



CENTRAL APPALACHIA HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

2020 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, June 25, 2020 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**
Applicant Webinar: **Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at 1:30-3:00 PM, Eastern Time**

OVERVIEW

The Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program will award grants to restore and sustain healthy forests, rivers and streams that provide habitat for diverse native bird and aquatic populations. Approximately \$2 million is available this year. Major funding is provided by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the American Forest Foundation and Shell Oil Company.

The overall goal of the program is to improve the quality and connectivity of forest and freshwater habitat in order to increase the distribution and abundance of fish, birds and other wildlife, as evidenced by a suite of species that collectively are indicators of forest and freshwater habitat condition. The program aims to:

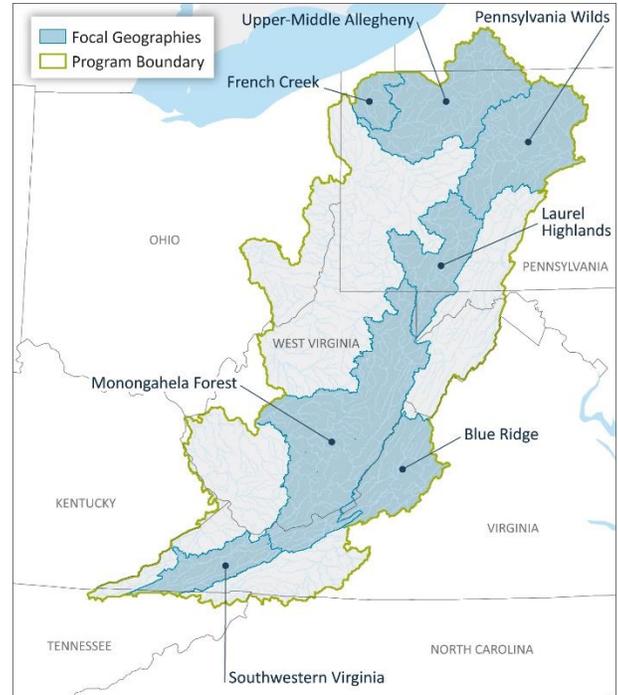
- improve the management of public and private forestlands in order to create blocks with a mosaic of mixed-aged forests that support a diversity of bird and wildlife species, especially targeting golden-winged warbler, wood thrush and cerulean warbler; and
- bolster populations of eastern brook trout, eastern hellbender and native freshwater mussels by removing barriers to fish passage, restoring riparian and in-stream habitat, and improving water quality and hydrology.

Applicants are encouraged to deploy a range of strategies to engage public and private landowners in active stewardship through technical and financial assistance, demonstrations, education and outreach and other innovative approaches.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program will award grants in portions of the Appalachian region of Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia. Priority will be given to projects within seven focal geographies (see map at right). These geographies were selected by analyzing large watersheds with priority forest and freshwater habitat for target species, with a goal of sustaining and improving large, contiguous blocks of the highest quality habitat. The seven focal geographies, are listed below along with the HUC8 watersheds that comprise them.

- **French Creek** – French Creek watershed
- **Upper-Middle Allegheny** - Upper Allegheny, Middle Allegheny-Tionesta and Clarion watersheds
- **Pennsylvania Wilds** - Pine, Middle West Branch Susquehanna, Bald Eagle, Sinnemahoning and Upper West Branch Susquehanna watersheds
- **Laurel Highlands** - Conemaugh and Youghiogheny watersheds
- **Monongahela Forest** - Cheat, Tygart Valley, Elk, Gauley, Greenbrier, Lower and Middle New watersheds
- **Blue Ridge** - Maury and Upper James watersheds
- **Southwestern Virginia** - Upper Clinch and North Fork Holston watersheds



To view an interactive version of the map, visit <https://arcg.is/14SPzX>. For more detailed information about priority habitats and partner priorities, visit NFWF’s Central Appalachia Business Plan GIS portal at https://web.tplgis.org/nfwf_centralapps/. Of particular interest, view the NRCS Golden-winged Warbler (GWW) Working Group Focus Areas and Priority Areas for Conservation.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

All proposals should strive to implement strategies and contribute to goals detailed in NFWF’s [Central Appalachia Business Plan](#) (March 2019). Priority strategies for funding in 2020 are detailed below.

1. Restore and Manage Forest Blocks in Focal Geographies

NFWF will invest in the management of forest blocks to enhance age and structural diversity that demonstrates improved forest conditions for golden-winged, wood thrush and cerulean warbler. **Focal geographies:** continued implementation of forest management activities in established and developing forest blocks in the [Upper-Middle Allegheny](#), [Pennsylvania Wilds](#) and [Laurel Highlands](#), and establishment of new forest blocks in the [Monongahela Forest](#), and [Blue Ridge](#). In addition, projects that occur within the NRCS GWW Working Group Focus Areas and Priority Areas for Conservation are encouraged.

