



REQUEST FOR QUOTATIONS

Contract to Support Implementation of the Middle Rio Grande Environmental Water Leasing Program

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC), and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) seeks a qualified Contractor to assist in the implementation of an Environmental Water Leasing Program (EWLP) for the Middle Rio Grande Focal Area of the Southwest Rivers Program. The Middle Rio Grande Environmental Water Leasing Program is designed to improve habitat for native species in the Middle Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. You can obtain a copy of the Program's Business Plan on NFWF's website, [here](#).

BACKGROUND

NFWF is seeking a qualified contractor to support implementation of the Middle Rio Grande EWLP to benefit Rio Grande silvery minnow and Southwestern willow flycatcher.

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

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

Through program development since execution of the Cooperative Agreement, the program has successfully designed and tested a water leasing program that works with irrigators and irrigation managers to secure water for habitat restoration through voluntary water right leasing by willing participants. The EWLP has also worked with MRGCD to identify strategic investments in water delivery infrastructure that complement the leasing effort. It has also identified and enhanced habitat restoration sites to receive leased water.

Through this RFQ, the program will seek implementation support from local grantee partners for the period from November 1, 2025 through October 31, 2027 to build on progress to date in achieving Program goals in water leasing, infrastructure improvement, and habitat restoration. This

will set the stage for expanded native water leasing and other voluntary measures at scale as win-win solutions for the river, local communities, agricultural producers, and MRGCD over the long term.

PROJECT AREA

This effort will address tasks within the boundaries and under the jurisdiction of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (Figure 1).

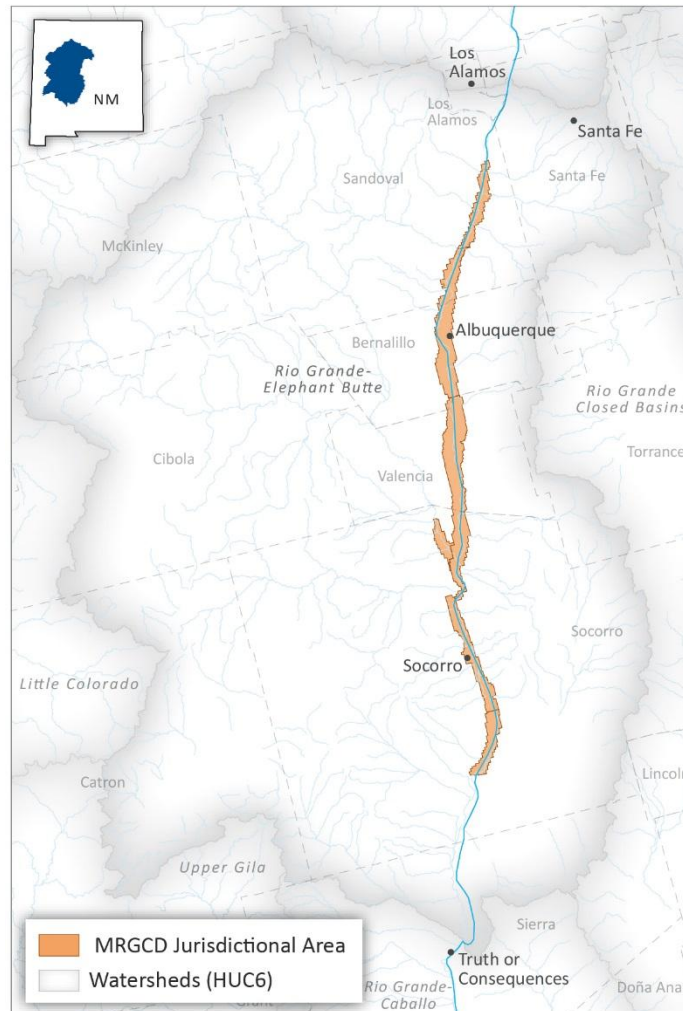


Figure 1. Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District Jurisdictional Boundaries

SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of work to be funded under this RFQ is comprised of five tasks, some of which are in turn divided into subtasks. All activities under these tasks build on the work undertaken to date to design, develop, and test the water leasing program and complementary infrastructure and habitat restoration activities, and will be done in close collaboration with staff of NFWF and MRGCD. This scope of work covers the period from November 1, 2025 through October 31, 2027.

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

Task 2, Water Market Research and Leasing Program Design, is concerned with conducting water market research to inform and design annual water leasing program structure and offerings. It is estimated at 15% of the program scope of work in this RFQ.

Task 3, Water Use Scenario Development, will develop plans for the conservation use of EWLP leased water at existing and future habitat/restoration sites under different hydrological conditions and river management scenarios. This is an ongoing task that builds on progress to date and includes integration of EWLP water deployment with other sources of environmental and/or Rio Grande Compact water in collaboration with USBR, NMISC, MRGCD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and non-profit partners. It is estimated at 35% of the program scope of work in this RFQ.

Task 4, Program Implementation, Expansion, and Refinement, involves staged growth and refinement of program activities including i) water leasing and other environmental water transactions, ii) irrigation infrastructure improvements, and iii) habitat restoration. It is estimated at 40% of the program scope of work.

