

Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund

2021 Request For Proposals

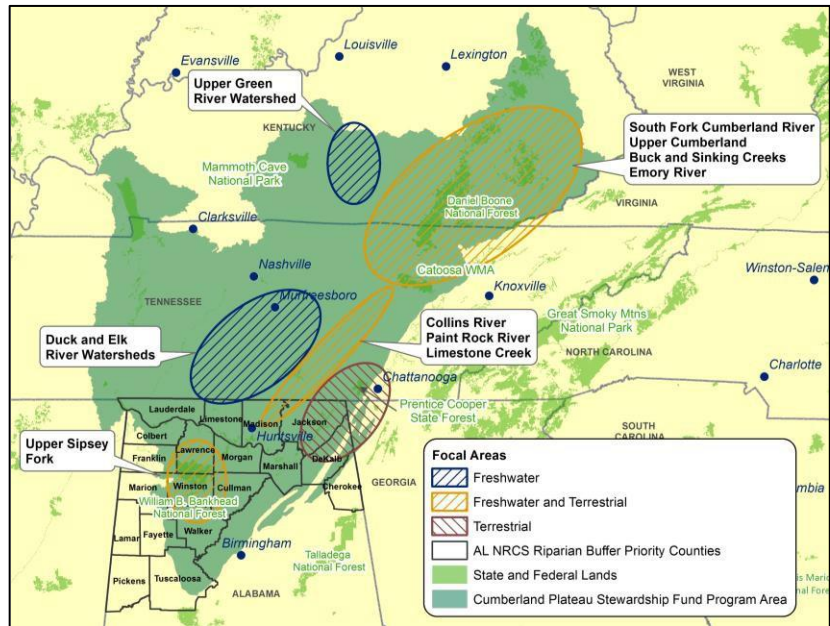
Applicant Webinar ([Register Here](#)): **Thursday, December 10, 2020, at 2:00 PM Eastern Time**
 Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, February 18, 2021 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is soliciting proposals within the Cumberland Plateau region that will help accelerate the restoration and enhancement of critical forest and freshwater habitats and associated wildlife species in the region. Funding is provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, International Paper’s Forestland Stewards Partnership, and the Altria Group. Approximately \$1 million is expected to be available for grants this funding cycle.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Projects within the Cumberland Plateau in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia are eligible with preference given to projects located within the identified focal areas ([View Interactive Map](#)). Focal areas were selected by analyzing upland and riparian forest and freshwater systems, and represent locations with the greatest potential for restoration and benefit to priority species. These focus areas are based on resource mapping, interviews with the practitioners in the field, and capacity to carry out the work.



PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund (Fund) seeks to support multiple strategic objectives including the implementation of the [Forestland Stewards partnership business plan](#), which includes strategic priorities and goals to enhance forest ecosystems for the benefit of wildlife species and freshwater systems, while promoting and supporting working forests.

The Fund also seeks to support implementation of the [Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan](#) for those portions of the historical shortleaf pine range that fall within the Fund’s program area, as well as restoration and enhancement of aquatic habitat and species within high priority watersheds identified through [The Southeastern Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](#) that are located within the Fund’s program area.

Preference will be given to projects that effectively implement one or more of the strategies below to improve shortleaf pine and/or oak forest, riparian forest, soil health, water quality, and/or in-stream habitats and populations of associated wildlife species, such as northern bobwhite, prairie warbler, as well as fish, amphibians and other aquatic species. **Note:** NFWF is particularly interested in projects that help improve the understanding and quantification of the carbon and water outcomes of upland and riparian forest restoration,

enhancement and management projects, as well as conservation practices on agricultural lands. Applicants are encouraged to reach out to program staff prior to submitting a proposal to discuss projects that will address carbon and water benefits.

- 1. Establishing Shortleaf Pine and Oak Forests:** Includes projects that create new shortleaf pine and/or oak forest habitat, including site preparation and planting on public and private lands. Proposals should describe all necessary site preparation for planting, number of acres and seedlings that will be planted, and summarize plans to promote sustainability and maintenance of plantings.
- 2. Enhancing and Maintaining Existing Shortleaf Pine and Oak Ecosystems:** Includes projects that support the enhancement and management of existing shortleaf pine and/or oak forest systems on public and private lands, with an emphasis on improving forest conditions to benefit wildlife. The following practices are eligible and applicants must demonstrate how these strategies contribute towards sustainable shortleaf and/or oak ecosystem management:

Prescribed Burning

- Increase prescribed fire on private and public lands, including capacity, coordination and collaboration through fire teams, prescribed burn associations, and/or other strategies.
- Provide technical assistance, training and/or other incentives to increase prescribed burning on private lands, including, but not limited to assisting USDA service center staff in writing burn plans and implementing financial assistance contracts through NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other programs.
- Pursue innovations and address specific barriers or roadblocks to prescribed burning, including strategies that may be transferred to other regions.

