



SOUTHEAST AQUATICS FUND

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Applicant Webinar: 2:30 pm EDT, Tuesday, May 28, 2024
Proposal Due Date: 11:59 pm EDT, Thursday, July 18, 2024

[**REGISTER**](#)

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OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks proposals to voluntarily conserve aquatic habitat in southeastern United States and Texas. Substantial new funding is available for grantees in a wider geography than previous SE Aquatics funding rounds. Approximately \$8.45 million is expected to be available for grants this funding cycle. The funding will support projects that improve water quality, water quantity, instream condition, and riparian condition through technical assistance for voluntary actions by private landowners. In some geographies, funding is available to support aquatic connectivity, species recovery, monitoring, and planning. Funding is provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Altria, Cargil, Nestlé, and Southern Company.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE..... 2

PROGRAM PRIORITIES & METRICS 2

 Technical Assistance and Outreach to Private Landowners 3

 Restore and Enhance Instream and Riparian Habitat..... 4

 Assessment, Prioritization and Planning for Watershed Resilience and Aquatic Connectivity 4

Villosa Mussel Conservation and Focal Species Monitoring 4

ELIGIBILITY 5

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH 5

EVALUATION CRITERIA..... 6

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS 7

TIMELINE 9

HOW TO APPLY 9

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE..... 9



GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Grants will be made in specific geographies or river basins in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and Texas. While there are many compelling places for aquatic conservation projects, the geographic scope of this RFP is limited by funding availability within priority aquatic areas. The following table provides an overview of the geographies that are within the scope of this RFP. A map of the geographic scope of this RFP can be found by clicking this [link](#).

	Eligible Geographies / River Basins	Eligible Activities
Alabama	Alabama (priority on the Middle Coosa watershed), Mobile-Tombigbee (priority on the Locust Fork watershed), and Flint River basins; and 25-mile coastal zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance and outreach to private landowners (p. 3) • Restore and enhance instream and riparian habitat (p. 4) • Assessment, prioritization, and planning for watershed resilience and aquatic connectivity (p. 4) • Villosa mussel conservation and focal species monitoring (p. 4-5)
Florida	All Florida river basins and 25-mile coastal zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance and outreach to private landowners (p. 3) • Implementation of prescribed/rotational grazing and associated practices.
Georgia	Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint, Middle Coosa, and Conasauga river basins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance and outreach to private landowners (p. 3) • Restore and enhance instream and riparian habitat (p. 4) • Villosa mussel conservation and focal species monitoring (p. 4-5)
Mississippi	25-mile coastal zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Assistance on aquatics with forest landowners (p. 3)
North Carolina	Neuse-Pamlico and Cape Fear River basins, Appalachian Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance on aquatics for private landowners (p. 3) including agricultural best management practices
South Carolina	Pee Dee, Santee River basins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance on aquatics for private landowners (p. 3) including agricultural best management practices.
Tennessee	Appalachian Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Assistance on aquatics with private landowners (p. 3)
Texas	Counties that contain the Colorado River Basin ¹ , 25-mile coastal zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Assistance on aquatics with private landowners (p. 3)

PROGRAM PRIORITIES & METRICS

The priorities of the Southeast Aquatics Fund are informed by the aquatic goals and strategies of the [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#), which was adopted by the NFWF Board of Directors in 2018 (updated 2023). To the extent possible, proposals should describe how activities will advance specific goals and objectives of the Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan and/or other relevant conservation plans. The plan seeks to conserve the extraordinary biodiversity found across the southeast. It prioritizes work in northern Alabama and Georgia due to measurement and monitoring constraints. It utilizes a suite of aquatic species as indicators of healthy

¹ Texas counties: Austin, Bastrop, Blanco, Brazoria, Brown, Burnet, Caldwell, Coleman, Colorado, Concho, Fayette, Fort Bend, Gillespie, Hays, Kimble, Lampasas, Lee, Llano, Mason, Matagorda, McCulloch, Menard, Mills, Runnels, San Saba, Travis and Wharton



aquatic habitat in prioritized watersheds. Because of the priority given to this subregion, funding is available for a wide range of activities in the Conasauga River (GA) and Locust Fork and Middle Coosa (AL) watersheds.

