laws, as appropriate, to effectively manage aquatic resources.
  - Examine how legislation may differ by jurisdiction.
  - Identify mechanisms and options to promulgate new and improve existing laws.
  - The role of the *Public Trust Doctrine*, associated caselaw, and how it relates to the Center's regime assessments and water stakeholders' ability to protect or restore flow or water level regimes.
  - The role of interstate and international compacts related to water management between water stakeholders.
- **Institutional and Organizational Capacity** – the basic regulations and policies (state, provincial, territorial, tribal/First Nation) agency administrations and their relationships to laws and the Center.
    - Administrative regulations and policies for environmental purposes in rivers, lakes and wetlands that may differ by jurisdiction.
    - Specifically include reference to water management and uses in strategic plans instead of speaking more broadly about “habitat.”
    - Understanding the roles and importance of agency and organizational administrations and how they influence staffing, expertise, training, support, overall implementation capacity, priorities, and related budgets.
  - **Public Involvement** – identify effective strategies to include, inform, empower, and motivate stakeholders to participate in the Center's actions.
    - Identify the importance of public involvement, including recreation, social, and economic considerations.
    - Recognize the differences between public support, public involvement, and public advocacy.
    - Identify effective messaging strategies and mechanisms for enhancing public comprehension, involvement; and encourage communication between agencies making decisions and the public.
    - Identify the roles of non-agency partners and the importance of champions.

Although not specified in this appendix, overarching socio-economic considerations will also be integrated into curricula and other Center functions for each of the 8 interdisciplinary elements as appropriate.

## Center Summary Fact Sheet

### National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management

1. The goal of this effort is to establish a new national Center that will provide leadership, training, research, development, and support for all stakeholders (see [footnote 4](#) above) involved in managing and conserving freshwater, estuarine, and associated aquatic resources to empower them to achieve ecologically sustainable water conservation and management outcomes.
2. The project is sponsored by the Instream Flow Council (IFC) and American Fisheries Society (AFS). The project is being developed by a 10-person steering committee of international experts representing a range of disciplines who have extensive experience dealing with conservation of aquatic resources.
3. The premise of the proposed Center is that effective integration of information from eight elements that include hydrology, geomorphology, biology, connectivity, and water quality within geographically appropriate legal, institutional, and socio-economic frameworks is essential to sustainably conserve and manage aquatic resources.
4. The Center will be organized with a core staff at a central location and a network of associated trainers throughout the U. S. and Canada. Training will occur virtually, at the host institution, and upon request, various regions.
5. Between 1976 and 2000, the Cooperative Instream Flow Service group provided consistent and credible leadership, training, development, and support for water managers and related stakeholders for many of the functions proposed for the Center. Support for this federally funded entity ceased in 2000 and its important functions have not been replaced.
6. The lack of leadership and the definition of comprehensive science and principles as provided by the project plan has caused conservation and management strategies and actions to become less consistent and credible. Though training for some elements of instream flow and water level management exists, no entity offers this unique training to the full range of stakeholders within geographically appropriate contexts.
7. A significant endowment will be obtained to help fund instructors, secure a professional training facility, and ensure effective function and growth for at least 20 years. The Center will derive supplemental income from student fees, government grants, and cooperative projects. It will not be associated with an existing governmental agency.
8. The Center will be housed at a compatible and qualified university, institution, or research center whose objectives align with those of the Center outlined in a [feasibility assessment](#).
9. The function of the Center will be guided by a Governance Charter. In addition to performance criteria, the Charter establishes an Executive Governing Board of IFC and AFS members, a 16-person Oversight Committee comprised of representatives of major water management and related interests and an Experts Subcommittee.
10. Next steps include obtaining legal counsel to assist with formation, identifying potential funding sources, and soliciting interest from various institutions that are interested in and capable of hosting the Center.
11. Additional, detailed information about the project can be found at [www.instreamflowcouncil.org](http://www.instreamflowcouncil.org).

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## **RFIQ Online Submission Form**

Interested parties should use the online application submission form (link below) to complete all fields per instructions above and within the online application form.

### **Online Application**

<https://www.instreamflowcouncil.org/national-center-rfiq-submission-form/>

**Application Deadline: 11:59 pm Pacific Time , January 21, 2025.**

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