

PIEDMONT – SOUTH ATLANTIC COAST
COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNIT

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PROJECT PROCEDURES

PROCESS FOR NPS PROJECTS IN THE
PIEDMONT – SOUTH ATLANTIC CESU

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WHAT IS THE PIEDMONT – SOUTH ATLANTIC CESU?

Your university is part of a nationwide organization called the Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit (CESU) network. This is a working collaboration among federal agencies, universities and other partners. The CESU network is a multi-agency, university-based, broadly interdisciplinary, and ecosystem-oriented working collaboration that provides scientific research, technical assistance, and education to 13 Federal Agencies. There are about 113 private sector partners, such as your university, within the network. In 2001, over 27 million dollars in 508 projects moved through the network.

*CESU =
Cooperative
Ecosystem
Studies Unit*

The CESU network is divided into 16 distinct CESUs, of which the Piedmont – South Atlantic Coast CESU (PSA-CESU) is a recent addition. Every CESU has a host university that provides administrative support and facilities for the federal representatives. The University of Georgia serves as the host university for this CESU. The PSA-CESU has eight other private sector partners and 6 federal agency partners. A summary description for the PSA-CESU can be found at the end of this document.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INVOLVEMENT

The National Park Service is fully involved in the CESU program, with an agency representative placed in each of the 16 CESUs. It is the intent of the agency to utilize the expertise and capabilities within the CESU network to the maximum extent possible. National Park Service projects have accounted for almost 72% of the total project funds in the CESU network.

*30 National Parks
closely associated with
the PSA-CESU*

Within the Piedmont – South Atlantic Coast CESU, there are about 30 National Parks that would have a close affiliation with the university partners. Any of the 388 National Parks across the nation can utilize university partners within the PSA-CESU, but it is more typical that a Park will utilize expertise from a university that they are familiar with and located close to.

The federal representative for the Park Service within the PSA-CESU is Dr. Ray Albright. The Park Service labels their CESU representatives as Research Coordinators. Dr. Albright currently serves as the Research Coordinator for another CESU – the Southern Appalachian CESU – so he is very familiar with CESU projects. His contact information is on the summary description sheet.

FUNDING OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PROJECTS

There are three typical funding sources from which a National Park Service (NPS) project can originate: from the base operating monies of a National Park; from NPS funds awarded to a project; or from ‘external’ funds such as a private sector research grant or US Fish & Wildlife partnership funds. The latter two sources are the most common. Parks usually do not give up base operating money for projects. Most NPS projects are funded by the agency in a process the NPS calls the Service-wide Combined Call (or the combined call for short).

The NPS pools all combined call project proposals into a once a year review process. Project proposals are gathered every November and funding awards are made by April for the upcoming fiscal year (FY). The funding pot for FY04 was about eight million dollars for the 69 National Parks in the Southeast. Most projects span 1-2 years in length. The NPS Research Coordinator can give more details on the combined call process at your request.

National Parks seldom seek external funding for projects for the simple reason that they are unfamiliar with the possible funding sources and the processes required. Most Parks are pressed for time to get proposals into the combined call and they do not have any extra time to explore external funding – especially if they perceive that their chances of success are slim. NPS people are not well versed in how to write competitive research proposals.

Combined Call process is the primary funding source for projects in Southeastern Parks.

There is ample opportunity for a university researcher to either embed their project in the combined call process or work with a Park for external funding. This is explained how in the next section.

UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT IN PARK SERVICE PROJECTS

Any researcher is welcome to conduct research on a National Park. There are some legal and policy matters that must be complied with, but the Parks’ doors are open. Basically, if a researcher has their own funding, the necessary resources, and the proper permit papers, they can go about their business. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park processes over 150 unsolicited research permits every year. National Parks are great research labs.

The key to tapping into agency funding for National Park Service projects is to become acquainted with the research needs of a National Park.

The key to tapping into agency funding for National Park Service projects is to become acquainted with the research needs of a National Park. This cannot be overstated. The NPS Research Coordinator can help by either establishing contacts with a National Park, facilitating discussion, or relaying research needs. A Park will want to know how a proposed project will address their research needs before they will agree to collaborate with it.

In the combined call process, only National Parks can submit the proposal. However, a university researcher can write the proposal for the Park. This is common. Parks love it because it’s a win-win situation for them: they get a well written proposal submitted which then boosts the chance of success. University researchers will find the NPS proposal process very simple (almost a

pre-proposal process) compared to academic proposal writing. Close association with a Park is essential to get a proposal into the combined call process.

