



MIDDLE RIO GRANDE NATIVE WATER LEASING PILOT PROGRAM

2022 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Applicant Webinar [[Register Here](#)]: **June 16, 2022 at 1:00 pm MT**

Full Proposal Due Date: **July 16, 2022 by 11:59 pm ET/10:59 pm CT/9:59 pm MT**

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is announcing a funding opportunity for the Middle Rio Grande Native Water Leasing Pilot Program (“Pilot Program”). NFWF will award one or more grants to contribute to ongoing implementation of the Pilot Program within the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) to benefit populations of Rio Grande silvery minnow. Up to \$300,000 will be available. Major funding is provided by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Grants will be awarded covering the following Pilot Program needs: Policy Analysis and Development, Water Rights Inventory, Water Use Scenario Development, Program Implementation, Expansion, and Refinement, and assistance with Final Reporting. In this Request for Proposals, NFWF is seeking to support projects that align with some combination, if not all of the tasks described under each category.

Program Background

Since 2018, NFWF and partners in the Middle Rio Grande watershed in New Mexico have been exploring conservation efforts that would address issues of environmental water needs and the potential for voluntary water transactions to support collaborative water management and conservation of the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

In September 2017, NFWF entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation to develop and implement a Middle Rio Grande Native Water Leasing and Habitat Restoration Pilot Program in collaboration with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. The Pilot Program continues to develop and implement a voluntary initiative to lease rights to natural river flow as a complement to other conservation water management work currently underway. Water acquired from willing lessors through the Program is being used to support river flows and Rio Grande silvery minnow refugia during the irrigation season in areas south of Albuquerque where the river channel is prone to drying. Avoidance of channel drying is one of the major water management goals for Rio Grande silvery minnow recovery.

Through program development since execution of the Cooperative Agreement, the program has successfully designed and tested a pilot water leasing program that works with irrigators and irrigation managers to secure water for habitat restoration through voluntary water right leasing by

willing participants. The Pilot Program has also worked with MRGCD to identify strategic investments in water delivery infrastructure that complement the leasing effort. It has also identified and enhanced habitat restoration sites to receive leased water. In 2022, the combined effort is poised to deliver water leased from over 2,500 acres to five separate habitat sites through infrastructure strategically operated to mitigate channel drying and support the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

Through this RFP, the program will seek implementation support from local grantee partners for the period from October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2024 to build on progress to date in achieving Program goals in water leasing, infrastructure improvement, and habitat restoration. This will set the stage for expanded native water leasing and other voluntary measures at scale as win-win solutions for the river, local communities, agricultural producers, and MRGCD over the long term.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

This Pilot Program will award grants for work that addresses these tasks within the boundaries and under the jurisdiction of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (Figure 1).

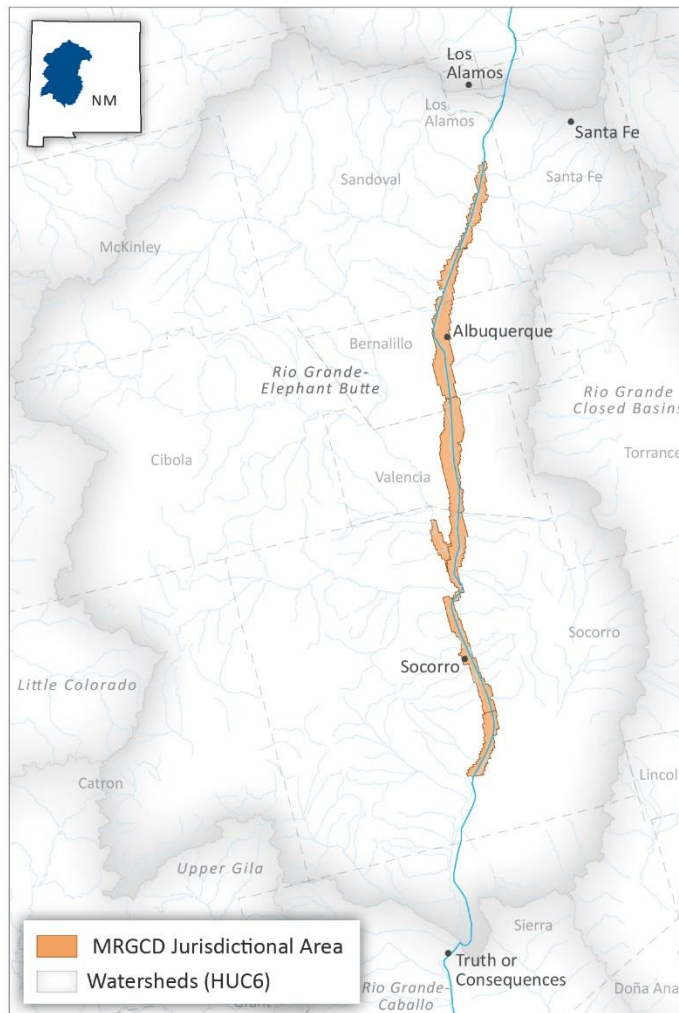


Figure 1. Middle Rio Grande Conservation District Jurisdictional Boundaries

PROGRAM SCOPE OF WORK AND PRIORITIES

The scope of work to be funded under this RFP is comprised of five tasks, some of which are in turn divided into subtasks. All activities under these tasks build on the work undertaken to date to design, develop, and test the pilot water leasing program and complementary infrastructure and habitat restoration activities. This scope of work covers the period from October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2024.