Other Silvicultural Treatments

Where prescribed fire is not sufficient or appropriate for achieving shortleaf pine and/or oak ecosystem restoration, the following strategies will be considered.

- Over-story treatments, including thinning and pre-commercial thinning, aimed at reducing over-story tree density, improving over-story structure, release of shortleaf pine and/or oak regeneration, or to implement uneven-aged or patch-cut silvicultural treatments.
- Mid-story treatments including mechanical and chemical treatments to remove or control mid-story hardwood or pine encroachment.
- Planting native under-story species to improve wildlife habitat and support the application of prescribed fire.
- Invasive species treatments including herbicide or mechanical single or multiple treatments to control non-native, invasive plant species.

- 3. Restoring and Enhancing Riparian Forests and Watershed Health to Support Aquatic Species:** Includes projects that restore riparian forests, implement forestry and agricultural best management practices, and/or restore in-stream habitats to improve soil, forest, and watershed health, enhance freshwater habitat and support at-risk aquatic species. Applicants seeking support for riparian or in-stream restoration projects should reference the [The Southeast Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](#) for additional information on priority watersheds within the Cumberland Plateau program boundary. A variety of practices are eligible including, but not limited to:

Restore and Enhance Riparian Forests

- Reforest riparian buffers with native riparian forest species.

- Implement forest management practices, such as thinning, that will improve wildlife habitat.
- Control invasive species, such as hemlock woolly adelgid, which threaten riparian forest health.

Improve Conservation Practices on Agricultural Lands

- Increase adoption of cover crops, reduced tillage, and diversified crop rotations.
- Promote responsible incorporation of crop residue, manures, and other sources of organic matter into soil management systems.
- Establish and enhance farmer-led education and outreach programs to drive increased adoption of soil health practices.
- Install fencing and alternative watering systems to exclude livestock from streams.

For projects implementing conservation practices on agricultural lands, applicants should seek to utilize existing federal, state, and local cost-share and incentive programs to finance implementation of practices, with NFWF funding for practice implementation used to strategically fill gaps in existing funding programs. Where NFWF funding is sought to cover all or a portion of costs for practice implementation, applicants must describe why other public programs are insufficient or otherwise inappropriate for financing proposed practice implementation.

Restore Aquatic Connectivity and Improve In-Stream Habitat Conditions

- Remove or retrofit stream barriers (low-head dams) and stream crossings (culverts, concrete fords), and/or other in-stream restoration practices to improve aquatic habitat within focal watersheds ([View Map](#)). **Note:** Preference will be given to proposals that remove or retrofit high priority barriers or crossings within watersheds where barrier/crossing surveys and/or assessments are being developed or have been completed with an emphasis on lower cost/high gain methods in locations known to fragment habitat for priority species.

- 4. Expanding and Coordinating Technical Assistance and Outreach:** Includes projects that implement targeted outreach and assistance to measurably increase private landowners and/or producers engaged in habitat stewardship practices. Proposals must estimate the number of acres and/or miles to be restored or enhanced as a result of proposed technical assistance and outreach activities. Projects should effectively align with and complement other existing private land initiatives, implementation plans or programs, such as [US Fish & Wildlife Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program](#) and [USDA's Working Lands for Wildlife](#). NFWF also seeks projects that include outreach and technical assistance to, and enhanced participation of underserved landowners, including [USDA's historically underserved farmers and ranchers](#).

- **Increase outreach and technical assistance delivery success:** Support increased landowner and/or producer outreach and technical assistance. Strategies may include:
 - Increasing capacity through the hiring of staff or contractors to provide technical assistance on private lands, develop forest management, prescribed burn plans, and/or conservation plans, and assist with implementation of restoration and management treatments, including but not limited to practices funded through existing and new financial assistance contracts.
 - Implementing innovative methods to engage private landowners or producers and expand on-the-ground restoration and protection activities on private lands, such as utilizing social marketing and preference data to identify and better understand landowner or producer motivations and barriers to participation in conservation efforts.
 - Targeting outreach for private landowners and producers and working with NRCS, FWS and other partners to prioritize, plan and deliver financial assistance such as EQIP, Partners for

Fish and Wildlife Program, Working Lands for Wildlife and other programs to improve habitat and support at-risk species.

