Conservation Partners Program – State Based Initiatives

2020 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Full Proposal Due Date: Wednesday, May 6, 2020 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time
Hawaii Proposal Due Date: Monday, April 13, 2020 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time

OVERVIEW

The Conservation Partners Program – State Based Initiatives (CPP) is a collaborative effort between multiple state offices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

The purpose of the program is to provide grants on a competitive basis to advance the implementation of shared conservation priorities between NFWF, Hawaii NRCS, Illinois NRCS, Kansas NRCS, Michigan NRCS, Minnesota NRCS, and Tennessee NRCS.

The CPP program funding will support efforts to deliver technical assistance to private landowners as well as specific project types based on the following state priorities.

- Prescribed Burning and Watershed Planning
- Landowner Technical Assistance
- Water Conservation and Rangeland Management
- Nutrient and Sediment Runoff
- Forest and Wetlands Restoration and Management
- Natural Resource Planning

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The Conservation Partners Program - State Based Initiatives has specific geographic areas where funding will be directed. To be eligible, proposals must address specific priorities for one of the following states.

- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Kansas
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Tennessee
STATE PRIORITIES

Hawaii
Natural Resource Planning Professional

In partnership with NRCS Pacific Islands Area, up to $124,000 will be awarded to projects in Hawaii that facilitate implementation of conservation practices that will conserve, restore and enhance priority landscapes and habitats. Priority landscapes and habitats are those that are important wildlife habitat, such as wetlands, which have a nexus with agriculture. The funds through this agreement will be obligated to projects in the Pacific Islands Area that pay for natural resource professionals to work with private landowners and managers, businesses, non-profits, and governmental agencies to implement conservation practices utilizing Farm Bill Programs (ex., EQIP, RCPP, ACEP, etc.). Natural resource professionals hired with these funds will work in collaboration with NRCS to provide strategic outreach and delivery of technical assistance to accomplish project deliverables.

Objectives include:

- Facilitate the development of a Targeted Conservation Delivery or Regional Conservation Partnership Program proposal that addresses conservation, restoration, and/or enhancement of a priority landscape or habitat.
- Perform specialized planning and technical assistance services which may include, but not be limited to:
  - Provide habitat restoration planning, design, construction layout, and inspection.
  - Complete Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance to support implementation of wildlife related conservation practices under NRCS implemented Farm Bill Programs

Typical grant awards will range from $50,000 to $124,000 and project duration can be up to one year. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. For all awards, a match of at least $149,500 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

Full proposal narratives must include anticipated outcomes. A list of metrics is available below. We ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project.

Please note that Full Proposals are due Monday, April 13th, 2020 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time.

Please contact Jana Doi, Manager, Alaska and Hawaii Programs (jana.doi@nfwf.org; 415-243-3102) to discuss your proposed project or with questions.

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<tr>
<th>Recommended Metrics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># jobs created</td>
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<tr>
<td># people (landowners) targeted</td>
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**Illinois**

**Prescribed Burning and Watershed Planning**

In partnership with Illinois NRCS, up to $225,000 will be awarded to projects in Illinois that hire conservation professionals who assist with increasing prescribed burning capacity within Illinois or expand the understanding and implementation of watershed planning among partners in Illinois.

**Prescribed Burning**

Priority projects will support staff positions within Illinois to increase delivery of prescribed burning on private lands, either forestlands or grasslands, and to build organizational capabilities for locally led collaboration on prescribed burn plan writing, training and implementation. Develop, train and assist with coordination of locally led landowner burn association groups to install and implement prescribed burning for implementation of conservation practices.

**Watershed Planning**

Priority projects will support staff positions within Illinois to expand the understanding and implementation of watershed planning with NRCS and partners in Illinois. Positions will work to develop and initiate implementation of watershed plans and/or convene agency, NGO, and other conservation partners to increase collective understanding of partnership, resource leveraging, and shared learning opportunities.

Typical grant awards will range from $50,000 to $150,000 and project duration can be up to three years. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. For all awards, a match of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

Full proposal narratives must include anticipated outcomes (if applicable) in terms of number of new jobs created or existing jobs sustained, number and acres of conservation practices implemented, acres of prescribed burn planning completed, number of watershed based plans initiated or created, number of landowner based plans initiated or created, number of prescribed burning landowner groups initiated, number of landowners trained in prescribed burning implementation, and number of partners involved in newly developed efforts.

Please contact Eric Forward, Program Director, Central Region Working Lands (eric.forward@nfwf.org; 612-564-7285) to discuss your proposed project or with questions.

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<th><strong>Recommended Metrics in Easygrants</strong></th>
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**Kansas**

**Landowner Technical Assistance**

In partnership with Kansas NRCS, up to $135,000 will be awarded to projects in the western half of Kansas that hire field conservation professionals who assist private landowners in implementing conservation practices and increase participation in federal Farm Bill programs. Priority will be given to projects that focus on: 1) grassland health by implementing practices such as prescribed grazing, prescribed burning, and brush management (noxious and invasive plants); 2) increasing water quantity by improving irrigation efficiency or other water conservation measure; and 3) other soil health related activities.

Priority projects will support staff positions to increase delivery of private landowner technical assistance for conservation on working lands, assist private landowners with designing and implementing conservation practices, assist private landowners with developing water conservation plans, grazing plans and other conservation plans, and assist landowners with enrolling in Farm Bill programs.

