

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service
Briefing Statement

Project: Land Acquisition Ranking System (LARS)

Background: Following direction from the Office of Management and Budget in the budget passback for fiscal year 2000, the Land Acquisition Program revised and further developed its nationwide priority ranking system. LARS was implemented during the FY 2001 budget process. It has been, and continues to be, refined on an annual basis and is currently used for the President's Budget process.

The initial information for each project is provided by the park unit and reviewed by regional or field offices of the Land Acquisition Program. The Land Acquisition staff in each office assists the Regional staff in ranking the requests received using guidelines provided by the Washington (WASO) Program Office. Regional ranking scores and lists, as well as information sheets, are submitted to the WASO Land Acquisition Program Office. The WASO Program Office then ranks all requests. The combined score of the Regional and WASO ranking process is used to determine the initial national priority list.

The major criteria used in LARS are:

- Threat to the Resource,
- Preservation of the Resource,
- Visitor Use Facility accommodation,
- Commitment has been made to acquire,
- Involvement of Partners, Non-Profit Groups or availability of matching funds,
- Continuation of an ongoing effort,
- Recreational opportunities,
- Hardship of the owner
- Existence of legislative authority to acquire,
- Ability to obligate appropriated dollars,
- Regional priority of the project,
- Congressional and local support,
- Impact to operation and maintenance of the unit (either savings or cost),
- Economic escalation or inflation factors, and
- The type of the unit.

The first seven major criteria are used by Regional and Project Office staff to rank requests from individual units. The last seven major criteria are used by the WASO Program Office staff to rank all the requests. The two scores are then combined for a nationwide ranking. Within each of the major criteria there are factors (minor criteria) to be considered. For example, under "Threat to the Resource" those persons evaluating and assigning ranking points consider the nature of the threat, the immediacy and validity of the threat, the significance of the resources involved and whether or not the resource might be repaired (restored) if it were to come to harm. Adequately addressing each of the factors included in the major criteria provides background knowledge and rationale for ranking the project. There is no restriction on how many requests, in priority order, may be submitted by a Region or Project Office for consideration at the national level.

Consideration is given for those units and parcels for which acquisition funds were requested but have not been authorized. Such requests are removed from the national priority list. During the following year, it is expected that Park Unit staff will work with legislative staff to draft authorizing language where needed in order for these important projects to be considered for acquisition. Additional consideration for amended ranking of projects is based on administrative intent, including Secretarial priorities.

UPDATE FY2021 Preparation: In the FY2021 process, 209 discreet requests were rated at the national level, totaling \$329,753,115 estimated need. This represents 101 units within the National Park System. A group of six Lands' employees, representing both WASO and Regions, met for a week to review the numeric scoring and complete background checking on the highest rated requests...including such things as whether or not the request was similar to one submitted previously, if there were limitations on acres or funding that needed to be factored in and compared with the request, etc. From this process a subset of the top rated projects that totaled \$125 million was presented to the Chief, Land Resources for confirmation that there were no outstanding issues the LARS team was not aware of. That subset was then used to "draw the line" at the mark of \$20.854 million that was provided by the Department to the NPS Budget Office for use in preparing the FY2021 request for Federal LWCF projects.