

Conservation Certification Review Procedures and Scoring

Version 1.1 | March 2017

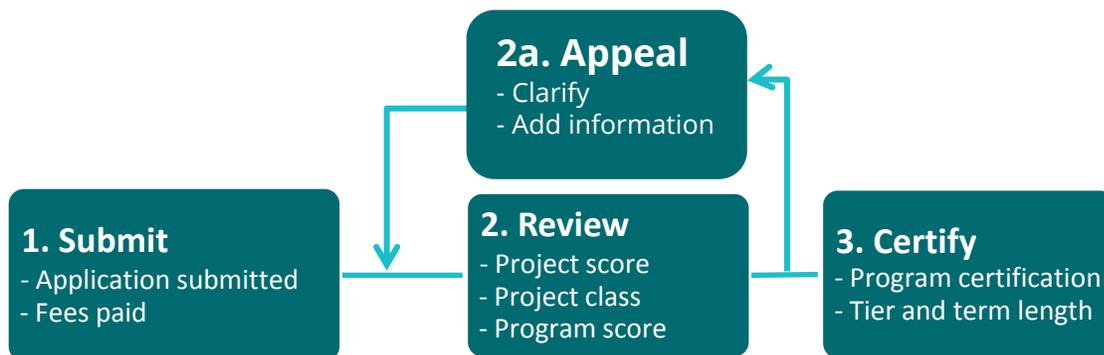
INTRODUCTION

The WHC Conservation Certification review procedures provide organizations with a third party credible system for evaluation of the quality of their projects. The WHC Certification and Technology Department (Certification Department) manages the review procedures in three steps. These steps help ensure that projects are scored in an equitable and transparent manner, providing objective feedback to improve conservation efforts.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

There are three steps to the Conservation Certification review procedures (**Figure 1**). In step 1, applications are submitted. Applications for Conservation Certification are considered received when the application has been submitted on the WHC Conservation Certification website and payment has been received by WHC. In step 2, applications reviewed. Programs that do not receive certification can appeal and be re-reviewed. In step 3, programs are notified if they are certified or not.

Figure 1: Review process



Key tasks for each step:

1. **SUBMIT:** Applications are considered received when they are both submitted on the WHC Conservation Certification website and application fees are paid.
2. **REVIEW:** Applications are assigned to independent Reviewers and are reviewed once. Reviewers do not have any conflict of interest with the company or the program for applications which they are assigned. Reviewers will score each project using the criteria in the Project Scoring Sheets and explanations provided in the Reviewer Guidance. The scoring process also determines each project's class. The qualifying questions described below (section **II. Project Class**) detail the criteria needed to become a qualifying project. The program score is the sum of all the project scores and is recorded in the Program Summary Sheet.

Upon receipt of the review, the Certification Department will verify that the review is complete by ensuring there are completed Program Summary and Project Scoring Sheets. The results will be sent to the applicant.

2a. **APPEAL:** If a program is not certified, the organization may appeal once. Applicants must appeal within 30 days of the outcome letter being sent by WHC. As part of the appeal process, organizations may amend their application and provide clarifying information for the application. Pertinent information will be re-reviewed by a Reviewer and scores may be changed if information was misinterpreted by the Reviewer or new relevant information was added. Results of the appeal are final.

The appeals are conducted by the Reviewer that initially performed the review. In the event that this Reviewer is not available, another Reviewer will be assigned.

Based on results from the Reviewer, the Certification Department will determine the result of the appeal and will contact the applicant

3. **CERTIFY:** Certification is awarded to programs that have at least one qualifying project. There are five exceptions to this rule. If a program's only qualifying project is Green Infrastructure, Invasive Species—Coordinated Approaches, Land Conservation Agreements, Remediation or Species of Concern, the program will not be certified. Program scores determine the program tier and term length.

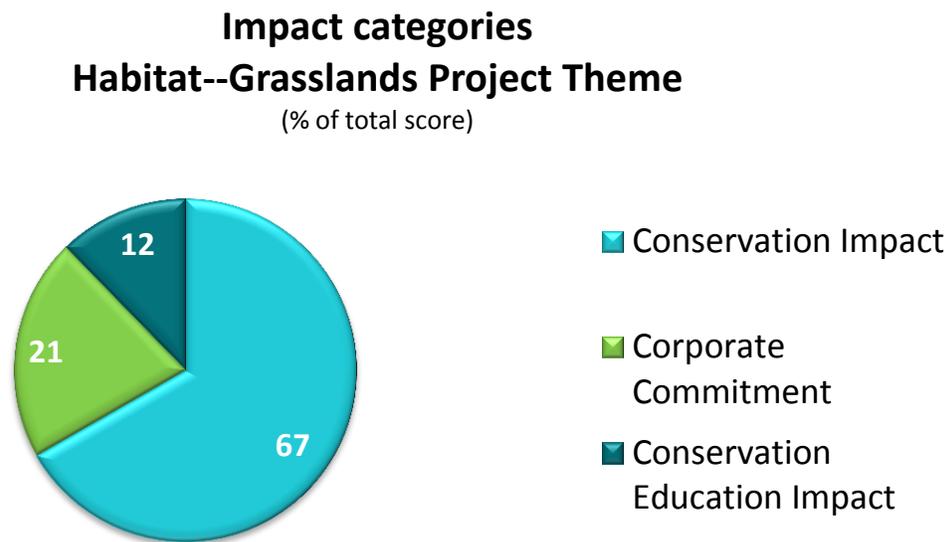
I. BACKGROUND

The review process and its associated scoring are guided by Conservation Certification's "impact categories." They are:

1. Conservation impact
2. Conservation education impact
3. Corporate commitment

Impact categories are core goals of WHC, directly related to its mission. Every project affects all three categories. Each Reviewer question—the questions that Reviewers answer on the Project Scoring Sheets—contributes to at least one impact category. The weights Reviewer questions have in project scores are guided in part by the relative contribution of each question to the impact categories.

For most project themes (e.g. Habitat, Species), conservation impact is weighted heaviest. As an example, the graphic below shows the percent of the total score that can be attributed to each of the impact categories for the project theme Habitat-Grasslands. For education project types, the scores weigh more heavily on conservation education impact and less heavily on conservation impact.



Project Score

All programs are scored at the project level first.

Project scores are based on weighted averages detailed in the scoring sheet for each project theme (e.g. Grasslands, Avian, Formal Education). The weighting draws from The Conservation Fund’s expertise in the [Logic Scoring of Preference](#) method that has been used in numerous conservation contexts. The Logic Scoring of Preference method structures scoring around “branches” of criteria using weighted means. The weights and scores for Conservation Certification were developed by WHC, drawing on input from several Advisory Committees of external conservation experts.

Project scores range from 0-100 (although a score of 100 is not possible in most themes). The project score is a sum of all points achieved (defined below) for each Reviewer question (defined below) in the Project Scoring Sheet, although projects classified as Early will earn 0 points. Each question in the scoring sheet is calculated in two steps: Reviewer score and points achieved. Some of the Reviewer questions are also used in determining project class.

Reviewer Score

Each Project Scoring Sheet's tab marked "Scoring" lists the questions Reviewers use to score applications. Each of these Reviewer questions relates to a specific attribute in a project (e.g. habitat size, management of habitat, employee participation). Each Reviewer question also relates to specific application questions found on the [WHC Conservation Certification website](#).

There are three types of Reviewer questions:

- 1. Yes/No**

Yes/No questions include questions such as "Is there a stated conservation objective?" for which answers are only yes or no.

- 2. Quantity**

Quantity questions are generally easily measured items such as the size of land units, years a project has been on the ground or number of employee hours.

- 3. Multiple choice**

Multiple choice questions rate project components on a scale. For example, in the Project Scoring sheet for the Habitat – Grassland theme, "Is the project locally appropriate by using native plant species or targeting native community types?" (Reviewer question 14.1.3) has four possible scores that the Reviewer can give. They are:

- **0** if the project is "Not utilizing any native species and not targeting a native grassland community"
- **1** if the project has "Any native species"
- **2** if the project has "Mostly (> 50%) native species"
- **3** if the project has "Exclusively native species or [is] targeting a native vegetative community"

The responses Reviewers give to these questions are called "Reviewer scores." They are entered into Project Scoring Sheets in the Scoring tab as "Score." They are also transposed onto the Calculation tab in the column "Reviewer Score."

Points Achieved

Reviewer scores are then translated into points (points achieved) using pre-defined weighting. This weighting is a three step process detailed in each Project Scoring Sheet's "Calculation" tab.

- 1. Branch weight**

Branch weight is the branch's contribution to the total project score, expressed as a percentage.

Most Reviewer questions are part of a "branch" consisting of related attributes. For example, in the Project Scoring Sheet for the Habitat-Rocky Areas theme, Reviewer question 18.1.1 in the Scoring tab reads "What is the total size of the project?" On the Calculation tab, question 18.1.1 is titled "size." This question is part of branch 18.1, "scope." The "scope" branch also contains the attributes "duration" and "locally appropriate."

In the column titled "Branch weight," you will see that scope branch is weighted at 0.2, or 20% of the total project score. Therefore, the scope branch represents a possible 20 out of 100 points of the project score in this scoring sheet.

2. Attribute weight

Attribute weight is the attribute's potential contribution to the total project score expressed as a percentage.

Most branches are divided into attributes that are related to specific Reviewer questions. Each Reviewer question, or attribute, has a weight that is a percentage of the branch weight. This attribute's branch weight value can be found in the "Branch weight" column under the bold value for the entire branch. For question 18.1.1, the attribute's branch weight is 0.2 or 20% of the points allocated to the entire scope branch. Said another way, question 18.1.1 represents 4% of the total project score calculated as $100 \times \text{branch weight} \times \text{attribute branch weight}$ ($100 \times 0.2 \times 0.2$). If question 18.1.1 receives the highest possible Reviewer score, the maximum number of points that can be achieved is 4.