Typical grant awards will range from $50,000 to $135,000 and project duration can be up to three years. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. For all awards, a match of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

Full proposal narratives must include anticipated outcomes (if applicable) in terms of number of jobs created or sustained, number of conservation practice referrals, number and acres of conservation practices implemented, estimated quantity of water conserved.

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**Michigan**

**Landowner Technical Assistance**

In partnership with Michigan NRCS, up to $328,000 will be awarded to projects in Michigan that hire field conservation professionals who assist private landowners in implementing contracted conservation practices and increase participation in federal Farm Bill programs. Priority will be given to projects that will reduce nutrient runoff and sedimentation from agricultural lands, improving the ecological condition of priority watersheds. Typical grant awards to support these positions will range from $60,000 to $328,000, and a
matching contribution of at least 25% of the total funding request in non-federal cash or in-kind services will be most competitive.

Applicants are encouraged to identify how positions will implement NRCS priority practices in the proposal narrative, including a reference to position skills and knowledge related to the conservation practice as indicated in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). Priority will be given to proposals supporting term positions of at least two years. The project narrative should include a clear timetable or schedule for project completion. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. The end date for projects indicated in the application may not extend past June 30, 2023.

All applications must report anticipated outcomes in terms of pounds of sediment and phosphorus inputs avoided annually, number of landowner technical assistance jobs sustained, and number of NRCS conservation practices implemented for Farm Bill Program contracts (include in the full proposal narrative). Applicants proposing forestry work must also include the number of acres of improved plant and wildlife habitat condition resulting from project activities in the full proposal narrative.

Please contact Aislinn Gauchay, NFWF Great Lakes Program Director (aislinn.gauchay@nfwf.org; 612-564-7284) to discuss your proposed project or with questions.

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**Minnesota**

**Grazing Lands Management**

In partnership with the Minnesota NRCS, up to $360,000 will be awarded to projects that advance production management on grazing lands in central and northwestern Minnesota. Projects are sought that will hire field conservation professionals to deliver technical assistance to assist private landowners in implementing conservation practices and increase participation in federal Farm Bill programs on grazing lands. Priority will be given to projects that accelerate the development and implementation of grazing plans, promote innovative grazing approaches, improve soil health, increase wildlife habitat benefits or improve water quality on working lands.

Eligible counties include Becker, Benton, Cass, Clay, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Kittson, Mahnomen, Marshall, Morrison, Norman, Otter Tail, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau, Stearns, Todd, and Wadena.
Typical grant awards will range from $50,000 to $150,000 and project duration can be up to three years. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. For all awards, a match of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

Full proposal narratives must include anticipated outcomes (if applicable) in terms of number of jobs created or sustained, number of conservation practice referrals, number and acres of conservation practices implemented.

Each project selected for funding should include a component that helps promote the grant activities, methods, and successes of their project in delivering conservation to private landowners. Outreach materials that are developed should emphasize the grant funded activities and should reach a broad and diverse audience of agricultural producers.

Please contact Eric Forward, Program Director, Central Region Working Lands (eric.forward@nfwf.org; 612-564-7285) to discuss your proposed project or with questions.

### Recommended Metrics

- # jobs sustained
- # jobs created
- # management/conservation plans with BMPs
- # people (landowners) targeted
- Acres with BMPs
- Acres under improved management

### Tennessee

**Forest and Wetlands Restoration and Management**

In partnership with the Tennessee NRCS, up to $225,000 will be awarded to projects that hire forestry professionals who promote management of privately-owned forested lands in western Tennessee, including upland, riparian and bottomland forests for multiple resource benefits, including forest health, wildlife habitat, fuels reduction and water quality. Preference will be given to foresters focused located within Area One (Jackson Area Office), as defined by Tennessee NRCS, and who will provide forestry assistance to private landowners, communities and public agencies to achieve optimum environmental, economic and social benefits from forest resources. In addition, the forester will implement silvicultural practices and deliver technical assistance and financial assistance programs under the direction of cooperating partners.

Typical grant awards will range from $50,000 to $225,000 and project duration can be up to three years. Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent or applied. For all awards, a match of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind is required, and will be considered in application review.

Please contact Jon Scott, NFWF Southern Forests Program Director (jonathan.scott@nfwf.org; 202-595-2609) to discuss your proposed project or with questions.
### Recommended Metrics in Easygrants

- # management/conservation plans with BMPs
- # people (landowners) targeted
- # people (landowners) reached
- # people (landowners) taking action
- Acres of upland forest restored (planted)
- Acres of bottomland forest restored (planted)
- # of seedlings planted
- Acres of upland forest under improved management
- Acres of prescribed burning
- Acres of bottomland forest under improved management
- Acres with restored hydrology
- Acres protected under easement
- # of jobs created

### 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.

### 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.
**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.

**Cost-Effectiveness** – Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation may include, but is not limited to, an assessment of either or both direct and indirect costs in the proposed budget. The federal government has determined that a *de minimis* 10% indirect rate is an acceptable minimum for organizations without a NICRA, as such NFWF reserves the right to scrutinize ALL proposals with indirect rates above 10% for cost-effectiveness.

**Transferability** – Project has potential and plan to transfer lessons learned to other communities.

**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). Proposals that minimize the amount requested to cover indirect costs will be more competitive.

**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.

**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 at Conservation Partners.

- **Full Proposal Due Date** May 6th, 11:59 PM, Eastern Time
- **Hawaii Full Proposal Due Date** April 13, 11:59 PM, Eastern Time
- **Review Period** May 7th – June 21st
- **Awards Announced** Late June
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 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. A 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.