



# Acres for America

## 2021 REQUEST FOR PRE-PROPOSALS

Applicant Webinar: **Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 1:00-2:00 PM Eastern Time** [**REGISTER**]

Pre-Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, April 15, 2021 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

Invite-Only Full Proposal Due Date: **Wednesday, June 30, 2021 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

## OVERVIEW

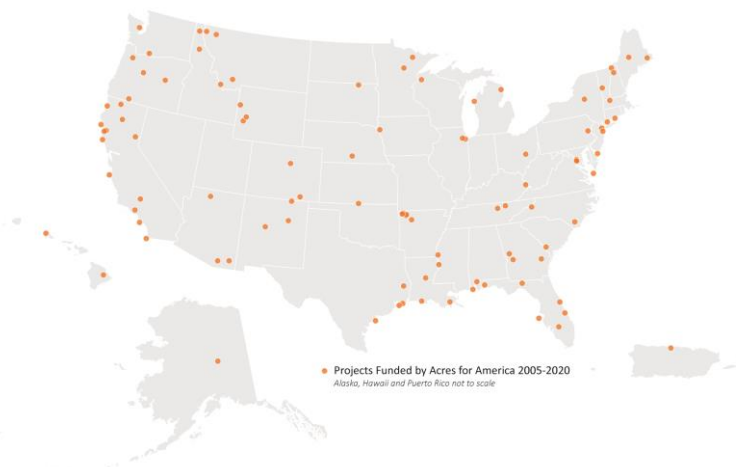
Acres for America is the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) premier land conservation program, and was established to provide urgently needed funding for projects that conserve important large-scale habitats for fish, wildlife, and plants through land acquisitions and perpetual conservation easements.

In 2005, Acres for America was launched as a partnership between Walmart Stores (www.walmart.com) and NFWF. As a founding partner, Walmart's goal was to offset the footprint of its domestic facilities on at least an acre by acre basis – a number then estimated at 100,000 acres – through permanent conservation of important wildlife habitats. The program has now helped to permanently protect over 1.49 million acres, and connect more than 10 million acres of public and private conservation lands across the country.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) will collect pre-proposals from around the nation; from which NFWF will select a small number of applicants to submit a more detailed full proposal. Prior to submitting a pre-proposal, applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the appropriate NFWF regional office (listed in the Applicant Assistance section of this RFP). The purpose is to give the applicant an opportunity to share project concepts and ideas prior to fully preparing and submitting a pre-proposal.

## GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Acres for America is a nation-wide program. Since its inception, 100 projects have been funded in 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.



## PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Preferential consideration will be given to proposals that can demonstrate their ability to achieve more than one of the program priorities below.

- Conserve critical habitats for birds, fish, plants and wildlife
- Connect existing protected lands to unify wild places and protect critical migration routes
- Provide access for people to enjoy the outdoors
- Ensure the future of local economies that depend on forestry, ranching and wildlife

To be competitive for funding through the Acres for America program, land acquisitions and conservation easements should address the following criteria:

### Conservation Criteria:

- **Project Scale and Program Priorities.** Projects should protect or contribute to the protection of significant acres of land, address one or more of the program priorities, and meet the other criteria below. Acres for America projects have ranged in size from several hundred acres to well over 100,000 acres, with an average size of more than 16,000 acres. The common characteristics of all Acres for America projects is that they are of a size that is significant for the landscape in which they are located, and/or they have exceptional strategic importance for conservation in the region.
- **National or State Conservation Priority.** Endorsement by appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies that the acquisition is of high conservation value is a primary consideration. Please make note if the project is part of published conservation plans (e.g. North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, etc.), State Wildlife Action Plans or Endangered Species Act Recovery Plans. Activities referenced in a NFWF business plan or a well-developed, comprehensive conservation strategy targeting those geographies/species will be most competitive. Natural Heritage rankings for key species present on the site are an important consideration when available. Endorsement by non-profit conservation organizations that the acquisition is of high conservation value using same criteria as above is also a primary consideration. Letters of support from agencies and organizations should be available for review at the full proposal stage.
- **Protect Critical Fish and Wildlife Species.** Important fish, wildlife, and/or plant resources, such as endangered species or areas of significant biological diversity, as identified by conservation agencies or organizations, should be conserved through the acquisition. Quantification of resources is important (e.g. 10% of the state's bald eagles nest at the site vs. bald eagles nest at the site.)
- **Expand Wildlife Connectivity.** Acquisitions that reduce fragmentation of key habitats, expand and enhance wildlife corridors and contribute to larger landscape-scale conservation efforts are preferred over isolated acquisitions.

