



Conservation Partners Program

2018 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Full Proposal Due Date: **Wednesday, August 22nd 2018 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

OVERVIEW

The Conservation Partners Program (CPP) is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>), the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) (www.nfwf.org) and other regional/initiative-specific partners.

The purpose of the partnership is to provide grants on a competitive basis to increase technical assistance capacity to advance the implementation of three complementary priorities: NRCS's Landscape Conservation Initiatives, NFWF's Conservation Priorities, and the NRCS-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partnership – Working Lands for Wildlife. In order to maximize benefits to these three priorities, the CPP also seeks to target investments in certain identified Program Priority Areas (PPAs).

The CPP program funding will support:

- Technical assistance to producers to help accelerate implementation of NRCS/NFWF initiatives and Farm Bill conservation programs within the Program Priority Areas and Working Lands for Wildlife Focal Areas listed below
- Incorporation of best available science in applying conservation systems and strategically focusing resources where the greatest conservation opportunities exist
- Increased landowner/manager awareness and participation in NRCS/NFWF initiatives and Farm Bill programs
- Identifying and promoting positive economic outcomes as a result of conservation system implementation

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The Conservation Partners Program is a nationwide program with specific priority areas where funding will be directed. A total of approximately \$5.1 million will be available through this funding opportunity.

Competitive proposals will be focused on one of the five priorities listed below:

- Pacific Salmon
- Grassland Bird Habitat
- Great Lakes
- Mississippi River Basin
- Working Lands for Wildlife



PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Pacific Salmon

Eligible technical assistance projects should improve the efficiency of on-farm irrigation practices and provide quantifiable benefits to instream flows through a state approved transfer or some other form of enforceable agreement. Projects should be located in priority anadromous salmonid streams in California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho and should benefit stream reaches where insufficient instream flows are identified as a key limiting factor for fish survival by a state or federal agency. We expect approximately \$800,000 to be available in this category.

Objectives:

- Improve instream flows and water quality in freshwater systems through implementation of conservation practices
- Restore stream flows while maintaining or balancing crop yields through conservation planning on agricultural lands
- Promote and facilitate conservation best practices including irrigation efficiencies and other conservation agricultural practices that benefit freshwater systems and promotes water conservation through conservation planning on agricultural lands
- Integrate Farm Bill funding into whole farm planning efforts aimed at producing better water quality

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) improved water management, wildlife habitat restoration, easement programs and management practices such as cover crops, range seeding, buffering, grass grazing systems, management of agricultural drainage water and irrigation efficiencies, prescribed grazing and forage harvest management.

Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:

- Salmonid species
- Mussels, fish and other aquatic biota
- Threatened and endangered grassland, wetland and aquatic species

Grassland Bird Habitat

The Great Plains and Prairie Pothole Region support more than 300 species of breeding, migrating, and overwintering bird species and are hotspots for about two dozen bird species of high national importance. We expect approximately \$1,200,000 to be available in this category.

Objectives:

- Technical assistance to engage ranchers, farmers, and the agricultural sector in developing and implementing best practices, innovation and stewardship practices that benefit grassland bird habitat
- Promote grass-based grazing systems with positive impacts on grassland bird habitat
- Evaluate and monitor species response to practices implemented
- Identify and monitor overlapping benefit to monarch butterflies
- Develop and implement innovative habitat conservation techniques, such as,
 - reducing economic entry barriers to attract a new generation of ranchers

- creating grass banks to improve access to large grazing areas
- incentivizing grass-based agriculture through price premiums
- using precision agriculture to help producers avoid converting unproductive field areas

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) grassland habitat restoration, agricultural management practices including conservation cover, cover crop, range seeding, buffering, prescribed grazing systems, management of agricultural drainage water, and forage harvest management.

Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:

- Grassland birds; focal species include burrowing owl, Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit, and chestnut-collared longspur
- Threatened and endangered prairie, grassland, wetland and aquatic species
- Waterfowl

Great Lakes Basin

Awards in the Great Lakes Basin will be made to reduce phosphorus runoff and associated harmful algae blooms. Investments to reduce algal blooms and improve water quality will focus in watersheds with high levels of phosphorus and sediment loading, with particular emphasis on western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay. Grant funding will be used to hire field conservation professionals who will, in collaboration with NRCS field offices develop farm nutrient management plans; enroll in Farm Bill programs; and implement conservation practices that may include, but not be limited to, construction of on-farm riparian buffers and wetlands, drainage and tillage practices, and application of soil health concepts. Positions will be supported by grant funding for up to two years. We expect approximately \$800,000 to be available in this category.

Objectives:

- Conduct outreach and implementation of conservation systems on agricultural land in priority watersheds, such as the Western and Eastern Lake Erie, Green Bay, and Saginaw Bay
- Engage farmer-led groups in conservation planning
- Improve water quality primarily through reductions in sediment and phosphorous losses
- Improve fish and wildlife habitat

Mississippi River Basin

Priority technical assistance projects will be located in NRCS's priority watersheds and subwatersheds as identified for the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and priority areas for the Driftless Area Initiative. A reference map for MRBI priority areas can be found [here](#), and the Driftless Area map can be found [here](#). Chief among the program priorities for the basin are improvements to water quality and a focus on riparian habitat. We expect approximately \$1,300,000 to be available in this category.