- **Advancing new market-oriented and/or incentive programs:** Pilot innovative, market-oriented solutions and incentive programs that stimulate landowner participation in shortleaf pine and/or oak ecosystem recovery, agricultural best management practice implementation, riparian forest restoration, and/or in-stream habitat restoration efforts.
- **Increasing participation in third-party forest certification:** Increase participation in third-party forest certification programs to encourage third-party verification of sustainable forest management practices that improve forest health and benefit wildlife.

5. Conservation Easements: Limited funding is available to facilitate targeted conservation easement projects that protect existing, high quality shortleaf pine, oak and/or riparian forest habitat, or key sites targeted for shortleaf pine and/or ecosystem and/or riparian forest restoration that are part of larger forest restoration proposals. Preference will be given to projects that protect working forests. Requests for conservation easement funding should not exceed 20% of the total proposal request and should be for transaction or due diligence costs, such as surveys, appraisal, environmental report, etc. In limited instances, highly leveraged projects will be considered for acquisition costs. Please contact Jon Scott (jonathan.scott@nfwf.org) to discuss specific land conservation projects.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund has a list of metrics in Easygrants for full proposal 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). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Jon Scott (Jonathan.scott@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Projects that may involve organizations or producers that identify as one or more of the federal Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories (described on page 9) are encouraged to apply and should report impact on such categories in the notes section of their selected metrics shown below.

Strategy	Easygrants Metric	Additional Guidance
Establish Shortleaf Pine and Oak Forests	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land restoration - Acres restored on private land	Enter the number of acres of shortleaf pine and/or oak planted on private lands.
	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land restoration - Acres restored on public land	Enter the number of acres of shortleaf pine and/or oak planted on public lands.
	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on private lands	Enter the number of shortleaf pine and/or oak seedlings planted on private lands. To the extent possible, please breakout the number of shortleaf pine and oak seedlings in the notes section.
	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on public lands	Enter the number of shortleaf pine and/or oak seedlings planted on public lands. To the extent possible, please breakout the number of shortleaf pine and oak seedlings in the notes section.
Enhance and Maintain Existing Shortleaf Pine and Oak Ecosystems	CPF - BMP implementation for prescribed burns - Acres private land burned	Enter the number of acres of prescribed burning completed on shortleaf pine and/or oak habitat on private lands.

		Include site prep burning in this metric.
	CPF - BMP implementation for prescribed burns - Acres public land burned	Enter the number of acres of prescribed burning completed on shortleaf pine and/or oak habitat on public lands. Include site prep burning in this metric.
	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (private)	Enter the number of acres of over-story treated, mid-story treated, native under-story established, and/or invasive plant species treated within existing shortleaf pine and/or oak habitat on private lands. Acres of prescribed fire should <u>not</u> be included in this total. An acre is to be reported on only one time, even if subjected to more than one treatment.
	CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (public)	Enter the number of acres of over-story treated, mid-story treated, native under-story established, and/or invasive plant species treated within existing shortleaf pine and/or oak habitat on public lands. Acres of prescribed fire should <u>not</u> be included in this total. An acre is to be reported on only one time, even if subjected to more than one treatment.
Restore and Enhance Riparian Forests and Watershed Health to Support Aquatic Species	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Riparian restoration - Acres restored on private land	Enter the number of acres of riparian forest planted on private lands.
	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Riparian restoration - Acres restored on public land	Enter the number of acres of riparian forest planted on public lands.
	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on private lands	Enter the number of riparian tree seedlings planted on private lands.
	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on public lands	Enter the number of riparian tree seedlings planted on public lands.
	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (private)	Enter the number of acres of riparian forest under improved management on private lands.
	CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (public)	Enter the number of acres of riparian forest under improved management on public lands.
	CPF - BMP implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction - Acres with BMPs	Enter the number of acres of best management practices implemented on agricultural lands.
	CPF - Improved management practices - Miles under improved mgmt (private)	Enter the number of miles of riparian habitat under improved management on private lands.
	CPF - Improved management practices - Miles under improved mgmt (public)	Enter the number of miles of riparian habitat under improved management on public lands.
	CPF - Fish passage improvements - Miles	Enter the number of miles of stream