Task 1, Policy Analysis and Development, is focused on technical policy integration of the Pilot Program into existing MRGCD operations and policy, State water law, and the local stakeholder context. This is an ongoing task that builds on progress to date. It is estimated at 5% of the program scope of work in this RFP.

Task 2, Water Rights Inventory, is concerned with identifying the most promising sources of supply for the water leasing Pilot Program. It comprises research into water rights, especially as they may interact with the Pilot Program as it expands. This is an ongoing task that builds on progress to date. It is estimated at 5% of the program scope of work in this RFP.

Task 3, Water Use Scenario Development, will develop plans for the conservation use of Pilot Program leased water at existing and future habitat/restoration sites under different hydrological conditions and river management scenarios. This is an ongoing task that builds on progress to date. It is estimated at 25% of the program scope of work in this RFP.

Task 4, Program Implementation, Expansion, and Refinement, involves staged growth and refinement of program activities including i) water leasing and other environmental water transactions, ii) irrigation infrastructure improvements, and iii) habitat restoration. This is a new task that is the core priority under this RFP. It is estimated at 60% of the program scope of work.

Task 5, Final Reporting, including support and input to the final report under the Cooperative Agreement. This is a new task that is estimated at 5% of the program scope of work.

Task 1: Policy Analysis and Development

Task 1.1 Policy Analysis and Development

- Support the Pilot Program in ongoing policy analysis and development as needed. Potential areas of activity include:
 - Specification of approaches to delivery of water at specific times during the season, across seasons, using different types of conserved water under different operational, hydrological, and Rio Grande Compact conditions.
 - Assist in establishing participation criteria for any new water interests that may be included in an expanded program, including in-district and out-of-district water rights and groundwater rights as applicable.
- Advise the Pilot Program regarding OSE policy and collaboration with water management agencies.

- Review agreements related to 2023 and 2024 Pilot Program participation, lease, forbearance, or transfer of water rights as needed.
- Support the Pilot Program in any integration with agricultural water leasing, the MRGCD Water Bank, or MRGCD Emergency Fallowing efforts.

Task 1.2 Program and Policy Context

- Understand and advise the Pilot Program on other Stakeholder Processes, including the Collaborative Program, BiOp implementation plans, Basin Study process, local water policy and issues, Rio Grande Compact developments, and River Integrated Operations.

Task 2: Water Rights Inventory

Task 2.1 Water Rights Validation

- Support validation of District Water Rights as applicable to the Pilot Program
- Provide MRGCD support in conducting Proof of Beneficial Use activities as applicable to the Pilot Program

Task 2.2 Water Rights Inventory

- Inventory Water that the Pilot Program could lease/acquire
- Support ongoing MRGCD System Inventory as needed to identify and specify system water opportunities (i.e. areas where investments in conveyance/operational efficiency would make water available for restoration use)
- Support ongoing identification and specification of infrastructure investments opportunities to support i) water transactions, ii) habitat restoration/water delivery or iii) monitoring

Task 2.3 Water Market Research

- Water Market Research in support of Pilot Program design as needed

Task 3: Water Use Scenario Development

- Inventory 2-3 additional new potential habitat/restoration sites and opportunities to use leased water for conservation, including:
 - Water needs by site/use and hydrological condition
 - Options for delivery of leased water to the place of use
 - Infrastructure and habitat site improvement needs
 - Feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and incremental species benefit relative to existing sites
 - Assistance in site design
 - Support for required NEPA and other compliance activities
- Assist in development of water budgets/scenarios:
 - By water year
 - By program water availability
 - By BiOp/Reclamation priority
- Assess species benefit of the pilot activities, including:

- Development of a plan for measuring species benefit of water provision to different habitat sites
- Establishment and initial collection of baseline data by hydrological condition and site
- Identification of options to improve outcomes and/or adapt to different levels of water availability in future years

Task 4: Program Implementation, Expansion, and Refinement

- Program Implementation: Support program implementation in collaboration with MRGCD, NFWF, Reclamation, and the Program team. Consistent with the program design, annual implementation activities are expected to fall into three general areas: i) water leasing and other environmental water transactions, ii) irrigation infrastructure improvements, and iii) habitat restoration. Activities will include:
 - Implementation support for all program activities in 2023 and 2024.
 - Integration of 2023 and 2024 water leasing with water delivery to habitat sites, including tracking water use, monitoring site and hydrological conditions, and supporting for annual water accounting.
 - Management of monthly team meetings and active participation with MRGCD’s Conservation Advisory Committee.
 - Develop adaptive management and monitoring plans for habitat/restoration sites including the Los Chavez, New Belen, and San Francisco outfalls, as well as any other new habitat sites included in the program, in conjunction with MRGCD and Reclamation and their commitments under the 2016 BO.