Task 5, Reporting, including support and input to NFWF's reporting requirements under its funding agreement with NMISC. This task is estimated at 5% of the program scope of work.

Task 1: Policy Analysis and Development

Task 1.1 Policy Analysis and Development

- Support the Leasing Program in ongoing policy analysis and development as needed. Potential areas of activity include:
 - Specification of approaches to delivery of water at specific times during the season, across seasons, using different types of conserved water under different operational, hydrological, and Rio Grande Compact conditions.
 - Assist in establishing participation criteria for any new water interests that may be included in an expanded program, including in-district and out-of-district water rights and groundwater rights as applicable.
- Advise the Leasing Program regarding OSE policy and collaboration with water management agencies.
- Review agreements related to 2026 and 2027 Leasing Program participation, lease, forbearance, or transfer of water rights as needed.
- Support the Leasing Program in any integration with agricultural water leasing, the MRGCD Water Bank, or MRGCD Emergency Fallowing efforts.
- Support for required NEPA and other compliance activities.

Task 1.2 Program and Policy Context

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

Task 2: Water Market Research and Leasing Program Design

Task 2.1 Water Market Research

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

Task 2.2 Leasing Program Design

- Using findings from water market research, support design of leasing program offerings and program administrative processes

Task 3: Water Use Scenario Development

- Assist in development of water budgets/scenarios:
 - By water year
 - By program water availability
 - By BiOp/Reclamation priority
- Assess species benefit of the program activities, including:
 - Collaboration with stakeholders to assess benefit of water provision to different habitat sites
 - Collection and analysis of hydrological data for relevant sites
 - Identification of options to improve outcomes and/or adapt to different levels of water availability in current future years

Task 4: Program Implementation, Expansion, and Refinement

- Program Implementation: Support EWLP implementation in collaboration with MRGCD, NFWF, Reclamation, and the Program team. Consistent with the program design, annual implementation activities are expected to fall into three general areas: i) water leasing and other environmental water transactions, ii) irrigation infrastructure improvements, and iii) outfall habitat maintenance. Activities will include:
 - Implementation support for all program activities in 2026 and 2027.
 - Integration of 2026 and 2027 water leasing with water delivery to habitat sites, including tracking water use, monitoring site and hydrological conditions, and supporting for annual water accounting.
 - Management of monthly team meetings and active participation with MRGCD's Conservation Advisory Committee.
 - Contribute to adaptive management and monitoring plans for EWLP habitat/restoration sites in conjunction with MRGCD and Reclamation and their commitments under the 2016 BO.

- **Program Expansion:** In addition to the annual implementation of water leasing and water delivery to habitat sites, proactively identify and develop opportunities for program expansion, including through additional water acquisition strategies that will secure water for the benefit of species.
- **Program Refinement:** Throughout, Program implementation will be flexible and informed by feedback and modification from the program refinement process established during Program development. Activities include ongoing tracking and evaluation of program activity and input into team planning for future years.

Task 5: Reporting

- Provide support and input to NFWF's reporting requirements under its funding agreement with NMISC.

Deliverables: The contractor shall provide the following deliverables according to the designated schedule:

Table of Deliverables	
Task	Due Date
2026 Leasing Season Plan and NEPA compliance	4/1/2026
Coordinate regulatory compliance for FY26 infrastructure, habitat maintenance and monitoring projects	10/30/2026
Assistance with FY26 semiannual programmatic reporting	10/30/2026
2027 Leasing Season Plan and NEPA compliance	4/1/2027
Coordinate regulatory compliance for FY27 infrastructure, habitat maintenance and monitoring projects	10/30/2027
Assistance with FY27 annual programmatic reporting	10/30/2027

Schedule: All tasks should be completed by November 2027.

REQUIRED EXPERTISE AND PROPOSED STAFF

This RFP is seeking qualified organizations or entities to serve as independent contractor(s) to NFWF with the following qualifications:

Required expertise of the team includes advanced skills in natural resources or agricultural economics and water market design. Offerors should have experience working in New Mexico's Rio Grande watershed and with the Bureau of Reclamation and should have familiarity with New Mexico water law and policy, water infrastructure and operations in the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and the *Final 2016 Biological Opinion for the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow*. Offerors should have demonstrated ability in implementation of complex resource management



programs through collaboration and relationship-building, and working within cross-jurisdictional relationships between local, state, and federal water management agencies. Preferred expertise includes seasonal forbearance agreements, rotational fallowing techniques and market research methods, including survey techniques.

