**Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake**

**DRAFT Peer Review Process**

*May 7, 2025*

**Background**

Since 2018, the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake (Committee) has worked to improve the health of Clear Lake itself, its species and the surrounding basin, and for the communities and cultures dependent on the health of the environment. To date, this has resulted in over $13 million in allocations from the State of California for research projects, on-the-ground restoration work, and environmental education to improve the health of Clear Lake and its communities. As project proposals become more complex (with larger funding requests), the Committee recommends the implementation of a peer review and peer advice to ensure proposals will meet their state goals, the goals of the Committee as a whole, and demonstrate clear justification for significant public investment.

Peer review and peer advice are essential tools to determine the likely efficacy of environmental restoration proposals based on the best available science prior to funding or implementation of the project in question, and after a project is implemented to determine whether the proposal achieved its state goal. Generally, peer review is carried out by an independent panel of experts with expertise in fields applicable to the proposal in question (i.e., a proposal for HAB mitigation would require a panel of experts with knowledge in lake science and water quality, while an erosion control proposal may require a panel including geologists, forestry specialists, etc.).

The Committee welcomes requests for peer review and advice. Reviews typically consider work that is complete or near-complete, while advice focuses on work in earlier stages of proposal development before funding and implementation. The Committee recommends whether a review or advice panel should be conducted, and plays a critical oversight role throughout the process. Two key features of the review and advice process are **independence** and **transparency**. Independence is maintained by the Committee and its parent agency, the California Natural Resources Agency, acting as an intermediary between the requesting party and the reviewers; transparency is maintained by publicly sharing materials and reviewer feedback to the public via the Committee website, during public meetings, and as attachments to proposals considered for funding and implementation.

Following peer review or advice, the Committee will consider expert panel outcomes to determine whether a proposal is sufficient to recommend funding, insufficient/requiring modification to meet state goals, or deficient and inappropriate for funding at this time.

**Peer Review/Advice Process**

Selection of appropriate peer review experts is a key first step in the peer review or advice process. As noted above, reviewers should be independent of any proposal brought to the Committee for its consideration. To ensure independence, the Committee recommends relying on the significant expertise of the California Natural Resources Agency for identifying experts specific to the proposal(s) in question. Once experts are identified, reviewers will be asked to consider the proposal(s) based on a series of questions designed to determine the likely efficacy of the project being proposed.

**Questions for Committee Consideration May 21, 2025**

1. What additional guidance can the Committee provide to ensure the independence and transparency of the peer review process? Ex: conflict of interest guidance or certification.
2. If reviewers deem proposal budgets insufficient for completion of the entire project, can the Committee recommend partial funding for critical components of the proposal?
3. Should reviewers conduct their work independently, or as part of a collaborative panel?
4. How can Tribal governments provide guidance on recommended reviewers to incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the review process?
5. Should the Committee recommend peer review for all proposals as part of the Committee process, or as part of the CNRA contracting process before funding agreements are finalized?

**SAMPLE Instructions and Questions to Reviewers[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Please provide a brief written summary of your findings for each criterion listed on the next two pages. Please provide an overall numerical rating of the proposal based on your review on the last page (not with the comment portion of your review). Note that providing individual scores for each question is optional. Only the overall numerical rating is required. Please do not report numerical ratings with greater than two significant figures. Use the rating definitions below to determine your overall rating. Please provide a brief written justification for your overall rating.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Rating** | **Definition** |
| 5 – 5.9 (Superior) | All aspects of the proposal are clear and well described. All technical review criteria are affirmatively met and there is a high probability of success. No substantive flaws are noted, although some minor errors or omissions may be noted. |
| 4 – 4.9 (Good) | All aspects of the proposal are clear and well described. A majority of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met, although there may be some minor questions related to some aspects of the proposal. Reviewers may identify one substantive flaw, but there is a clear resolution to that flaw. Some minor errors or omissions also may be noted. |
| 3 – 3.9 (Average) | The proposal is sound overall, but some deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify up to two substantive critical flaws, and at least half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met. |
| 2 – 2.9 (Below Average) | The proposal presents a cogent description of the project but serious deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify three or more substantive critical flaws, and less than half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met. |
| 1 - 1.9 (Inferior) | The proposal does not present a cogent description of the project and serious deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify three or more substantive critical flaws, and less than half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met. |

**Proposal Title:**  **Date:**

**1. Goals.** Are the goals, objectives, and hypotheses clearly stated and internally consistent? Is the idea timely and important? Does the proposal directly address the Committee’s state goals?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**2. Justification.** Is the study justified relative to existing knowledge/is the project supported by applicable case studies in California? Is the conceptual basis clearly stated in the proposal, and does it explain the underlying basis for the proposed work?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**3. Approach.** Is the approach well designed and appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project? Is the project likely to generate novel information, methodologies, or approaches? If the project is a physical capital improvement or restoration effort, is there a clear monitoring plan prior to, during, and following implementation?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**4. Feasibility.** Is the approach fully documented and technically feasible? Are the underlying assumptions reasonable? What is the likelihood of success? Are the scale, budget, and timeline of the project consistent with the goals and objectives and within the grasp of the proposal team?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**5. Products.** Is the project likely to yield products of value? Are interpretative (or interpretable) outcomes likely from this project? Is an adequate plan provided for review and revision of draft products? For scientific research projects, will the information ultimately be useful to decision makers?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**6. Capabilities.** What is the track record of the project team in terms of their past work? Is the project team qualified to efficiently and effectively implement the proposed project? Do they have the infrastructure and other aspects of support necessary to accomplish the project?

**Reviewer Comment:**

**7. Overall Rating:** Please provide a numerical score using the rating table below and provide a brief justification for your overall rating:

**Reviewer Overall Rating:**

**Reviewer Comment:**

**Overall Proposal Rating Value (see rating definitions in the table above):**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Rating Value** |
| Question 1 (optional) |  |
| Question 2 (optional) |  |
| Question 3 (optional) |  |
| Question 4 (optional) |  |
| Question 5 (optional) |  |
| Question 6 (optional) |  |
| **OVERALL Rating (required)** |  |

1. Modified from the Nevada Lake Tahoe License Plate Program Grant Review Technical Advisory Committee Evaluation Criteria. <https://lands.nv.gov/uploads/documents/Grant_Procedures_2025.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)