

## ***NORTHEAST FORESTS AND RIVERS FUND*** **2023 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, July 13, 2023 by 11:59 PM EDT**

Applicant Webinar: Wednesday, May 31, 2023 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM EDT Register [here](#)

### **I. OVERVIEW**

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is soliciting proposals for the Northeast Forests and Rivers Fund (NEFRF)(formerly known as the New England Forests and Rivers Fund) to restore and sustain healthy rivers, forests and grasslands that provide habitat for diverse fish and wildlife populations. The program will advance this goal by investing in projects that:

- Restore the quality and connectivity of stream and riparian habitats with a focus on improving habitat for river herring, Atlantic salmon, eastern brook trout and wood turtles;
- Improve management of forest blocks to enhance age and structural diversity, resulting in improved forest conditions for native wildlife, with a focus on improving habitat for golden-winged warbler and New England cottontail; and,
- Promote hayfield management that allows for successful grassland bird breeding, with a specific focus on habitat for bobolink.

Approximately \$2 million is available this year. Funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Zoetis Foundation and Avangrid Foundation.

### **II. GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS**

Projects are eligible from throughout the program boundary, which includes all of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont, as well as parts of New York. (See map, or click on [“2023 RFP Map”](#) to view the map in more detail.) However, within the Long Island Sound and Connecticut River watershed, NEFRF will only consider fish passage projects, grassland projects and early successional forest projects. All other projects should apply to the [Long Island Sound Futures Fund](#) (LISFF). LISFF has significantly more funding available than NEFRF and proposals are due May 10, 2023.



### III. PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Proposals should strive to contribute to goals detailed in NFWF’s [Northeast Watersheds Business Plan](#) (March 2023), and specifically the strategies for *Stream and Riparian Habitat*, and *Upland Forests and Grasslands*. (Applicants interested in supporting the priorities for *Coastal Habitats* in the business plan are encouraged to apply to NFWF’s [Long Island Sound Futures Fund](#) and [National Coastal Resilience Fund](#).)

Priority implementation strategies for NEFRF funding in 2023 are detailed below.

In addition, projects that incorporate outreach to communities, foster community engagement, and pursue collaborative management leading to measurable conservation benefits are encouraged. When possible, projects should be developed through community input and co-design processes and should consider traditional knowledge where relevant. Additionally, projects should engage community-level partners (e.g., municipalities, NGOs, community organizations, community leaders) to help design, implement, and maintain projects to secure maximum benefits for communities, maintenance, and sustainability post-grant award.

#### A. Restore Stream and Riparian Habitats

NFWF will invest in projects that strive to restore the quality and connectivity of stream and riparian habitats to enhance the long-term persistence of native aquatic species, with a focus on improving habitat for river herring, Atlantic salmon, and eastern brook trout.

NFWF Program Eligibility	Connecticut and Long Island	Upper Connecticut River Basin (MA, VT, NH)	Outside the LIS and Connecticut River Watershed
Restore aquatic connectivity	LISFF	NEFRF	NEFRF
Restore riparian habitat	LISFF	LISFF	NEFRF
Restore in-stream habitat (large wood)	<i>consult w/NFWF staff</i>	NEFRF	NEFRF
Reduce agricultural runoff/soil health	LISFF	LISFF	NEFRF

**Priority watersheds ([see map](#)) include:**

- Piscataquis River (ME) for Atlantic salmon
- St. Croix (Skutik) and Megunticook Rivers (ME) for river herring and brook trout
- Mattawamkeag/Baskahegan and Kennebec Rivers (ME) for river herring and Atlantic salmon
- Narraguagus and Sabattus Rivers (ME) for river herring, Atlantic salmon and brook trout
- Oyster (NH), Lamprey (NH), Merrimack (NH/MA) and Mystic Rivers (MA) for river herring
- Saranac River (NY) for eastern brook trout

- In upper Connecticut River basin for eastern brook trout -- Halls Stream (VT/NH), First and Second Branch White River (VT), Mill Brook (VT/NH), Vernon Dam watershed (VT/NH) and the Manhan River (MA). ***NEFRF will only fund fish passage and large wood additions in these watersheds. Riparian restoration and agricultural runoff projects should apply to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund.***

**Priority 1: Restore aquatic connectivity.** Remove or replace under-sized or perched culverts and derelict or under-utilized dams that pose a safety risk, have community support and are barriers to aquatic organism passage and/or result in artificial impoundments and higher water temperatures. Projects should seek to connect native fish to key spawning, rearing, and refuge habitats. Projects may support on-the-ground restoration and stream barrier surveys to determine priorities for future connectivity restoration. Projects are encouraged to demonstrate the benefits of aquatic connectivity projects to multiple species, as well as the resilience benefits to human communities (i.e., by reducing flood risk and the risk of failing infrastructure). Projects should include a monitoring plan to assess changes in run counts as a result of passage improvements.

**Priority 2: Restore Riparian and In-stream Habitat.** Restore riparian areas with native vegetation to reduce stream temperature, improve water quality and enhance in-stream habitat complexity through large wood additions (aka: large woody debris, strategic wood additions).