- **Assessment/Planning:** Provide forest management decision support tools that encourage landscape level planning to manage for an appropriate mix of age and structural diversity that also is adaptable to meeting the needs and interests of public and private landowners at the parcel and forest block scale. Forest management plans should be written by certified foresters qualified to write plans for NRCS producers.

- **Forest Block Restoration:** Implement forest management projects that use a range of practices and prescriptions to create a diversity of age and structure across contiguous forest blocks of at least 5,000 acres. Projects that engage landowners with a range of property sizes and interests are strongly encouraged.
- **Restoration Response Monitoring:** Demonstrate scalable, cost-effective monitoring tools and strategies to measure species population response to habitat restoration. Proposals should test approaches within dynamic forest blocks exceeding 5,000 acres, and expand on proven point count monitoring techniques, employing emerging technology for both detection and for biodiversity more generally. Demonstrations of Automated Acoustic Sensors are of particular interest to achieve more powerful and robust sampling through repeated measurement across the full diurnal cycle and record sound data for a diversity of wildlife.

2. Target Outreach and Assistance to Key Forest Landowners and Practitioners

NFWF will invest in strategies to continue to grow the universe of willing landowners and knowledgeable practitioners in order to lay the groundwork to take the dynamic forest block approach to scale. **Focal geographies:** These strategies may be implemented in any of the focal geographies, as well as the larger central Appalachia program boundary.

- **Outreach:** Execute innovative outreach and marketing strategies to engage target audiences (e.g., family woodland owners, municipalities, consulting foresters, loggers), in adopting forest management practices that enhance habitat conditions, with a focus on private forestlands that are adjacent to or in close proximity to established dynamic forest blocks, dynamic forest blocks that are under development, and/or other state or federal forestlands. (These established and developing dynamic forest blocks are areas where prior NFWF grants have supported landscape-level planning to inform management to achieve an appropriate mix of age and structural diversity that meets the needs of landowners and wildlife at the parcel and forest block scale.) Proposals should clearly describe how relationships with willing landowners will be managed, and by whom, in order to ensure landowners receive ongoing support for project planning, financing and transition to on-the-ground implementation. (Projects planning to leverage NRCS technical and/or financial assistance must include letters of support from the relevant NRCS state office.)
- **Technical Assistance:** Increase the number of qualified consulting foresters (esp. NRCS-certified Technical Service Providers) available to write forest management plans that include enhancing wildlife habitat condition, with a focus on plans that meet NRCS standards for cost-share. Proposals should use innovative strategies to address challenges such as recruitment and retention.
- **Landowner Demonstration Projects:** Create forest demonstration projects that target key audiences through hands-on learning, field tours, and other strategies to accelerate adoption of management prescriptions. Young forest demonstrations should target management prescriptions for forest stands on lands that lack structural diversity for golden-winged warbler, as well as prairie warbler and American woodcock, all of which utilize young forest habitat during critical stages of their life cycle. Mature and late succession demonstrations

should maximize habitat quality for wood thrush and cerulean warbler. This may include non-commercial harvests to manage understory, canopy or create gaps within mature stands. Demonstration projects should include plans for conveying lessons learned to landowners, loggers, consulting foresters and other conservation professionals throughout the region.

3. Sustain and Improve High Integrity Habitat for Eastern Brook Trout

NFWF will invest in strategies to improve habitat quality and connectivity within and between eastern brook trout population patches. NFWF prioritizes allopatric populations that have been characterized as *resilient* or *redundant* through Trout Unlimited's eastern brook trout conservation portfolio assessment [Conservation Portfolio](#). **Focal geographies:** *Upper-Middle Allegheny, Pennsylvania Wilds, Monongahela Forest, Blue Ridge and Southwestern Virginia.*