CRITERIA FOR COMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS

Proposals will be evaluated and scored on the following criteria. Offerors should organize their Proposal Narrative based on these sections:

1. **Understanding of the Scope of Work.** The Scope of Work must demonstrate an understanding of the goals of the activities involved. This section should include a description of how you will communicate with NFWF and program stakeholders and report on progress, results, and deliverables. Weight: 10%
2. **Technical Approach.** The proposed technical approach for conducting the tasks should clearly describe the proposed methods necessary to conduct the project. The section must demonstrate that those methods are robust and appropriate for conducting the project and address any areas of complexity or uncertainty associated with conducting the project. Weight: 20%
3. **Qualifications of Proposed Personnel.** This section should clearly describe which tasks each member of the team will conduct and how their training and experience provide the requisite experience to do so successfully. Weight: 20%
4. **Contractor's Past Performance.** The proposal should include information on the primary investigator(s)'s past performance experience in the requested field. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered. If subcontractors are to be used, information should be provided that demonstrates their past performance as well. Describe how that past performance is applicable to this evaluation. Weight: 20%
5. **Budget.** The proposed budget should itemize work in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the entire funding request. You must use attached Contractor Budget Template. You may add columns to the template for additional tasks if needed, but should not make any other changes. If applicable, please include the proposed budget for equipment purchase in the proposal separate from the Contractor Budget Template. Weight: 30%

ELIGIBLE OFFERORS & CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, and local, state and Indian tribal governments.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the offeror warrants and represents that it does not currently have any apparent or actual conflict of interest, as described herein. In the event an offeror currently has, will have during the life of the contemplated contract, or becomes aware of



an apparent or actual conflict of interest, in the event an award is made, the offeror must notify NFWF in writing in the proposal, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the proposal) of such apparent or actual conflicts of interest, including organizational conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest include any relationship or matter which might place the contractor, the contractor's employees, or the contractor's subcontractors in a position of conflict, real or apparent, between their responsibilities under the award and any other outside interests, or otherwise. Conflicts of interest may also include, but are not limited to, direct or indirect financial interests, close personal relationships, positions of trust in outside organizations, consideration of future employment arrangements with a different organization, or decision-making affecting the award that would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question the impartiality of the offeror, the offeror's employees, or the offeror's future subcontractors in the matter. Upon receipt of such a notice, the NFWF Contracting Officer will determine if a conflict of interest exists and, if so, if there are any possible actions to be taken by the offeror to reduce or resolve the conflict. Failure to resolve conflicts of interest in a manner that satisfies NFWF may result in the proposal not being selected for award.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the Offeror warrants and represents that it is eligible for award of a Contract resulting from this solicitation and that it is not subject to any of the below circumstances:

Has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an Contract with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Was convicted (or had an officer or agent of such corporation acting on behalf of the corporation convicted) of a felony criminal violation under any Federal or State law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Is listed on the General Services Administration's, government-wide System for Award Management Exclusions (SAM Exclusions), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 C.F.R. Part 180 that implement E.O.s 12549 (3 C.F.R., 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 C.F.R., 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension," or intends to enter into any subaward, contract or other Contract using funds provided by NFWF with any party listed on the SAM Exclusions in accordance with Executive Orders 12549 and 12689. The SAM Exclusions instructions can be found here: <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposals must be submitted under the same cover at the same time, in three distinctly labeled and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, 2) Budget, and 3) Evidence of Financial



Stability. Interested parties should submit proposals electronically to Southwest Rivers Program Director Kirstin Neff (Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org) using the requirements below:

1. Technical Proposal

- Format: Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF with a font size no smaller than 11 pt.
- Contact information: Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, UEI number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#.
- Narrative: Concise (10-page limit) description of the work plan and a summary of the applicant's expertise and experience, organized by the Criteria for Competitive Applications.
- Biographies: Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area.
- References: List two clients who have received services from the applicant that is similar in nature to the proposed work; include names, phone numbers, and email address.

2. **Budget:** The budget proposal must be submitted using the following NFWF budget template, found [here](#).

3. **Evidence of Financial Stability:** The applicant shall provide proof of financial stability in the form of financial statements, credit ratings, a line of credit, or other financial arrangements sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's capability to meet the requirements of this solicitation.

SELECTION PROCEDURE

A panel of NFWF staff, USBR staff, and cooperating stakeholders in EWLP program implementation will review the proposals. Offerors may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. Only one award will be made for this project. If multiple institutions are involved, they should be handled through subcontracts.

COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAWS

NFWF is committed to operating in full compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and Executive Orders. We continuously monitor legal and regulatory developments to ensure our policies, procedures, and operations align with current federal directives. We encourage all applicants to do the same.

The ability and extent to which NFWF is able to make awards is contingent upon receipt of funds from federal agencies and/or other funding partners. Final funding decisions will be made based on the applications received and the level and timing of funding received by NFWF.

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

October 3, 2025

Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF.

Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Kirstin Neff (Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org). NFWF will post all the questions and responses to all questions so that all

offerors have access to them at the same time. In order to provide equitable responses, all questions must be sent to NFWF **no later than 5:00 PM MST on October 3, 2025.**

October 6, 2025

NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the [RFQ page](#) on the NFWF website by October 6, 2025.

October 10, 2025

Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals.

Proposals must be sent electronically as an email attachment to Kirstin Neff (Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org) by **5:00 PM MST on October 10, 2025.**

Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.

November 2025

Contract award to selected Offeror

November 2027

Deliverables Due