**Priority 3: Reduce Agricultural Runoff and Improve Soil Health.** Provide technical and financial assistance to accelerate adoption of agricultural conservation practices that reduce polluted runoff and erosion, and improve soil health, including wetland and riparian restoration, livestock exclusion fencing, barnyard management, cover crops and conservation tillage, etc. 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.

## **B. Improve Upland Forest Health**

NFWF will invest in the management of forest blocks to enhance age and structural diversity that demonstrates improved forest conditions for native wildlife, with a focus on improving habitat for golden-winged warbler and New England cottontail. **Note that NFWF seeks to achieve its upland forest health goals (priorities 4-6) without sacrificing or cutting late successional or old growth forest.**

**Priority geographies ([see map](#)) include:**

- For healthy forests, projects that contribute to large forest blocks (>5,000 acres) throughout the program boundary

- There are two priority areas for New England cottontail – one centered in western Connecticut and the other in southern Maine and eastern New Hampshire
- For golden-winged warbler, there are three priority areas – two in northern New York, and the other focused in the Lake Champlain basin. Projects are strongly encouraged that target private landowners within the project areas for golden-winged warbler under the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) initiative.

**Priority 4: Forest Block Planning.** Conduct planning at the landscape, forest block (5,000+acres) and parcel scale to support forest management that achieves a targeted mix of age and structural diversity that is adaptable to meeting the needs and interests of individual landowners, while providing vital fish and wildlife habitat. (Target: 15% young or early successional forest <15 years, and 35% late successional or old growth > 150 years)

**Priority 5: Young Forest Restoration:** Within the context of large forest blocks, implement young forest management practices and prescriptions to create or enhance habitat for New England cottontail, golden-winged warbler and other young forest-dependent species. Projects that engage landowners with a range of property sizes and interests are strongly encouraged, including public lands, family-owned woodlands, commercial forests, utility rights-of-way, etc.

**Priority 6: Outreach and Technical Assistance:** Execute innovative outreach and marketing strategies to engage target audiences (e.g., family woodland owners, consulting foresters, loggers), in adopting forest management practices that enhance habitat conditions. Proposals that include outreach approaches that address known public opinion impediments to forest management are encouraged. Proposals also should clearly describe how relationships with willing landowners will be managed, and by whom, in order to ensure landowners receive ongoing support for planning, financing and transitioning to on-the-ground implementation.

### C. Increase Grassland Bird Habitat

NFWF will invest in voluntary management of hayfields to allow for successful breeding of grassland birds, with a specific focus on habitat for bobolink.

**Priority geographies ([see map](#)) include:**

- There are three priority areas – one in the Lake Champlain basin (VT only), one along the Connecticut River valley (MA, VT, NH), and one in central Maine.

**Priority 7: Grassland Management on Hayfields.** Provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners to adjust the timing of hay harvest(s) that allow bobolink and other grassland birds to nest and fledge young before or between harvesting.

## IV. PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the *Northeast Forests and Rivers 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. (Preferred metrics are shown in the table in [APPENDIX A](#)). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact [john.wright@nfwf.org](mailto:john.wright@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

## V. 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

- 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.

## VI. FUNDING AVAILABILITY, MATCH AND PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

**Availability:** The New England Forests and Rivers Fund will award at least \$2 million in grants this year. Grant requests must range from \$75,000 to \$300,000. Requests above or below that range will not be considered for funding.

**Match:** A match valued at 50 percent of the total project cost (a 1:1 ratio of grant request to match) is preferred but not required.

**Grant Period:** Projects should plan to start six months after the award date and be completed within three years. Notification of awards is expected to be mid-November.

## VII. EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness, and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated by a team of technical experts based on the extent to which they meet the criteria listed below.

- **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.
  - 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.
  - 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. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project, integration into local programs and policies, and community acceptance of proposed restoration actions.
- **Budget/Cost-Effectiveness** –
  - Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. Federally funded projects must be in compliance with [2 CFR 200](#) as applicable. A complete budget should include budget narratives to provide justifications for costs.
  - Amount requested is proportional to expected outcomes.
  - Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the most efficient way to meet project objectives. 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.

- **Partnership and Community Impact** – The project is supported by a robust partnership with necessary expertise. The applicant partners with, elevates, and engages collaboratively with or directly represents diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the project. These include projects where non-traditional partners or communities are engaged—or are applicants themselves—thereby benefitting underserved communities and broadening the sustained impact from the project. Efforts to develop capacity in non-traditional partners are encouraged.

## VIII. OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## IX. TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information *Northeast Forests and Rivers Fund*.

Applicant Webinar	Wednesday, May 31, 1-2:30pm EDT
Full Proposal Due Date	Thursday, July 13, 11:59pm EDT
Review Period	August - October
Awards Announced	November

## X. 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.

## **XI. 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](#). Including pages about [required financial documents](#), [budget narrative instructions](#), [Easygrants mapping tool](#), and our [indirect cost policy](#).

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

John Wright, Program Manager, Northeastern Regional Office  
[John.wright@nfwf.org](mailto:John.wright@nfwf.org)  
(202) 595-2478

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.