- **Eastern Brook Trout Patch Assessments:** Assess habitat condition and threats in priority brook trout population patches to identify opportunities to improve habitat conditions. Patch assessments should include, but are not limited to, identifying passage barriers, water quality hot spots, streambank erosion, gaps in riparian buffer and livestock exclusion, presence of non-native trout and invasive species.
- **Restore Aquatic Connectivity within and between Priority Population Patches:** Prioritize and remove barriers to aquatic organism passage, including replacing culverts and removing under-utilized dams. Project funds can support on-the-ground restoration, engineering design, permit fees, and stream barrier surveys to determine priorities for future connectivity restoration. Projects are encouraged, where possible, to demonstrate the benefits of aquatic connectivity projects to human communities through reduced flooding and risk of infrastructure failures. The Aquatic Barrier Prioritization Tool <http://maps.freshwaternet.org/northeast/> is a useful resource in planning projects.
- **Restore Riparian Forests:** Reforest riparian buffers. Buffers should be sized and placed to maximize benefits to eastern brook trout and wildlife, as well as water quality.¹ Projects should include long-term maintenance strategies for new buffers, addressing issues such as deer browse, invasive species and competitive vegetation management, and mortality.
- **Improve Conservation on Agricultural Lands:** Provide technical and financial assistance to address all conservation concerns on farms that have the greatest impact for eastern brook trout, including water quality, erosion and hydrologic modifications. Projects should implement conservation practices that meet or exceed the performance of related federal and state-approved methods and specifications, unless flexibility is necessary to demonstrate an innovative approach or technology. Outreach should target farms that have conservation, manure management, and/or nutrient management plans in place, as appropriate. Where these plans are not in place, projects should prioritize developing plans prior to implementing conservation practices.

¹ In most cases, reforested buffers should range between 50 feet and 100 feet wide, be planted with 200 – 250 native tree and shrub seedlings per acre, and be protected from deer browse and competition from invasive species.

- **Reduce Erosion and Sedimentation from Dirt and Gravel Roads:** Implement dirt and gravel road best management practices, in partnership with county conservation districts, municipalities and state agencies. Projects should focus on road-stream crossings that will reduce sediment delivery to streams with priority eastern brook trout population patches.

4. Restore Eastern Hellbender and Freshwater Mussel Habitat and Increase Occupancy

NFWF will invest in strategies to increase eastern hellbender populations, and the abundance and diversity of native freshwater mussels. **Focal geographies:** *French Creek and Southwestern Virginia, as well as Upper-Middle Allegheny, Pennsylvania Wilds, Monongahela Forest and Blue Ridge.*

- **Re-establish Hellbender Occupancy and Improve Habitat:** Enhance hellbender nesting habitat in watersheds where hellbender have recently gained access to high-quality habitat resulting from dam removals or where significant water quality improvement projects have recently been completed. Where localized sedimentation or barriers to movement may limit nesting success, implement restoration to minimize these threats, including culvert replacements, riparian buffer restoration and livestock exclusion fencing. Projects are encouraged to monitor hellbender population response to interventions, including eDNA.
- **Re-establish Freshwater Mussel Occupancy and Improve Habitat:** Re-introduce freshwater mussel species to targeted watersheds, especially those that have had significant dam removals or flow regime changes that would increase potential for reproductive success. Remedy barriers to movement for mussels and their host species, including culverts and dams, as well as stream segments impacted by acid mine drainage or increased temperatures that also can serve as barriers to fish movement.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the *Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program* has a list of metrics in Easygrants for applicants to choose from for future reporting. We ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project (all possible program metrics are shown in the table below). Refer to the descriptions of the program priorities, above, to determine which metrics are most suitable. If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact *John Wright* to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Program Priority		Metric	Guidance
1. Restore and Manage Forest Blocks in Focal Geographies	Assessment/ Planning	Central Apps - Tool development for decision-making - # tools developed	Enter the number of tools developed.
	Forest Block Restoration	Central Apps - Forest Management Planning - # of acres covered by dynamic forest plans	Enter the total acres for each dynamic forest plan (sum if several plans are created under the grant).
		Central Apps - Golden-Winged Warbler - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres of forest management implemented to enhance young forest habitat . In NOTES indicate if the acres are part of a dynamic forest plan.
		Central Apps - Wood Thrush - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres of forest management implemented to enhance mature forest habitat . In NOTES indicate if the acres are part of a dynamic forest plan.