Priority will be given to projects that would benefit the following focal species:

- Conasauga River – Endemic and Native Fishes (Alabama shiner, banded sculpin, blue shiner, bridled darter, Coosa darter, Coosa shiner, Greenbreast darter, tricolor shiner and trispot darter).
- Middle Coosa – Trispot darter

Program priorities are also informed by State Wildlife Action Plans and the collaborative regional initiatives to set aquatic priorities for the region. This includes the Southeast Aquatics Regional Partnership (SARP) and the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS).

The following is a listing of the eligible project activities under this RFP. NFWF will fund projects that address the threats facing native freshwater species by implementing one or more of the strategies described below.

Priority metrics are included with each of the listed priority programmatic activities. A full table of eligible metrics can be found by following this [link](#). All applicants should utilize the metrics table (accessed through this link) to select the most relevant metrics. If an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact NFWF staff to identify viable options.

Technical Assistance and Outreach to Private Landowners

All Eligible Geographies

Significant funding is available this year from USDA NRCS to support projects that build capacity to implement targeted outreach and assistance to private landowners. Grant recipients will provide technical assistance to interested farmers and ranchers to develop management plans, design and implement voluntary conservation practices, share their experiences and lessons learned through participation in Farm Bill programs, especially the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Implementation will be accomplished without a corresponding increase in NRCS workload – grantees will do the conservation planning and practice design. A particular emphasis should be placed on promoting, designing, and implementing [climate-smart agriculture and forestry \(CSAF\) conservation practices](#). Climate Smart Practices that benefit aquatics:

- Practices (including grazing management) to improve/maintain riparian and watershed function and temperature, protects surface and ground waters from nutrients, avoids erosion.
- Contingency planning for resiliency.
- Increase riparian herbaceous cover and/or forest buffer width for sediment and nutrient reduction and enhance or increase wildlife habitat.
- Increase stream shading for stream temperature reduction
- Restore rare or declining natural communities
- Restore floodplain hydrology including the use of low-tech process-based restoration methods

The Working Lands for Wildlife State Initiatives promote specific species that are indicators of ecological health – including aquatics. The WFLW map of species can be found by clicking this [link](#). The Southeast Aquatics Fund has funding available for the following WFLW State Initiatives:

- Northern Bobwhite in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.
- Eastern Hellbender in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee.
- Conasauga River Aquatic Species in Georgia.



- Colorado River Aquatic Species in Texas.

Funding is also available from NRCS for technical assistance capacity for grasslands/pasture management that improves water quality through grazing best management practices.

NRCS Coordination – Please ensure the project is in alignment with NRCS goals and priorities by conferring with the NRCS State Conservationist and their staff in the state in which your project is located. A list of NRCS contacts can be found [here](#).

Metrics: Please include the following metrics: number of people reached; number of participants receiving government agency cost share or financial assistance; dollar value of government agency cost share of financial assistance, acres covered by government agency cost share or financial assistance, acres under improved management. Please refer to the “Project Metrics” table for a full list of metrics.

Restore and Enhance Instream and Riparian Habitat

Eligible Geographies (River Basins): Alabama, Mobile-Tombigbee, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint

Diverse public and private funding is available for affecting physical changes to improve instream habitat. The objective is to improve native aquatic species populations and support key functions of the watershed by restoring wetland, streambank, and instream habitat. Proposals should discuss conservation outcomes for target species and how the project has been prioritized within the watershed.

Improving aquatic connectivity by removing or retrofitting stream barriers and stream crossings (culverts, concrete fords). Projects should remove high priority barriers and crossings based on surveys or assessments with an emphasis on high return methods in areas where priority habitat is fragmented.

Metrics: Proposals must estimate the number of acres and or streambank miles to be restored or enhanced and the number of landowners implementing practices because of the proposed activities. Please refer to the “Project Metrics” table for a full list of metrics.

Assessment, Prioritization and Planning for Watershed Resilience and Aquatic Connectivity

Eligible Geographies (River Basins): Alabama, Mobile-Tombigbee, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint

Grants will support assessment of barriers to habitat connectivity and prioritization for removal of barriers. This includes deepening understanding of the importance of aquatic habitat for resilience of target species. Barriers to habitat connectivity should be identified as a main factor impacting targeted species. The proposed work should demonstrably build on existing assessments and/or conservation plans. Emphasis will be placed on lowest cost/highest gain opportunities and identifying willing landowners.

Metrics: Proposals should estimate the number of research studies (including barrier assessments) used to inform prioritization of barriers.