Objectives:

- Engage farmers, farm-related and farmer-led organizations, and the agricultural sector in best practices, innovation and stewardship practices that benefit water quality, fish, and wildlife



NFWF

- Promote innovative agricultural practices that have positive economic and environmental outcomes
- Measure and promote positive economic implications of on-farm conservation practices
- Promote grass-based grazing systems with positive impacts on soil health, water quality, and cold water stream systems, using brook trout as an indicator species
- Achieve long-term reductions in edge-of-field nutrient losses from agricultural lands in the key watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin
- Improve nutrient management and bring new tools to farmers to more efficiently manage inputs
- Promote wetlands, active floodplains, and other practices that can trap and treat excess nutrient runoff
- Integrate Farm Bill funding into whole farm planning efforts aimed at producing better water quality
- Drainage management and monitoring its effect on wildlife

Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:

- Mussels, fish, brook trout, and other aquatic biota
- Waterfowl, marsh birds, and shorebirds
- Grassland birds
- Threatened and endangered prairie, grassland, wetland and aquatic species

Funding in this category will support technical assistance to farmers, foresters and other private landowners and managers to help optimize wildlife conservation on private lands in the Mississippi River Basin.

WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Program funding will support:

- Hiring field conservation professionals who will, in direct coordination with State NRCS Offices, increase participation in federal Farm Bill programs and assist private landowners to implement conservation practices
- Accelerated implementation of NRCS/NFWF initiatives and Farm Bill conservation programs within the Program Priority Areas shown in the map below
- Identifying and promoting positive economic outcomes as a result of conservation system implementation

Please consult with the state level Working Lands for Wildlife coordinator for information on specific priority activities and project approaches. We expect approximately \$1,000,000 to be available in this category.



| | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Improved management practices - Acres under improved management | Acres under improved management | Enter the number of acres under improved management |
| Erosion control - Lbs sediment avoided | Lbs sediment avoided | Enter the amount of sediment prevented from entering system |
| BMP implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction - Lbs nutrients avoided (annually) | Lbs Nitrogen avoided (annually) | Enter the amount of nitrogen prevented from entering system annually |
| BMP implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction - Lbs nutrients avoided (annually) | Lbs Phosphorus avoided (annually) | Enter the amount of phosphorous prevented from entering system annually |
| BMP development - # BMP recommendations developed | # BMP recommendations developed | Enter the number of Best Management Practice (BMP) recommendations developed through technical assistance activities |
| BMP development - # mgmt plans with BMPs | # mgmt plans with BMPs | Enter the number of management plans into which Best Management Practices (BMPs) were incorporated through technical assistance with private landowners |

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include: non-profit 501(c) organizations, farmer and commodity-led organizations, educational institutions, tribal governments, and state or local units of governments (e.g. state agricultural and/or conservation agencies, counties, townships, cities, conservation districts, utility districts, drainage districts, etc.).
- Ineligible applicants include: individuals, federal government agencies, and for-profit entities.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.
- Due to the federal nature of these funds, they may not be used to implement NRCS' Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects.



FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

The 2018 Conservation Partners Program will award approximately \$5.1 million in NRCS funds. Typical grant awards will range from \$50,000 to \$300,000. Projects may be funded for up to three years from the completion of a grant agreement.

For all requests a match of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Program Goals and Priorities – Project contributes to the Program’s overall habitat and species conservation goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities outlined in the Request for Proposal.

NRCS Alignment – Please ensure the project is in alignment with the goals/priorities of the respective state in which your project is located. A list of state contacts can be found [here](#).

Technical Merit – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation to ensure activities are technically-sound and feasible.

Transferability – Project has potential and plan to transfer lessons learned to other communities and/or to be integrated into government programs and policies.

Communication – Project includes a detailed plan to communicate information about the project to appropriate audiences, especially NRCS state and field offices.

Funding Need – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested, and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

Conservation Plan and Context – The project advances an existing conservation plan or strategy.

Monitoring – Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during and after the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Long-term Sustainability – Project will be maintained to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time. This should include how future funding will be secured to implement necessary long-term monitoring and maintenance activities.

Past Success – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.



Partnership – An appropriate partnership exists to implement the project and the project is supported by a strong local partnership that leverages additional funds and will sustain it after the life of the grant. Identify proposed partners, if known (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementing the project, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in the completion of the project.)

OTHER

Budget – Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s Budget Instructions cost categories. Federally-funded projects must be in compliance with OMB Uniform Guidance as applicable (OMB Uniform Guidance).

Matching Contributions – Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised and spent for the project during the Period of Performance. Larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

Procurement – If the applicant chooses to specifically identify proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF’s express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and regulations.

Publicity and Acknowledgement of Support – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF’s financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project.

Receiving Award Funds – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Projects may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

Compliance Requirements – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As may be applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.

Quality Assurance – If a project involves significant monitoring, data collection or data use, grantees will be asked to prepare and submit quality assurance documentation (www.epa.gov/quality). Applicants should budget time and resources to complete this task.

Permits – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements. Where projects involve work in the waters of the United States, NFWF strongly encourages



applicants to conduct a permit pre-application meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers prior to submitting their proposal. In some cases, if a permit pre-application meeting has not been completed, NFWF may require successful applicants to complete such a meeting prior to grant award.

Federal Funding – Federally-funded projects must operate in compliance with the OMB Uniform Guidance as applicable to the applicant. The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the Program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information Conservation Partners.

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| Applicant Webinar | July 26 th , 2:00 PM, Eastern Time |
| Full Proposal Due Date | August 22 nd , 11:59 PM, Eastern Time |
| Review Period | August 23 rd - October |
| Awards Announced | Mid-November |

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Easygrants system.

1. Go to easygrants.nfwf.org to register in our Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.
2. Once on your homepage, click the "Apply for Funding" button and select this RFP's "Funding Opportunity" from the list of options.
3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A PDF version of this RFP can be [downloaded here](#).

A *Tip Sheet* is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be [downloaded here](#).

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page. The webinar will be recorded and will be accessible on the [Conservation Partners](#) page.



For more information or questions about this RFP, please contact:

Eric Forward

Eric.Forward@nfwf.org

612-564-7285

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday-Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.