

TIPS for WRITING BETTER PROJECT BRIEFS (Updated 2021)

The goal of this document is to help States and their project partners maximize the point potential of the project briefs submitted to the national review panel. These tips are polishing remarks- suggestions to help your project shine to its fullest.

General Tips:

Avoid technical terms. Keep to plain English a non-expert could understand.

Scoring Guidance: Read & re-read the scoring guidance! Make sure you have the most current version of the scoring guidance as it does change some each year. Also revisit the Forest Legacy Information System Users Guide as you plan out your project, and pay attention to the bullet and character limits.

Title: Pick a name that captures something special about the project, tracts with what you are describing, and helps emphasize key benefits (e.g. watershed, wildlife corridor, scenic viewshed, river forest...). Don't just use CE or FEE in the title.

Funding History/Table: Double check that the dollar and acre figures here match what you cite in the narrative sections below. Include future phases/tracts, if planned, to provide a complete picture of the project. Use the same name for the project and tract throughout the document.

General Description: This is your executive summary for the project. **Put in your core arguments for why your project is important, strategic, and threatened** – include the most compelling attributes and **grab the reader's attention** with any unique aspects of the project. Be brief and to the point. Include who, what, where and why. Include how this project supports the goals and priorities identified in your State's Forest Action Plan.

It is useful to identify in the general description whether a project is a Fee or Easement and who will be holding that land or interest in land. Consider capitalizing FEE or EASEMENT in the general description.

General Tips for the Importance, Threatened, and Strategic Sections:

- Adjectives are **Very Important**.
- Be specific and quantify benefits - # of jobs, recreation days, miles of watercourses, XX species have been documented on site, etc.
- **Focus on the attributes of the specific project being proposed, not just the benefits/threats in the general area.**
- It's OK to repeat items mentioned in the General Description, but avoid repeating bullet statements in the Importance, Threatened and Strategic sections.
- Make sure the core arguments you touch on in the General Description are described again in each relevant section but with more details – don't just repeat the same points verbatim.

- **Use headers that mirror (or are similar) to the sub-criteria listed in the scoring guidance** i.e. *Economic Benefits from Timber, Public Access* etc. to make it super easy for the reviewer to see how the project meets the core criteria. Label each bullet that begins a new sub-criteria category with ALL CAPS, i.e. SCENIC, and list all key points pertaining to the sub-category under this heading.
- **Put your most compelling arguments first in each section** – you don't necessarily need to keep perfect alignment with the scoring guidance – e.g. if your project has amazing scenic and cultural benefits, then list these first before discussing the attributes that may be of only average quality for this project. But otherwise follow the order of the scoring guidance.
- Do not assume that all reviewers know common acronyms. It is best to spell out the acronym first and then use the acronym if word count is an issue. The exception might be when identifying a city in a state (e.g. Durham, NH).
- Be consistent...use periods or not; capitalize or don't; use ':' or – but not both.
- Check for spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Use citations.

Importance Section: Stress multiple national benefits and touch on all criteria/benefits to the extent possible.

- T & E and Wildlife Benefits.** Organize with federally recognized species first, then state, and then other status. Be specific about what species have been recently documented or have been observed on the property. Don't simply say "The area provides habitat for T & E species. Rather explain why it is critical and for the particular T & E species. This is a great time for adjectives. "The project area provides critical key winter range for the endangered Six Winged, Mosquito-eating, Dragon Fly." Follow with State-listed species, and species of concern (check you're State Wildlife Action Plan) and then other wildlife. If the project area provides suitable habitat for deer, elk, black bear etc. Remember that in some parts of the country deer are a pest. So you say, "The Utah Fish and Game has identified this project area as part of key winter range for Mule Deer, Elk and Moose." *See T&E Definitions provided as an appendix to the Scoring Guidance.*
- Watershed:** If this project is in a critical watershed, say it. If it's an important source of drinking water, say that and include the population (city names, number of people) served by the watershed **and the extent that the property contributes to it.**
- Economics:** How does this project affect the local economy? Quantify impacts where possible: if the project is important for hunting, include how many hunter days a year the property supports or how much hunting contributes to the local economy. The same goes for fishing, rafting, hiking, timber etc. Is there a

national impact? This is where you tie in the social aspects of the project and its importance to society as a whole.

Threatened Section: What we are looking for here is the threat or likelihood that the property will be converted to non-forest uses, i.e. recreation homes, agriculture, resorts or subdivisions. It's that simple. Do not talk about the threat to T & E species, watershed, etc. here; this should be discussed under Importance. Again, **adjectives** are very helpful such as "imminent" (only if it applies). Discuss proximity to properties that are being developed, cities (include population), popular recreation areas, major airports and past activities or nationally significant events (Olympics).

