



COLUMBIA BASIN RESTORATION PROGRAM 2024-2025 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Applicant Webinar [[Register Here](#)] Thursday, March 12, 2024 at 11:00 AM PST
Full Proposal Due Date: Monday, April 8, 2024 by 8:59 PM PST

COLUMBIA BASIN OVERVIEW

The Columbia Basin covers 258,000 square miles, making it one of the largest river basins in the United States. The Basin includes public and private lands, multiple mountain ranges, arid valleys, lush forests, and agricultural lands. This region contains abundant rivers and streams, stretching across Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, that deliver water to the Columbia River and its tributaries to provide critical fish and wildlife habitat, renewable energy, drinking water, irrigation for agricultural production, and scenery that makes the area a diverse and vibrant ecosystem.

The Columbia Basin is home to several threatened and endangered fish species that depend on the freshwater system to migrate and fulfill their life cycle. However, many of these streams are dewatered due to numerous factors, including over-appropriation, climate change, and drought. Water scarcity can have catastrophic impacts for fish, further threaten the cultural vitality of Tribes, and cripple local agricultural economies. Balancing ecosystem health with the resource needs of local communities is critical to long-term resilience of wildlife and people throughout the Basin.

GRANTMAKING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is requesting proposals to enhance, restore, and protect aquatic ecosystems for native fish species in the Columbia Basin. This funding opportunity is built on the success of the Columbia Basin Water Transaction Program (CBWTP), which funds water transactions development and implementation in the United States portion of the Columbia Basin and is the largest voluntary instream flow restoration program in the country. Since its inception in 2002, CBWTP has implemented over 705 voluntary water transactions and secured over 3.1 million acre-feet of water in flow-limited tributaries of the Columbia River Basin. This year, the Request for Proposals (RFP) is soliciting proposals for water transaction development as well as water management and conservation projects that will benefit fish habitat through three funding partnerships:

- 1. Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grant (Partnership with Bonneville Power Administration):** Approximately \$2.2 million will be available for programmatic support allowing for staff time, limited travel, supplies/materials, and other associated costs of developing water transactions. Funding for this program will be primarily provided by Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). Once an entity is selected through this Request for Proposals (RFP), they will be considered a Qualified Local Entity (QLE) and will be able to apply for funding to pay for individual water transactions during the term of their grant agreement through a competitive process. Qualification status will last **three years** from the



time a full proposal is approved, pending satisfactory annual performance reviews. Existing QLEs will have the option to submit an abbreviated proposal in lieu of a full proposal in the two subsequent years post initial selection. More information on the water transaction solicitation process can be found [here](#).

- 2. National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (Partnership with U.S. Forest Service Region 6):** Up to \$300,000 is available to support flow restoration and aquatic ecosystem enhancement activities for projects that take place within the boundaries of U.S. Forest Service Region 6 National Forests. Priority strategies include voluntary water transactions, projects that improve access to and connectivity of habitat for native fish, and instream habitat enhancement projects in flow limited watersheds. Projects must also be located in stream systems that are part of the Columbia Basin drainage.
- 3. Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (Partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service):** Approximately \$1.1 million in funding will be available for habitat improvement projects on working lands within Columbia Basin watersheds located in Washington State. Priority strategies include technical assistance for landowners to develop conservation plans focused on climate-smart mitigation activities to improve and protect water quality and quantity to benefit watershed resilience and native fish conservation. Projects should engage agricultural producers in conservation practices and increase participation in USDA Farm Bill Programs administered by NRCS.

GEOGRAPHIC & SPECIES FOCUS

1. Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grant (BPA):

All proposed activities must be located within the Columbia River Basin in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Priority will be given to areas listed in the [2020 National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's \(NOAA\) Biological Opinion \(BiOp\)](#) that benefit species listed threatened or endangered by the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). A portion of the funding from BPA is dedicated to the areas of the Columbia River basin that are covered by the [Columbia Basin Fish Accords](#) with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Proposals in these geographies should be separate from proposals for other geographies.



Figure 1. Columbia Basin with BiOp Identified Geographies

Proposed geographies must include tributaries that have identified flow as a priority limiting factor to survival of species in one or more of the below categories:

1. ESA listed species in [2020 BiOp](#) identified areas.
2. ESA listed anadromous species not specified above ([National Marine Fisheries Service](#) and [2020 BiOp](#)).
3. ESA listed resident [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) or state species of concern (by one or more of [OR](#), [WA](#), [ID](#), [MT](#)).
4. Other fish or wildlife not listed above where a benefit can be tied to increased flows in a specific location.

2. National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (USFS Region 6)

All proposed activities seeking U.S. Forest Service funding must be within the Columbia Basin and must be within USFS Region 6 National Forests.



