



RIO GRANDE PROJECT WATER CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION INITIATIVE

2024 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Applicant Information Session:

**Monday, March 25, 2024 in Las Cruces, NM at 3:30 pm Mountain Time - Exact Location
TBA**

**Tuesday, March 26, 2024 in Albuquerque, NM at 9:00 am Mountain Time - Exact Location
TBA**

Full Proposal Due Date:

Thursday, April 25, 2024 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is announcing the first grant funding opportunity for the Rio Grande Project Water Conservation and Ecological Restoration Initiative. NFWF will award one or more grants to contribute to development and implementation of water conservation and ecological restoration projects within the Rio Grande Project (Project) area in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and the State of New Mexico. Up to \$300,000 will be available. Major funding is provided by Reclamation through Cooperative Agreement R23AC00424.

Grants will be awarded covering the following programmatic needs: planning and implementation of habitat restoration and enhancement for native riparian bird species associated with demand management projects, stormwater capture projects at Project sediment dams, and off-channel storage projects. In this Request for Proposals (RFP), NFWF is seeking to support projects that align with some combination, if not all, of the tasks described in the Program Scope of Work and Priorities below.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Prolonged aridification of the Rio Grande Project area and heavy regional reliance on groundwater pumping has caused a reduction in Project water supply, resulting in a decrease in Project efficiency. During increasingly unpredictable monsoon seasons, there are significant storm events that result in flooding, causing property damage, crop loss, and channel sedimentation. The areas of flooding are often in underserved, lower income communities with inadequate flood control capacity.

NFWF and partners in the Lower Rio Grande watershed in New Mexico are exploring conservation efforts that would address issues of riparian bird habitat, stormwater management, sediment management, environmental water needs and the potential for water transactions to support long-term Project resiliency and conservation of southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed

cuckoo. Developing stormwater storage capacity at existing sediment dams and building off-channel storage has the potential to slow down baseflow during monsoon events, capture stormwater to recharge the aquifer, and improve and create riparian habitat. A demand management program would reduce reliance on surface and groundwater and build Project water supply resilience.

In September 2023, NFWF entered into a Cooperative Agreement with Reclamation to develop and implement projects that result in water conservation and improve or create riparian habitat. The Initiative is in its early days and seeks to develop and implement multiple multi-benefit projects that enhance Rio Grande Project water supply to ensure continued access to water for municipal and irrigation use, enhance riparian habitat, decrease flooding of adjacent lands and channel sedimentation, and implement measures to build Project resilience under prolonged drought and aridification.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Grants will be awarded to partnership-based proposals that leverage expertise regarding southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo and riparian habitat design to benefit those species within the Lower Rio Grande Focal Area of NFWF’s [Southwest Rivers Business Plan](#), whose geography includes the watersheds of the Bureau of Reclamation’s Rio Grande Project, extending roughly from the north end of Elephant Butte Reservoir to the El Paso-Hudspeth County Line and project distribution facilities. Visit the interactive [Southwest Rivers Business Plan Map](#) for a more detailed view of the focal areas.



PROGRAM SCOPE OF WORK AND PRIORITIES

All proposals must specifically address how projects for which funds are requested will directly and measurably contribute to the accomplishment of Initiative goals. Further information on those goals can be found in NFWF's [Southwest Rivers Business Plan](#) which guides the strategies in this RFP. The Rio Grande Project Water Conservation and Ecological Restoration Initiative seeks projects in the following program priorities:

1. **Increase water availability for species and their habitats** – Make available more water to sustain species and their habitats.
 - a. Support design of a water transactions program in New Mexico's Lower Rio Grande Valley – Support the design and development of a program that can reduce groundwater pumping, without harming existing habitat, to raise the water table to benefit riparian habitat by assisting in establishing water savings and habitat goals and monitoring to evaluate the success of the program.
 - b. Assist in planning and implementing multi-benefit stormwater capture and wildlife habitat projects at Project sediment dams. Assist in production of a prioritized list of stormwater capture and wildlife habitat projects, an implementation plan, and an ongoing habitat maintenance plan.
 - c. Assist in evaluating each off-channel storage project for benefits to system operation, drought resilience, and ability to provide wildlife habitat on-site and/or to manage water for benefits to wildlife habitat off-site.
2. **Riparian habitat restoration and enhancement** – Restore or enhance riparian zones adjacent to the river channel or irrigation canal infrastructure to increase hydrologic connectivity of riparian zones and recruitment of native riparian vegetation.
 - a. Floodplain reconnection – Reconnect the floodplain and stream channel to restore and enhance riparian habitat for focal species. Plant native riparian plants where appropriate.
 - b. Support engineering design and analysis for riparian restoration projects – Evaluate stormwater capture and off-channel storage project sites for existing wildlife habitat qualities and the potential to create or improve wildlife habitat, particularly for riparian species such as southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, and other species of concern.
3. **Partner Coordination, Monitoring, and Environmental Compliance**
 - a. Work collaboratively with NFWF, Reclamation, the State of New Mexico, and other project partners to set and achieve water conservation and riparian habitat improvement goals.

- b. Coordinate with project partners to design and conduct riparian species survey to ensure timely and consistent monitoring of wildlife species of concern.
 - c. Assist project partners in preparing compliance documentation for Reclamation and other authoritative entity’s review and approval.
 - d. Assist project partners in identifying additional funding partners and sources to support the Initiative.
4. **Community Impact and Engagement:** Incorporate outreach to communities, foster community engagement, and pursue collaborative management leading to measurable conservation benefits. When possible, projects should be developed through community input and co-design processes. 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.

ANTICIPATED DELIVERABLES

Project deliverables will include:

- Reports, tools, and work products specified in the grant scope of work
- Participation in recurring team meetings and active coordination with the Initiative team
- Interim written and verbal progress reports
- Final report due at the conclusion of the project term
- Participation in 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 Southwest Rivers Program has a list of metrics in Easygrants for full proposal applicants to choose from for future reporting. We ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project (all possible program metrics are shown in the table below). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Kirstin Neff (Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Riparian restoration	Acres restored	Enter # of riparian acres restored, including riparian buffers to benefit native riparian vegetation and federally protected birds. In NOTES section, specify landcover type prior to

		planting (barren, cropland, grassland), dominant vegetation being planted (Broadleaf, Conifer, Shrub, Grass, Marsh, Wet meadow, Swamp), and average width of riparian buffer.
Monitoring	# sites being monitored	Enter the # sites being monitored

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include: local, state, federal, and tribal governments and agencies (e.g., townships, cities, boroughs), special districts (e.g., conservation districts, planning districts, utility districts), non-profit 501(c) organizations, educational institutions.
- Ineligible applicants include: international organizations, businesses or unincorporated individuals.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- Funds from this program cannot support fee title land acquisition projects. However, funds may cover certain transaction costs associated with an acquisition (appraisals, title searches, surveys) and for conservation easements.
- 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.
- 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

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 Rio Grande Project Water Conservation and Ecological Restoration Initiative will award up to \$300,000 in the 2024 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 may last up to three years. 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.

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, identification of additional project-funding partners, 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 – 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.

Applicant Webinar	March 2024
Full Proposal Due Date	April 25, 2024 11:59pm EST
Review Period	April – May 2024
Awards Announced	July 2024

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:

Gracie Broughton – gracie.broughton@nfwf.org

Kirstin Neff – Kirstin.neff@nfwf.org

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

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday-Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.