- **Expand Public Access to Nature.** Projects that provide public access for people to enjoy and experience the outdoors, recreate and connect with nature are preferred. It must be clearly stated in the grant application what the uses are, or will be allowed or not allowed (e.g. hunting, nature observation, ATV use, camping, etc.). State the number of additional acres of land or miles of river that will be opened to public access. It also should be indicated whether by acquiring this land public access will be improved to neighboring parcels. NFWF understands that conservation easement projects may have difficulty satisfying this criterion, and that species conservation and public access may not be accomplished on the same property.
- **Benefit Local Economies.** Projects that can demonstrate the connection between the land acquisition and related benefits to local economies are preferred. For example, projects could help expand tourism or recreational economies, or contribute to community forestry. Applicants are encouraged to estimate the economic benefits that are expected as a result of the project (i.e., number of jobs sustained or created).
- **Provide a Range of Ecological Services.** Please indicate if the project can demonstrate or even quantify the ecological services provided or protected through land protection (i.e., securing drinking water sources, or protecting stream flow for aquatic resources, carbon sequestration).
- **Under Threat of Conversion.** Please demonstrate the threats to the property and what would happen if the property is not conserved (i.e. risk of area being converted to alternate land cover, or area is zoned to allow for conversion of habitat to an alternate land use, or whether there is a competing buyer, etc.). Examples from the local landscape are helpful.

#### **Additional Criteria:**

- **Shapefile.** In the Full Proposal stage only, applicants will be required to provide detailed digital Shapefiles in Easygrants delineating the land proposed for conservation in the context of adjacent protected lands.
- **Transaction Structure.** Explain in detail the ENTIRE transaction, communicating step-by-step pieces of the acquisition (i.e. total purchase price, who is selling the property, who will purchase the property, what entity will be the long-term manager of the property).
- **Acquisition Disposition.** Final disposition of land, including long-term ownership and management plans, must be clearly stated. If the federal government is to receive land, additional review by NFWF may be necessary.
- **Easement Restrictions.** If a conservation easement will be acquired, explain in detail the restrictions to be included, and how these will protect the conservation values of the property.

## PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Acres for America program has a list of metrics in Easygrants to choose from for reporting. We ask that full proposal applicants select all relevant metrics from this list for their project (all possible program metrics are shown in the table below). This feature will only show up in Easygrants during the full proposal round; however, it is encouraged that pre-proposal narratives make reference to these metrics as well.

<b>Project Activity</b>	<b>Recommended Metric</b>	<b>Additional Guidance</b>
Conservation Easements	# Acres protected under easement	Enter the total number of acres protected under long-term easement (permanent or >30 yrs). Please also indicate the acres of wetland, timberlands, grazing lands protected within the easement in the NOTES.
Conservation Easements	# Acres connected	Enter the total number of conservation acres permanently connected as a result of this easement (include your proposed easement in this total).
Conservation Easements	# Miles under long-term easement	Enter the number of stream/riverine/riparian miles protected within your proposed property area or as a result of the easement.
Land Acquisitions	# Acres acquired in fee	Enter the total number of acres acquired in fee title. Please also indicate the acres of wetland, timberlands, grazing lands protected within the acquisition in the NOTES.
Land Acquisitions	# Acres connected	Enter the total number of conservation acres permanently connected as a result of this acquisition (include your proposed land acquisition in this total).
Land Acquisitions	# Miles acquired	Enter the number of stream/riverine/riparian miles protected within your proposed property area or as a result of the acquisition.
Economic Benefit	# Jobs created	Enter the number of jobs created as a result of the acquisition/easement.
Economic Benefit	# Jobs sustained	Enter the number of jobs sustained as a result of the acquisition/easement.
Public Access	# Acres with public access	Enter the number of acres that have been opened to public access as a result of this project. Typically this will be just your project, not adjacent lands.
Public Access	# Miles with public access	Enter the number of stream/riverine/riparian miles that have been opened to public access as a result of this project. Typically this will be just your project, not adjacent lands.

## **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.

### **Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds**

- Federal funds and matching contributions may not be used to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems (including entering into or renewing a contract) that uses telecommunications equipment or services produced by Huawei Technologies Company or ZTE Corporation (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) as a substantial or essential component, or as critical technology of any system. Refer to Public Law 115-232, section 889 for additional information.
- 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.
- 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.

### **Land Acquisition and Conservation Easement Eligibility**

- All acquisition documents, including appraisals, title reports, environmental hazard assessments, mineral rights assessments, surveys, and where appropriate a local attorney's opinion of easement viability, as well as other appropriate documents, must be available for NFWF staff review as part of the application process. For more specific information regarding funding an acquisition of interest in real property, see NFWF's [Applicant's FAQ](#) webpage.
- NFWF has required language that must be incorporated into the grant agreement and land use records (i.e. deed, conservation easement). See NFWF's [Land Acquisition/Easement Guidance](#) webpage for details.