- Program Expansion: In addition to the annual implementation of water leasing and water delivery to habitat sites, proactively identify and develop opportunities for program expansion, including through additional water acquisition strategies that will secure water for the benefit of species and through design and development of additional habitat sites.

- Program Refinement
Throughout, Program implementation will be flexible and informed by feedback and modification from the program refinement process established during Program development. Activities include ongoing tracking and evaluation of program activity and input into team planning for future years.

Task 5: Final Reporting

- Provide support and input to the final report under the Cooperative Agreement.

Focal Species

Rio Grande silvery minnow
Southwestern willow flycatcher

ANTICIPATED DELIVERABLES

Project deliverables will include:

- Reports, tools, and work product specified in the grant scope of work
- Participation in recurring team meetings and active coordination with the Pilot Program team
- Interim written and verbal progress reports
- Final report due at the conclusion of the project term
- Participation in Pilot Program meetings in New Mexico with program partners

These deliverables may be expanded or refined by mutual agreement of NFWF and the grantee(s).

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the [Rio Grande Program](#) has a list of metrics in Easygrants to choose from for future reporting. We ask that full proposal applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project, and that each conservation action be measured by the 1-3 most relevant metrics. The number of proposed metrics will not have any bearing on the competitiveness of the proposal.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Outreach/Education/Technical Assistance	# people reached	Enter the number of people reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities
Management or Governance Planning	# plans developed	Enter the number of plans developed that had input from multiple stakeholders
Management or Governance Planning	# water transactions programs	Enter the number of water transactions program developed
Research	# studies reported to mgmt	Enter the number of studies completed whose findings are reported to management
Tool development for decision-making	# tools developed	Enter the number of tools developed

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

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

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.
- 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.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

The Middle Rio Grande Native Water Leasing Pilot Program will award up to \$300,000 in the 2022 funding cycle. Grants will vary depending on the scope of work addressed by the project. Applicants may apply to address a group of tasks or subtasks, and may apply as individual entities or a coalition of entities. Projects should begin within one month of the award date and be completed by September 30, 2024. These grants do not require matching contributions. Reporting of appropriate matching funds (either cash or in-kind) is encouraged, and matching funds must be non-federal in origin, with that distinction made in the Matching Funds section of the 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.

Understanding of the Program, Landscape, Local Implementation Context and Scope of Work – Proposal demonstrates an understanding of water resources, context for water leasing and habitat restoration in the Middle Rio Grande basin, and the MRGCD Conservation Program.

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. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation to ensure activities are technically-sound and feasible.

Partnership and Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project, integration into local programs and policies, and community acceptance of proposed restoration actions. Non-traditional partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project. Describe the community characteristics of the project area, identify any communities impacted, describe outreach and community engagement activities and how those will be monitored and measured. Use demographic data to support descriptions and submit letters of support from community partners and/or collaborators demonstrating their commitment to the project and engagement in project activities as proposed.

Cost-Effectiveness – Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the economically most efficient way to meet project objectives. Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation includes, but is not limited to, an assessment of effective direct/indirect costs across all categories in the proposed budget according to the type, size and duration of project and project objectives. Project budgets will be compared to similar projects to ensure proposed costs across all budget categories are reasonable for the activities being performed and the outcomes proposed.

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

Communication – Project includes a detailed plan to communicate information about the project to appropriate audiences.

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

Applicant Demographic Information – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic demographic information on applicants and their organizations via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers and will not be considered when making grant decisions. For more details, please see the tip sheet and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

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.

Environmental Services – NFWF funds projects in pursuit of its mission to sustain, restore and enhance the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations. NFWF recognizes that some benefits from projects may be of value with regards to credits on an environmental services market (such as a carbon credit market). NFWF does not participate in, facilitate, or manage an environmental services market nor does NFWF assert any claim on such credits.

Intellectual Property – Intellectual property created using NFWF awards may be copyrighted or otherwise legally protected by award recipients. NFWF may reserve the right to use, publish, and copy materials created under awards, including posting such material on NFWF’s website and featuring it in publications. NFWF may use project metrics and spatial data from awards to estimate societal benefits that result and to report these results to funding partners. These may include but are not limited to: habitat and species response, species connectivity, water quality, water quantity, risk of detrimental events (e.g., wildfire, floods), carbon accounting (e.g., sequestration, avoided emissions), environmental justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Permits – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements. Where projects involve work in the waters of the United States, NFWF strongly encourages applicants to conduct a permit pre-application meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers prior to submitting their proposal. In some cases, if a permit pre-application meeting has not been completed, NFWF may require successful applicants to complete such a meeting prior to grant award.

Federal Funding – 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.

Applicant Webinar [Register Here]:	Jun 16, 2022 at 1:00pm MT
Full Proposal Due Date	July 16, 2022 by 11:59 pm ET/9:59 pm MT
Review Period	July – August 2022
Awards Announced	September 2022

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:

Kirstin Neff
Manager, Southwest Rivers Program
Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org
(303) 222-6485

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.