Villosa Mussel Conservation and Focal Species Monitoring

Eligible Geographies: Alabama and Mobile-Tombigee River Basin



Grants are available for restoration of two *Villosa* mussel species (Alabama rainbow, Coosa creekshell) in the Conasauga River watershed streams with suitable water quality. This includes stocking to add to existing populations. These actions can be in addition to habitat restoration activities listed in Program Priority #2.

Funding is available for monitoring of the population status and habitat conditions for endemic native fishes (Alabama shiner, banded sculpin, blue shiner, bridled darter, Coosa darter, Coosa shiner, Greenbreast darter, tricolor shiner and trispot darter) in Conasauga and Middle Coosa; *Villosa* mussels (Alabama rainbow, Coosa creekshell) in Conasauga; and Black Warrior waterdog and flattened musk turtle in, Locust Fork.

Metrics: Proposals should include the species-specific strategies-Translocation # translocated/stocked, the number of sites restocked with new individuals.

NOTE: Community Engagement: Regardless of project activities, proposals that reflect active engagement and involvement of communities are strongly encouraged because of their importance for establishing sustained conservation success. Projects should engage community-level partners to design, implement, maintain projects, and monitor outcomes. Assistance to underserved communities is also important.

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.
- Applicants must comply with or be exempted from federal single audit requirements.
- Ineligible applicants include U.S. Federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations. U.S. Federal agencies are encouraged to partner with applicants but are not eligible to apply.

Restricted Uses of Grant Funds

- **Equipment Purchase:** 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

Approximately \$9 million is available in grant funding in 2024. Grant awards are expected to range from \$150,000 to \$500,000, depending on the overall scale and duration of the project. If outside of this range, please contact program staff to discuss.



Project Period: Anticipated completion time for funded projects typically will be 24 – 36 months following finalization of a grant agreement. Proponents should plan for the projects to start activities after the first quarter of 2025. The project narrative must include a clear timetable or schedule for project completion.

Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent. Projects may be a discrete part of a longer-term project, provided there are definable outcomes for the proposed phase of the overall effort.

Match Requirement: Proposals are strengthened by demonstrating matching funds from non-federal sources, cash, or in-kind contributions. Matching ratio and diversity of funding partners will be considered in the proposal's competitiveness. Applicants are encouraged to consider the programmatic circumstances of their project to describe match from partners who are working cooperatively to accomplish the same objectives within the defined geography. Applicants are encouraged to describe federal partner contributions in the match section of the application. These contributions will not count toward the non-federal match but will help in understanding the resources and partners contributing to the overall project. Applicants with questions about the match requirement are encouraged to contact program staff.

Organizations relevant to any of NRCS's Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories that are unable to meet any non-federal matching contribution requirement are eligible to receive grant funding, but they must contact NFWF to discuss potential match adjustment options prior to submitting a proposal.

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.

Conservation Plan and Context – The project advances an existing conservation plan or strategy, as outlined in the "Program Priorities" section above. The proposal should describe how the project will advance the aquatic species goals and strategies outlined in the [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#) or other established conservation plan (such as a State Wildlife Action Plan).

NRCS Coordination – For projects providing technical assistance and outreach to private landowners, please ensure the project is in alignment with NRCS goals and priorities by contacting and conferring with the NRCS State Conservationist and their staff in the state in which your project is located. A list of NRCS state contacts can be found [here](#).

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 most economically 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 there is a 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 – Proposal establishes a clear need for the funds being requested and demonstrates that activities would not be possible without requested funding.

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, supported by a strong local partnership that leverages additional funds and will sustain it after the grant's life. 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 CONSIDERATIONS

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.



Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories – The historically underserved farmer and rancher categories include those with limited resources, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged (American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics) and veterans. More information on the underserved categories can be [found here](#). The special emphasis categories are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Disability, Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Hispanic, and Veterans. More information on the special emphasis categories can be [found here](#).

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.



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 depends on the federal appropriations process.** Funding decisions will be made based on the 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:	2:30 pm EDT, Tuesday, May 28, 2024	REGISTER
Proposal Due Date:	11:59 pm EDT, Thursday, July 18, 2024	
Review Period	July – October 2024	
Awards Announced	November 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 on 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 the following Southern Regional Office staff:

Will Singleton Program Director 202-595-2607 Will.Singleton@nfwf.org	Zack Bernstein Manager 202-595-2433 Zachary.Bernstein@nfwf.org	Sarah Vest Coordinator 202-888-1657 Sarah.Vest@nfwf.org
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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.