- The fee transfer or perpetual conservation easement must qualify for "conservation purposes" as defined by Internal Revenue Code Section 170(h), which generally includes the following:
  - the preservation of land areas for outdoor recreation by, or the education of, the general public; the protection of relatively natural habitats of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystems; the preservation of open space - including farmland and forestland - for scenic enjoyment or pursuant to an adopted governmental conservation policy; in either case, such open space preservation must yield a significant public benefit; the preservation of historically important land areas or buildings.
- Debt retirement on acquisition projects is not preferred.
- Applicants should be able to secure letters of support from appropriate Congressional representatives for acquisition of interest in a real property if requested by NFWF.

## **FUNDING AVAILABILITY & MATCH**

Approximately \$3.5 million will be available to support projects in 2021. Based on prior year decisions, we anticipate that between four and eight projects will be awarded funds. All grant awards require a minimum 1:1 match of cash or contributed goods and services. Federal funds may be considered as match. Please include ALL matching sources no matter the status (intend to apply, application submitted, pledged, received). Due to the competitive nature of this program, successful Acres for America projects typically have matching funds at a 5:1 ratio or greater.

## **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** – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline.

**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 and/or to be integrated into government programs and policies.

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

**Ensure Long-Term Stewardship** – Projects that have a specific plan to transfer management to a resource agency or manage the lands in such a way to maximize ecosystem benefits and provide access to the public are preferred.

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

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

**Partnership** – An appropriate organization or coalition 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, 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.

- Grant funds from the Acres for America program can only be applied to the property’s purchase price.
- Budget section of Easygrants application:
  - In the *General Budget Narrative* present the entire funding strategy, including the total purchase price, expected expenses, and sources of revenue.
  - In the *Other Direct Costs*, enter 1 in the “quantity” field, and the total amount you are requesting from NFWF in the “unit cost” field.
  - In the *Other Direct Costs Notes* field, type a sentence explaining what the funds will be used for (e.g. “NFWF grant will support the purchase and protection of the \_\_\_-acre \_\_\_ property as described in this proposal.”)

**Matching Contributions** – Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised and spent for the Project.

- Include ALL sources of match no matter the status (intend to apply, application submitted, pledged, received) and ensure that they cumulatively add up to the full project value. Larger

match ratios and matching fund contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

**Mitigation Funds** – Applicants that use mitigation funds as match must clearly state in the proposal how the mitigation funds will be utilized in overall project funding strategy.

**Insurance** – Award recipients will be required to obtain and maintain, at a minimum, equivalent insurance coverage for Real Property as provided to property owned by such recipient.

**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.

**Applicant Demographic Information** – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic information on applicants and their communities via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers. For more details, please see the [Tip Sheet](#) and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

**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. 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.

**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.

## **TIMELINE**

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the [Acres for America](#) Program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information.

Applicant Webinar [ <b>REGISTER</b> ]	March 24, 2021 at 1:00-2:00 PM EDT
Pre-Proposal Due Date	April 15, 2021 by 11:59 PM EDT
Invitations for Full Proposals Sent	mid-May 2021
Full Proposal Due Date	June 30, 2021 by 11:59 PM EDT
Board of Directors Approval	November 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](https://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.

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page.

Before submitting a pre-proposal, applicants are encouraged to discuss project ideas with NFWF's regional office staff. They will be able to provide additional guidance on National Fish and Wildlife Foundation conservation priorities in the project area.

Western Region Office, Jonathan Birdsong, [jonathan.birdsong@nfwf.org](mailto:jonathan.birdsong@nfwf.org)  
Rocky Mountain Region Office, Chris West, [chris.west@nfwf.org](mailto:chris.west@nfwf.org)  
Central Region Office, Todd Hogrefe, [todd.hogrefe@nfwf.org](mailto:todd.hogrefe@nfwf.org)  
Southern Region Office, Suzanne Sessine, [suzanne.sessine@nfwf.org](mailto:suzanne.sessine@nfwf.org)  
Northeastern Region Office, John Wright, [john.wright@nfwf.org](mailto:john.wright@nfwf.org)

**For general information or questions about this RFP**, please contact:  
Kimberly Shriner, #202-595-2639, [kimberly.shriner@nfwf.org](mailto:kimberly.shriner@nfwf.org)

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

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: [Easygrants@nfwf.org](mailto: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.