	of stream opened	habitat that will be opened/reconnected by removing or retrofitting in-stream barriers.
Expand and Coordinate Technical Assistance and Outreach	<p>Note: Projects that will engage private landowners and/or producers should select all three of the following metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # people targeted • # people reached • # people with changed behavior <p>Data for all three metrics will enable NFWF to better understand landowner/producer response to outreach, education and technical assistance efforts.</p>	
	CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people targeted	Enter the number of landowners and/or producers targeted by outreach activities. Examples include direct mailings and targeted media advertisements. If applicable, in the notes section, please report the number of people targeted in each underserved/special emphasis category.
	CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people reached	Enter the number of landowners and/or producers anticipated to be reached through educational meetings, trainings and/or technical assistance. The target value for this metric should be a subset of the “# of people targeted” metric. If the target value includes landowners or producers reached through more than one activity, please break out in the notes section. If applicable, in the notes section, please report the number of people reached in each underserved/special emphasis category.
	CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people with changed behavior	Enter the number of landowners and/or producers reached who are expected to implement conservation actions. Examples include developing a conservation plan, enrolling in a financial assistance program, implementing a conservation practice. The target value for this metric should be a subset of the “# of people reached” metric. If applicable, in the notes section, please report the number of people with changed behavior in each underserved/special emphasis category.
Conservation Easements	CPF - Conservation easements - Acres protected under easement	Acres of shortleaf pine, oak and/or riparian forest habitat protected by conservation easements.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, Tribal Governments and Organizations, and educational institutions.
- Ineligible applicants include U.S. Federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations. U.S. Federal agencies, businesses and unincorporated individuals are encouraged to partner with applicants, but are not eligible to submit an application.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- **Equipment:** Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases. NFWF acknowledges, however, that some projects may only be completed using NFWF funds to procure equipment. If this applies to your project, please contact the program staff listed in this RFP to discuss options.
- 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 Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund anticipates awarding approximately \$1 million in grants in 2021. Grant awards are expected to range from \$100,000 to \$250,000. This program has one annual application cycle and awards approximately 6-8 grants per year. Projects should begin within six months of the award date and be completed within two to three years from the start date. These grants require non-federal matching contributions valued at 50% of the total project costs (1:1 ratio).

Work on Public Lands: Work performed on Federal, state, and local public lands are eligible across the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund geography. **Projects that focus on public lands are strongly encouraged to include work on private lands as part of the broader project scope.** Please contact Jon Scott at jonathan.scott@nfwf.org to discuss potential work on public lands prior to submitting an application.

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 Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund’s acreage, habitat and species goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics that will be tracked and measured to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities outlined in the request for proposals.

Conservation Plan and Context – Describe how the project advances the [Forestland Stewards partnership business plan](#). Proposals also should highlight how efforts will expand new or existing restoration and conservation initiatives, such as the [Shortleaf Pine Initiative](#) and [Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan](#), and the [The Southeast Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](#) to maximize large-scale ecosystem function.

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, and design and implementation. Applications involving private lands should be shared with the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist for input and guidance before submission ([View NRCS State conservationist contacts](#)).

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.

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

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.

Letters of Support

- Letters of support from the applicable State forestry office(s), highlighting how the proposed project is being coordinated with their office must be submitted for projects including state and private lands ([View state forest agency contacts](#)).
- Letter from the appropriate NRCS State conservationist acknowledging how the applicant is coordinating with NRCS must be submitted for projects including work on private lands ([View NRCS State conservationist contacts](#)).
- Letters documenting the support/contributions of all other project partners are strongly encouraged.

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.

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.

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 acts (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.

USDA Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories – The historically underserved farmer and rancher categories include those with limited resources, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged (American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics) and veterans. More information can be found at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/people/outreach/slbfr/?cid=nrcsdev11_001040.

The special emphasis categories are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Disability, Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Hispanic, and Veterans. More information can be found at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/employee/sep/>.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information: [Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund](#).

Applicant Webinar [[Register Here](#)]
Full Proposal Due Date
Review Period

December 10, 2020, 2:00-3:00 PM, Eastern Time
February 18, 2021, 11:59 PM, Eastern Time
February-June 2021

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 [Application Information](#) page.

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

Jon Scott

Southern Forests Program Director
202-595-2609
jonathan.scott@nfwf.org

Zack Bernstein

Program Coordinator, Southern Regional Office
202-595-2433
Zachary.Bernstein@nfwf.org

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.