WHC Conservation Certification® Standard Revision

Version 1.3.1 | 2021

WHC Conservation Certification Version 1.3.1 Overview

Modifications to WHC Conservation Certification Standard are currently made by an inter-departmental group of WHC staff that represented corporate, site/program, and communication perspectives as well as the credibility, reviewer and data considerations of the Certification Department. Applications are evaluated based on the updates that were in place and had been communicated at the time of submission.

V1.3.1

The only changes made to V1.3 for V1.3.1 (released in June 2021) are clarifications of the Covid-19 Accommodations section. The V1.3.1 updates are reflected in italics to differentiate from other changes made in 2021.

Summary of Changes

Modifications were enacted for improved consistency, credibility and reporting capabilities. The most substantive change was the removal of one project type (Integrated Vegetation Management). Changes to the guidance instructions under some application and scoring questions were made for additional clarification and context and are not accounted for in this document.

In addition, a significant accommodation was made in light of the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic. This change temporarily alters review procedures and is therefore included in this document.

V1.3.1

Covid-19 Accommodations were clarified. Most notably, V1.3 noted that applicants should not apply with an education project if no education occurred during the certification term. This wording has been clarified further, specifying that such education projects will not be evaluated or qualify for certification.

Overall

Across All Project Types

Change Type	Prior	Updated	Reasoning
Tiers	Score ranges updated annually	Score ranges updated every 3 years	After achieving a full data set (3 years of data) the changes from year to year were minor. Decreased frequency of changes provides more consistency for applicants.
Fields	Character limits of 10,000 for long text fields and 5,000 for short text fields.	Character limits of 5,000 for long text fields and 2,500 for short text fields.	While extremely long answers to questions are uncommon, when they do occur, they often provide irrelevant information. Shorter fields will help applicants focus on content specific to the question.

Habitat

All Habitat Project Types

Application Section	Change Type	Application Question	Updated	Reasoning
Management	Question Wording	Describe the steps taken to maintain the [Habitat Type] habitat.	Describe the steps taken to maintain the [Habitat Type] habitat. If any information (monitoring, etc.) prompted changes in management, explain when and why the changes were made.	To prompt for a description of adaptive management (this can result in a higher score).
Alignments	Question Wording	Does the project connect with other [Habitat Type] projects on neighboring land?	Does the project connect with other [Habitat Type] projects on neighboring property?	To clarify that this question is looking for connectivity with off-site habitats.

Species

All Species Project Types

Application Section	Change Type	Application Question	Updated	Reasoning
Scope	Added Question		Is this a new project not included in previous applications?	For consistency with habitat projects and to provide additional context to reviewers.
Scope	Question Wording	Name the group of species being targeted and list several of the species in this group (common or scientific names).	Name the group of species being targeted AND list several of the species in this group (common and scientific names).	More prominent placement of the information was needed, and both common and scientific names are needed to properly identify species.
Management	Question Wording	Provide a timeline of the completed activities such as the steps involved in implementation, maintenance, population management, etc.	Provide a timeline of the completed activities specific to management of the target species. If any information (monitoring etc.) prompted changes in management, explain when and why the changes were made.	To prompt for a description of adaptive management (this can result in a higher score) and to keep information focused on target species.
Alignments	Question Wording	Does the project connect with other [Species Type] projects on neighboring land?	Does the project connect with other [Species Type] projects on neighboring property?	To clarify that this question is looking for connectivity with off-site habitats.

Species - Project Type Specific

Project Type	Application Section	Change Type	Application Question	Updated	Reasoning
Invasive Species	Scope	Moved Question	Describe the control or prevention methods being used for each species.	Now in Management section.	To place with other management-related questions.
Invasive Species	Scope	Added Question		If applicable: Upload a map showing the location of the Invasive Species project management area.	Option to include a map to help illustrate areas where invasive species are present and/or being controlled.
Invasive Species	Management	Added Question		Select the method(s) being used to control the invasive species. Options: Biological; Chemical; Mechanical/Physical; Other	To standardize this important information for reporting and analysis.

Education

All Education Project Types

Application Section	Change Type	Application Question	Updated	Reasoning
Scope	Added Question		Is this a new project not included in previous applications?	For consistency with habitat projects and to provide additional context to reviewers.
Planning & Materials	Added Question		Describe how the materials are used in the [Education Project Type] project.	For consistency with equipment and to ensure applicants provide enough information.
Planning & Materials	Added Question		If applicable, upload any photos or documentation of the equipment used.	For consistency with materials and to prompt applicants to provide enough information.

Other Options

All Other Options Project Types

Application Section	Change Type	Application Question	Updated	Reasoning
Scope	Added Question		Is this a new project not included in previous applications?	For consistency with habitat projects and to provide additional context to reviewers.

Integrated Vegetation Management

The Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) project type is specific to IVM being conducted on linear features and excludes other types of IVM. Additionally, the project type is different from other project types because it includes industry-specific technical terminology, making it inaccessible to a broader audience. Analysis of all the projects submitted under the IVM project type showed that only three applicants had successful IVM projects, and that these efforts could be recognized under other project types.

To improve consistency in applications, scoring and reporting, the IVM project type is being discontinued. Applicants with existing IVM projects can gain recognition for their efforts by applying with a different project type (such as Invasive Species or Grassland).

Covid-19 Accommodations

The global impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the public health measures needed to counter its spread have impacted, and may continue to impact, many Conservation Certification programs. During this time, maintenance, monitoring, education and other conservation activities may be challenging at best, impossible at worst.

Applications now include series of questions about the impact of Covid-19 on the program. If continuity of a project (management and monitoring, education efforts, etc.) has been disrupted by the pandemic, the applicant can provide information on the specifics of the disruption (e.g., facility closed) and the dates of these impacts. The reviewers will consider this information so that gaps associated with Covid-19 will not adversely impact an application's outcome. Applications will be evaluated based on work that was done outside of the impacted time period.

Due to the ongoing impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, beginning in 2021, additional accommodations will be made for applicants who have been unable to maintain any projects to the standard that is required for Conservation Certification. Applicants whose programs include habitat and/or species projects who describe significant impacts to their program that have prevented them from implementing aspects of their projects during the entirety of their certification period can still apply. Applicants must include all possible information for their projects as well as a description of the Covid-19 impacts. While the application will be reviewed using the standard criteria, if no projects meet the criteria to be qualifying, the program will still be recognized (with a program score of zero and a tier of Certified).

For education projects, if no education has occurred during the certification term there will be no information to include in the application (whereas impacted habitat and species projects should still provide value and have information related to the ongoing impacts). Therefore, education projects that have not had any education activities during the certification term should not be submitted. Such projects will not be evaluated by reviewers and will not qualify a program to receive certification. Programs with only education projects are strongly encouraged to consider virtual learning events as a means of engaging learners during this challenging time, and to maintain certification.

Although accommodations are being made, the base requirements for Conservation Certification remain the same. New programs must still meet the minimum requirement for how long a project has been on the ground and actively monitored prior to applying. *Programs that have at least one project that enables the program to achieve certification (either traditionally or under the Covid-19 accommodations) are not eligible for appeal. In keeping with existing appeal policies, only programs that would otherwise not be certified can submit an appeal.*