To seek external funding, in collaboration with a Park, the university researcher should expect to do the bulk of the proposal package. The Park will assist with information when asked, but generally, they are unfamiliar with how to write competitive research proposals. Once guided through the process, a Park will respond much stronger the next time around. Most National Parks are very interested in collaborating with a university researcher for external funding.

Combined Call for projects is a good means to obtain NPS funding for a project - - but it must be submitted by a Park.

There are some other sources of agency funding for research projects, but they are usually of short duration and targeted at very specific issues. These initiatives are usually announced within the relevant disciplines of a university. As an example, a recent initiative was white-tailed deer analysis in selected southern states.

Very often, National Parks get funding for a project for which they do not have collaborating principal investigator. They then turn to the CESU to find their PI. The Research Coordinator is frequently asked to perform this search.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CESU PROJECTS

If a university researcher is requested by a Park to become the principal investigator of an already funded project, OR a university researcher is already PI of a project that gets awarded funding with NPS monies, there are some steps that must be followed. These steps are **necessary only for NPS projects**. Another federal agency may have a different process.

The National Park Service is legally bound to each university partner within the PSA-CESU through a cooperative agreement. Without going into a lengthy description of what a cooperative agreement entails, suffice it to say that this is a very simple, flexible contract bridge for both parties. At present, it is the easiest way to get into a contract agreement with the Park Service.

Here is how process works for National Park Service CESU projects.

A National Park develops a Statement of Work (SOW) or scope of work which describes the Why, What, When and Where of the project. Usually, a 3-4 page document. The Research Coordinator encourages Parks to use a CESU template for the SOW, but this is not required. The SOW template for the CESU can be requested from the Research Coordinator.

The NPS Research Coordinator prepares a Review of Appropriateness for the SOW. This records that the project meets the intent of the CESU strategic objectives. This is necessary for using a cooperative agreement. Turnaround time for the Review of Appropriateness is very quick.

A principal investigator is identified (if not already so) and contacted by the Park. The SOW is sent to the PI for his/her review. The PI may have drafted the SOW for the park in which case this step is only a formality. Some discussion can go on between the PI and the Park to refine the SOW.

The PI prepares a proposal from the content of the SOW. The proposal gives the How of the project. The proposal is for the PI's university administrative approval process and should meet the language / format requirements of the university. The content of the SOW can be cut and pasted to

suit the proposal. Again, discussion between the PI and the Park can go on to refine the proposal. An important element of the proposal is the budget.

The proposal is sent to the NPS Research Coordinator and the Park for a Technical Review. This is a quality assurance check that the proposal contains the intent of the SOW and the budget is reasonable. Turnaround time for this review is usually very quick as well.

The proposal can then be routed through the PI's administrative approval process (i.e. Office of Grants and Contracts). Once approved, an electronic form and paper copy should be sent to the Park.

The Park will take the SOW, the proposal and the reviews and send the package to a contracting officer in the NPS Regional Office in Atlanta. The contracting officer will process the package and send the proper papers of authorization to the university. Turnaround time for the contracting officer is usually less than 2 weeks.

When the NPS Research Coordinator receives a copy of the authorization, he will contact the Park and PI to ensure they know that everything is good to go. Often the Park and PI already know this. The PI will also receive a project start-up letter from the Research Coordinator that summarizes timelines and responsibilities of the project. The Park commonly has a project kick-off meeting with the PI to make sure everything is in order.

The NPS Research Coordinator can provide more specific details regarding this process upon request. Please feel free to address any questions or inquiries concerning the CESU, project procedures, or the NPS process to the Research Coordinator (contact information is on the summary description sheet).

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF PIEDMONT – SOUTH ATLANTIC CESU

The Piedmont – South Atlantic Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (PSA-CESU) is a multi-agency, university-based, broadly interdisciplinary, and ecosystem-oriented working collaboration designed to provide scientific research, technical assistance, and education to Federal resource managers.

There are six federal partners:

- Bureau of Land Management
- US Geological Survey – Biological Resources Division
- National Park Service
- USDA Forest Service
- Agricultural Research Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service

The University of Georgia is the Host University

There are eight other partners

- Clemson University
- North Carolina State University
- Florida A&M University
- University of Florida
- University of Central Florida
- Audubon of Florida
- Audubon of South Carolina
- Audubon of North Carolina

The National Park Service Research Coordinator for the PSA-CESU is:

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