Figure 2. Columbia Basin USFS Region 6 National Forests

3. Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (NRCS):

All proposed activities must be located within the Columbia River Basin in Washington State.



Figure 3. Columbia Basin in Washington State

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The goal of the program is to maximize voluntary habitat restoration in flow-limited streams critical to the survival of native fish species, while improving resilience of communities throughout the Columbia Basin. Priority project types include:

1. Water Transactions and Conservation Projects:

Development of projects to increase available water in flow-limited streams. Water transactions include the temporary lease of water rights, voluntary duty reduction, and



the permanent sale of water rights, among other incentive-based approaches. Voluntary, market-based water transactions provide an effective and fair way to balance out-of-stream water uses with the need to maintain stream flow for imperiled fish. Water conservation project types may include conveyance efficiency projects (e.g., piping or lining ditches), upstream water conservation or tailwater reduction projects, or on-farm infrastructure upgrades (e.g., flood-to-sprinkler shifts in irrigation practices) where there is a measurable benefit to aquatic habitat. Transactions may also enhance on-farm efficiency and reduce water demand to help build drought resilience for agricultural communities.

- 2. Complementary Aquatic Habitat Projects:** Design and implementation of projects that improve habitat for native fish in flow-limited streams. Project types include access improvement and barrier removal projects; Projects that enhance habitat complexity, cover and/or access to coldwater refugia; Habitat connectivity projects such as in-channel enhancements and improvements to eliminate flow and thermal barriers (e.g., removal or functional upgrades of diversion structures or screens, channel modifications or impediment removal to improve flow and access), channel reconstruction, floodplain connection, off-channel habitat creation, and riparian fencing.
- 3. Community Impact and Landowner Engagement Efforts:** Projects that incorporate outreach to communities, foster landowner and water user engagement, and provide technical assistance to landowners to pursue measurable conservation benefits are encouraged. When possible, projects should be developed through community input and co-design processes ensuring traditional ecological knowledge elevation. Additionally, projects should engage community-level partners (e.g., municipalities, NGOs, landowners, community leaders) to help implement and maintain projects to secure sustainability post-grant award.

Additional Project Considerations

All proposed activities will be targeted to locations where partners share species and flow restoration objectives. Competitive proposals will also address the following priorities:

- 1. Species of concern:** Proposals must showcase how the applicant will work toward addressing the conservation needs of one or more species of concern through project implementation. Recognized species of concern include Sockeye, Coho, and Chinook Salmon, as well as Steelhead Trout. Species of concern also include all ESA listed anadromous and resident U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or state species of concern in the Columbia Basin.
- 2. Prioritization:** Proposals should clearly articulate the prioritization efforts for each subbasin in which work will take place. Prioritization efforts should show the hierarchical planning that has gone into the selection of subbasins, streams, and water rights, properties, and landowners. The efforts should articulate why the subbasin is important compared to other subbasins, why a particular stream is important compared to



other streams in the subbasin. Proposals should show a logic path from the subbasin down to the transaction or restoration level to emphasize priorities and levels of importance for species.

- a. **Existing plans:** If prioritization plans have been completed, describe how those are used in transaction development and planning. If a plan already exists, please define what the quantifiable objectives are for the priority basins or streams and how many previous transactions have contributed to meeting those goals.
- b. **New plans:** If prioritization plans have not been developed, describe how you will use the budget to develop them.

- 3. Adaptive management:** Demonstrate how your efforts are moving beyond preliminary practices and proof of concept methods. Transactions should strive towards permanent instream flow or restoration and work to build on previous efforts. Applicants should use monitoring results to show how experience with local systems has contributed to selection of the most impactful projects.
- 4. Monitoring:** The proposal should include a description of long-term monitoring of water flow, and how the benefits to habitat and species will be documented. All transactions funded under CBWTP will be required to have compliance and flow monitoring plans unless otherwise approved by NFWF staff.
- 5. Watershed Context:** The proposal should describe any collaborative efforts with other entities and document how opportunities for cost-sharing, data sharing, and project coordination were considered. The scale of any planned flow or habitat restoration projects should be measurable relative to the overall flow and the scale of habitat loss and other issues in the basin. Proposals should document the entity's intention of working in areas where significant seniority can be protected in-stream through state agency process or is contractually protectable instream at a time of year when needed to benefit fish and wildlife.

Project Metrics

To better gauge progress for projects within NRCS funded Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants, the Columbia Basin Restoration Program RFP has a list of metrics in Easygrants for applicants to choose from for reporting (commonly used metrics are shown in the table below). We ask that you select the most relevant metrics from the below list for your project. If you do not believe an applicable metric has been provided, please contact Alex Mahmoud (Alexander.Mahmoud@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.



Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Habitat Conservation – Water acquisitions or leases	Acre feet of water purchased	Enter the acre feet of water purchased.
Habitat Conservation – Water acquisitions or leases	CFS of cold water purchased	Enter the cubic feet per second of cold water purchased.
Habitat Restoration – Fish passage improvements	# Passage barriers assessed and/or with design plans	Enter the # of in-stream barriers with assessments or engineering/design plans completed in this grant. In the notes, provide the barrier’s Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) ID (aquaticbarriers.org). If the barrier(s) is not in SARP, provide its lat/long or its name and source.
Habitat Restoration – Fish passage improvements	# Passage barriers rectified	Enter the # of in-stream barriers removed/rectified in THIS grant. In the notes, provide the barrier’s Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) ID (aquaticbarriers.org). If the barrier(s) is not in SARP, provide its lat/long or its name and source.
Habitat Restoration – Fish passage improvements	Miles of stream opened	Enter total # of miles opened to improve aquatic organism passage. Only include the miles of main stem & smaller tributaries connected until the next barrier upstream (or headwaters), but NOT lakes, ponds, or distance downstream from the barrier removed.
Habitat Restoration – Floodplain restoration	Acres restored	Enter # of floodplain acres restored. In the NOTES, indicate % of vegetation on the pre-project site (0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, 61-80%, 81-100%) and the dominant vegetation being restored (Broadleaf, Conifer, Redwood, Shrub, Grass, Marsh, Wet meadow, Swamp).
Habitat Restoration – Instream restoration	Miles restored	Indicate the miles of stream enhanced or restored through your project. Includes modifications to stream channel (shape, cross-section, or profile) or meander pattern, placement of large woody debris or log jams, etc.



Habitat Restoration – Riparian restoration	Acres restored	Enter the number of riparian acres restored. In the NOTES section, specify the landcover type prior to planting (barren, cropland, grassland, shrubland), the % of vegetation on the pre-project site (0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, 61-80%, 81-100%), the dominant vegetation being planted (Broadleaf, Conifer, Shrub, Grass, Marsh, Swamp), the buffer width, and the acres. DO NOT include instream restoration.
Habitat Restoration – Wetland restoration	Acres restored	Wetlands in this context refer to off and side channel habitat and ponds created to provide refugia for Coho. Enter # acres of WETLAND (not riparian or instream) habitat restored. In the NOTES, specify landcover prior to restoration (Marsh, Tidal marsh, Wet meadow, Swamp) and indicate % of vegetation on pre-project site (0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, 61-80%, 81-100%).
Habitat Management – Improved irrigation practices	Acre feet of water conserved	Enter the number of acre feet of water expected to be conserved annually.
Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# People reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities	Enter the number of people reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities.
Planning, Research, Monitoring – Restoration planning/design/permitting	# Engineering and design plans developed	Enter the number of Engineering and Design plans developed. Generally, there will be one plan per project to be constructed.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, U.S. Federal government agencies, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, tribal governments and organizations, educational institutions, conservation districts, watershed councils, and other local agencies.
- 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

In 2024, NFWF expects to award up to \$2.2 million for Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grants, up to \$300,000 in National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants, and up to \$1.1 million dollars in Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants. The Bonneville Power Administration and NFWF expect to make 14-17 grant awards from this RFP ranging from \$15,000 to \$350,000 for Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grants. With U.S. Forest Service Region 6 funding, NFWF expects to make 2-5 awards from this RFP ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 for National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants. With NRCS Washington funding, NFWF expects to make 2-8 awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$200,000 for Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants. Projects that demonstrate strong partnerships and that have non-federal matching funds from various partners/donors to support a significant portion of the cost of the project being submitted are strongly encouraged. For Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grants, non-federal matching funds are optional but projects with matching funds are strongly encouraged. For National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants, 1:5 matching funds are required. For Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants, 1:2 matching funds are required.

Maximum performance periods are as follows:

- **Columbia Basin Programmatic Water Transaction Grant (BPA):**
 - Projects should be proposed with periods of performance that start **October 1, 2024** and end no later than **September 30, 2025**



- **National Forest Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (USFS Region 6):**
 - Projects should be proposed with periods of performance that start **September 30-November 30, 2024 and end no later than June 30, 2028.**
- **Working Lands Habitat Improvement Grants (NRCS):**
 - Projects should be proposed with periods of performance that start **September 30-November 30, 2024 and end no later than June 30, 2028.**

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. 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.

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.

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 and Adaptive Management– Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.

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.

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](#)]
Full Proposal/Amendment Due Date
Review Period
Awards Announced

March 12, 2024 at 11:00 AM PST
April 8, 2024 at 8:59 PM PST
May – July
Early August



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.

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:

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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.