		Central Apps - Cerulean Warbler - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres of forest management implemented to enhance late successional forest habitat . In NOTES indicate if the acres are part of a dynamic forest plan.
		Central Apps - Monitoring - Acres being monitored	Enter the total number of acres being monitored. In NOTES indicate the species and habitat being monitored. If you are monitoring eastern brook trout please use the metric specifically provided for eastern brook trout- # sites being monitored
	Species Outcomes	Central Apps - Cerulean Warbler - Population - # sites occupied by species	Enter the number of sites occupied by cerulean warbler
		Central Apps - Wood Thrush - Population - # sites occupied by species	Enter the number of sites occupied by wood thrush
		Central Apps - Golden-Winged Warbler - Population - # sites occupied by species	Enter the number of sites occupied by golden-winged warbler
2. Target Outreach and Assistance to Key Forest Landowners and Practitioners	Outreach and Technical Assistance	Central Apps - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities	Enter the number of people reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities
		Central Apps - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # of people demonstrating a minimum level of behavior change	Enter the number of individuals demonstrating a minimum level of behavior change
	Landowner Demonstration Projects	Central Apps - Golden-Winged Warbler - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres managed to create a young forest demonstration project.
		Central Apps - Wood Thrush - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres managed to create a mature forest demonstration project.
		Central Apps - Cerulean Warbler - Improved management practices - Acres under improved management	Enter the acres managed to create a late successional forest demonstration project.
		Central Apps - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - Conservation demonstration sites	Enter the number of demonstration sites created.
	3. Sustain and Improve High Integrity Habitat for Eastern Brook Trout	Eastern Brook Trout Patch Assessments	Central Apps - Research - # of sites assessed
Restoration Response Monitoring		Central Apps - Monitoring - # sites being monitored	Enter the # of small watersheds being monitored for eastern brook trout population response to habitat restoration.
Restore Aquatic Connectivity within and between Priority Population Patches		Central Apps - Fish passage improvements - # passage barriers rectified	Enter the number of aquatic organism passage barriers rectified. In the NOTES section indicate what type(s) of barrier(s) are being removed or replaced (e.g., culvert, dam).
		Central Apps - Fish passage improvements - Miles of stream opened	Enter the number of miles of previously inaccessible stream habitat opened. In NOTES list the targeted species.
Restore Riparian Forests		Central Apps - Riparian restoration - Miles restored	Enter total number of riparian forest miles restored. If you are restoring wetlands use the acres of wetland restored metric.
Improve Conservation on Agricultural Lands		Central Apps - BMP implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction - Acres with BMPs to reduce nutrient or sediment loads	Enter the number of acres with Best Management Practices (BMPs) implemented. In NOTES indicate the type of BMP(s) (e.g., continuous non-till, enhanced nutrient management)
		Central Apps - BMP implementation for livestock fencing - Miles of fencing installed	Enter the number of miles of fencing installed (fencing on both sides of a stream should be reported as double the miles).
		Central Apps - Stream restoration - Miles restored	Enter the total miles of stream restored through habitat structures, erosion control, streambank stabilization, floodplain and/or stream channel modification. Use separate metrics provided for riparian buffers, livestock exclusion, and wetlands.

		Central Apps - Wetland restoration - Acres restored	Enter the number of acres of wetland restored. (If you are restoring riparian forests use the miles of riparian forest restoration metric.)
	Reduce Erosion and Sedimentation from Dirt and Gravel Roads	Central Apps - BMP implementation for road improvements - Miles of road improved	Indicate the number of miles improved by installing BMPs that reduce erosion
	Eastern Brook Trout Outcome	Central Apps - Habitat Quality - # of habitat units improved	Enter the number of eastern brook trout population patches with improved status
4. Restore Eastern Hellbender and Freshwater Mussel Habitat and Increase Occupancy	Re-establish Hellbender Occupancy and Improve Habitat*	Central Apps - Nesting Sites - # nesting sites installed	Enter the number of hellbender nest sites created or enhanced.
		Central Apps - Hellbender - Population - Miles of habitat occupied	Enter the number of miles of habitat occupied by eastern hellbender
	Re-establish Freshwater Mussel Occupancy and Improve Habitat*	Central Apps - Captive breeding/ rearing/ rehab facilities - # individuals released	Enter the number of individual freshwater mussels released or translocated
Other Activities		Central Apps – Conservation easements - Acres protected under long- term easement (permanent or > 30-yr)	Enter the number of acres
		Central Apps - Volunteer participation - # volunteers participating in projects	Enter the number of volunteers participating in habitat restoration activities

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, Indian tribes and educational institutions.
- Ineligible applicants include U.S. Federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations.

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.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

The Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program will award approximately \$2 million in grants this year. Grants will range from \$50,000 to \$200,000 each. Projects should begin within six months of the award date and be completed within two to three years from the agreed start date. These grants strongly encourage non-federal matching contributions valued at 50% or more of the total project costs (1:1 ratio).

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.

Technical Merit and Work Plan – 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.

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

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.

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 – 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 [Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program](#).

Applicant Webinar Register Here	May 20 th 1:30 - 3:00 pm, EDT
Full Proposal Due Date	June 25 th , by 11:59 pm EDT
Review and Notification Period	July - 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 *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.

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

John Wright, Manager, Northeastern Regional Office, NFWF

john.wright@nfwf.org

(202) 595-2478

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.