Describe why there is a threat of conversion, and don't shy away from mentioning the family circumstances/realities. Mention the age of the landowners, whether heirs have indicated they will sell the property, the type of pressure and offers owners are receiving, financial situations that might force the landowner to sell all or part of the property to keep it, etc. Don't just say *aging landowners*, everybody ages. If the landowner is an industrial owner or a non-profit such a camp, describe why that owner may need to sell in the near future (e.g. profit targets, bankruptcy risk, lack of endowment or reserve funds to help avoid having to sell if there is a change in the market, etc.).

If the landowners have a strong stewardship ethic, then mention that, but also describe why despite their good intentions they or their heirs may no longer be able to afford owning this property.

If the property is currently held by a third party, such as a land trust or NGO, due to the threatened status of the property prior to acquisition, make this clear.

Quantitative Data: Data can be time sensitive. Older statistics may not be the strongest method to validate a fact, particularly in the threatened category. Use newer statistics that emphasize the point that you are trying to highlight.

Use the appropriate quantitative analysis for the data (e.g. when citing population for a city use a standard metric referenced by the professionals in the real estate field).

When providing dollars and numbers, cite the source and round up cost to the nearest \$5,000.

Strategic Section: How does this project contribute to other conservation efforts, plans and initiatives in the vicinity, and what is its relationship to other protected properties? Organize the bullets to feature plans/initiatives first that are International level, Federal then State, then Regional-- and tie back to key attributes highlighted in the Importance section.

In the Strategic Section, list and describe in the narrative any initiatives, plans, strategies etc. that this property supports and who developed each plan. Describe how it supports the goals of these plans, but better yet **describe how this project is critical or highly**

important to the success of that plan. Use these descriptions to highlight how all sorts of local, regional, national, and international groups/coalitions/governments think that this project is really important.

If your project is no where near other protected lands, then talk about any future plans, goals, and strategies to reconnect forest fragments in the area to create a newly protected landscape. If there have been other FLP projects completed in the area, then mention those and how all the FLP projects are working together towards a larger landscape conservation purpose. If you have no other conservation strategies or initiatives in the project area, then create your own FLP-lead initiative and describe the vision here.

Photos: While points are not allocated to photographs, poor or confusing photos don't help. FLIS 2.0 allows for 4 photographs with captions; take full advantage of the limit, and use **the choice of photos and captions to highlight the most compelling and unique (and pretty) attributes of the project. Don't include pictures that call into question whether the property is forested or not**, even if the meadows on the property are really gorgeous.

If using a map in a photo location make sure it is not too detailed, is large enough to read and relevant.

Readiness: Demonstrating readiness is important. Completed items show a mature project that may have a higher degree of being completed within the two-year time frame. Folks on the panel will not assume anything, so if the Stewardship Plan is complete, check the box. Readiness can be used as a project tie breaker during scoring.

Supporters and Partners: What is the difference? This does not show up on the brief so describe it in some fashion, i.e. "the 45% match of \$1.2 million was made by the following partners, State, landowner, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Vital Ground and Upper Valley Land Owners Association. Supporters included the Valley County Commissioners, U.S. Senator Freddy Fender, and Friends of the Forest..." Make sure you have a letter of support in your files to document the support of everyone listed in this section.

Senators, congressional representatives listed first, by name. After that any federal entities by agency/department only and tribal governments, not individual names, then other organizations.

Map: Quality of map is very important. *Follow map standards provided in the National Project Selection letter.*

Map should include both strategic and threat components in same language as the writeup.

- Clear and crisp
- Good detail but not cluttered
- Scale and relationship to other areas such as protected lands, population centers, critical watersheds, etc. – this is very important for the Strategic rating

- Show nearby subdivision lines and any adjacent/nearby resorts, luxury developments, existing houses, etc. to visually demonstrate the Threat.
- Tie brief back to the map where relevant: i.e. if the brief reference habitat corridors (use arrows to indicate corridors) or designated scenic features, then show these on the map!
- Do label FLP tracts on the map with the year funded, proposed or completed.
- FLP tracts are usually colored red. Make sure the current proposed tract stands out.

Show as much as you can on the map (without cluttering it). Show Federal lands such as National Forests, BLM, BIA, National Parks, and National Receptions Areas. Show State owned lands, State Parks, etc. Show other Legacy projects completed, funded and proposed. Find out where other Conservation easements are and mention these as well. Show designated critical habitat areas, known migration corridors, Wild & Scenic Rivers, Scenic Byways, popular trails, etc.

Also make sure to show the threat on the map – nearby communities, distance to metropolitan areas, recently sold/built subdivisions, dots for nearby residences/structures, etc.

Use insert maps to show different scales of how the property fits into the overall landscape.

Conclusion: You can put a lot into 4 or 5 pages. Get started early. Read and re-read. Consult and re-consult the scoring guidance. Check and re-check for spelling and grammar (this actually matters a lot!). Share the brief with each other, with someone who knows nothing about the project or even the process and ask for their comments. Take advantage of the optional review processes provided in each geographic Region (West, Northeast, and South). Ask for and take seriously constructive criticism and re-write it again. Sit on it for a few days then read and re-write again. Competition is tough and money is short. Review briefs from successful projects for examples found in FLIS.