3. Calculation

Each attribute weight is converted into "points achieved" (see column "Points Achieved") in the Project Scoring Sheet's Calculation tab. This points achieved is calculated using one of two calculation types, discrete calculation or linear calculation.

a) Discrete Calculation

Discrete calculations are used for multiple choice questions. Reviewer scores for multiple choice questions reflect the degree to which the attribute is addressed by the project (see section A.3, **Multiple choice**, above). Each Reviewer score corresponds to a specific percentage of the attribute weight that is available.

For discrete calculations, the "Reviewer score" and the "response key" are the same.

The percentage, expressed as a decimal (see column "Percentage" in the Calculations tab), determines the proportion of the points available for the attribute that are awarded to each response key for that attribute. This is then used to create a point value (see column "Point Value" in the Calculation tab). For example, question 18.1.3 in the Habitat-Rocky Areas theme has a total attribute weight of 12 and 4 possible Reviewer scores. If the Reviewer score is:

- 0, 0% of the attribute weight is given and the point value is 0
- 1, 30% of the attribute weight is given and the point value is 3.6 ($12 \times 0.3 = 3.6$)
- 2, 80% of the attribute weight is given and the point value is 9.6 ($12 \times 0.8 = 9.6$)
- 3, 100% of the attribute weight is given and the point value is 12

b) Linear Calculation

Linear calculations are used for quantity questions (described above in section A.2, **Quantity**). An upper limit determines the maximum number of points that could be earned for the attribute. There is a linear point allocation, so quantities between zero and the upper limit will receive specific point values along that line. Quantities above the upper limit will earn the maximum available points for the attribute.

For linear calculations, the response key ranges from 0 to the upper limit (see “Response Key” column in the Calculations tab) for that attribute. This is done to create a linear range between 0 and the upper limit. This allows Reviewer scores to correspond to a specific point value (see “Point Value” column in the Calculation tab) according to that linear relationship.

For example, for Reviewer question 18.1.1 (habitat size), the Response Key ranges from 0 to 100. If the size is 100 acres, 4 points (the maximum value) is given. Any Reviewer score above 100 acres is given the maximum of 4 points. Values between 0 and the 100 acre upper limit are calculated based on the numeric answer entered as the Reviewer score. If the size is 53 acres, then 53% of the total available points for the attribute are given ($0.53 \times 4 = 2.12$ points).

II. PROJECT CLASS

Through the scoring of projects, Reviewers also determine a project’s class as one of three types: qualifying, contributing or early. A project’s class determines if points will be received for the project and if the program will be certified (**Table 1**). Programs that have at least one qualifying project receive certification (note the five exceptions in **Table 1**). WHC has a parallel public recognition and awards effort that is not part of the certification and review process.

Table 1: Project classes

Class	Description	Impact on Program Certification and Score
Qualifying	Meets all five qualifying criteria (Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contributes points to the program score• Qualifies a program for Conservation Certification<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Exceptions: qualifying projects under the Green Infrastructure, Invasive Species—Coordinated Approaches, Land Conservation Agreements, Remediation and Species of Concern themes do not qualify a program for certification on their own.
Contributing	Meets 2 key qualifying criteria (numbers 1 and 2 in Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contributes points to the project score• Does not qualify a program for Conservation Certification
Early	Do not meet both key qualifying criteria (numbers 1 and 2 in Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No points contributed to the project score• Does not qualify a program for Conservation Certification

The analysis of how the project meets the qualifying questions is detailed in the “Determining Project Class” section on the “Outcome” tab of the Project Scoring Sheet (see

Table 2). For the Rocky Areas theme, qualification requires a “Yes” answer to two questions and positive Reviewer scores for four other Reviewer questions.

Table 2: Rocky Areas qualifying questions and criteria

Determining project class				
	Question	Question No.	Requirement	Result
1	Is the project locally appropriate?	18.1.3	>0	0
2	Does the project exceed regulatory requirements?	18.Q.5	Yes	0
3	Does the project have a conservation or conservation education objective?	18.Q.2	Yes	0
4	Does the project provide conservation or conservation education value?	18.1.1 18.1.2	>0 >0	0 0
5	Does the project have documented outcomes?	18.4.3	>0	0

The table of class requirements for each project theme can be found on the “tips” page of the WHC Conservation Certification website. That table details specific criteria and application questions related to the class requirements of each project theme.

III. PROGRAM SCORE, CERTIFICATION AND TIERS

Based on the project scores and classes, programs are scored and certification is determined. This information is summarized in the Program Summary Sheet.

The “Outcome” tab of the Program Summary Sheet lists each project in the program with its class and score. If there is at least one qualifying project, then the program is certified (see exceptions noted in **Table 1**). Project scores are added to generate a program score and a program description is written summarizing qualifying projects.

The program score determines a program’s tier. This tier is a grouping of programs based on their relative performance. The tier determines a program’s term length, or the number of years a program will remain certified until its certification must be renewed.

The information contained in this document may be modified at any time.