



SOUTHWEST RIVERS HEADWATERS FUND

2026 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

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.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the [Southwest Rivers Headwaters Fund page](#) of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information.

Applicant Webinar [View Recording]	September 18, 2025, 12:00pm–1:00pm EDT / 10:00am–11:00am MDT
Full Proposal Due Date	November 12, 2025, 11:59pm EDT / 9:59pm MDT
Review Period	November 2025 – March 2026
Awards Announced	March 2026

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is requesting proposals to restore, protect and enhance aquatic and riparian species of conservation concern and their habitats in the headwaters of the Colorado River and Rio Grande watersheds. Funding is expected to be available through support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Trinchera Blanca Foundation, an affiliate of The Moore Charitable Foundation.

GRANT AWARD INFORMATION

NFWF expects to make 3-5 grant awards from this Request for Proposals. Grant requests should be between \$100,000 and \$600,000, with larger grant requests being considered on a case-by-case basis. Projects should begin within six months of the award date and be completed within three years of the agreed start date.

Applicants are required to provide at least \$1 in non-federal matching funds for every \$1 of NFWF grant funds requested. Eligible matching sources can include cash, in-kind donations, and/or volunteer labor which are directly related to the project proposed for funding. Applicants must distinguish between federal and non-federal matching fund sources.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is part of NFWF's Southwest Rivers Program and will provide funding to projects that produce measurable outcomes for species of conservation concern in the riparian corridors of the headwaters of the Colorado River and Rio Grande. The Rio Grande Headwaters Focal Area includes the mainstem and headwater tributaries of the Rio Grande in Colorado and northern New Mexico, as well as the headwaters of the Rio Chama, Jemez River, and Rio Puerco. The Colorado River Focal Area includes selected tributaries and headwaters of the Colorado River including the Escalante, Gila, Salt, San Juan, Verde and Virgin Rivers (see Figure 1). ***Projects located in the San Juan River watershed in southwestern Colorado should be submitted to the concurrent [RESTORE Colorado 2026 RFP](#).*** Projects located in the Colorado River Focal Area of this RFP must be limited to technical assistance activities in support of NRCS Farm Bill programs. Applicants are encouraged to consult NFWF's Southwest Rivers Business Plan [mapping portal](#) in informing potential geographic focus.



Figure 1. Southwest Rivers Headwaters Fund Program Boundary

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Priority projects will address the leading factors in aquatic and riparian species decline such as loss of natural processes and habitat, environmental change and invasive species. Projects employing process-based methods of wetlands and riparian restoration are highly encouraged. Maintaining healthy headwater wetlands and riparian areas provide security by improving the reliability of late season flows for water users, fish and wildlife downstream. Proposals should strive to contribute to goals detailed in NFWF's [Southwest Rivers Business Plan](#), and specifically the strategies related to focal species (see below) conservation. Projects benefiting one or more of the following species and their habitats are priorities for funding.

- Business Plan focal species in the Rio Grande Headwaters Focal Area include Rio Grande cutthroat trout, North American beaver and southwestern willow flycatcher.
- The focal species in the Colorado River Focal Area is North American beaver.

Priority restoration activities that address key limiting factors for focal species in the Rio Grande Focal Area include:

Process-based wetland, riparian and instream habitat restoration and enhancement – Restore natural fluvial process that increase floodplain connectivity, dynamic channel processes and recruitment of native riparian vegetation. Activities may include beaver mimicry structures, livestock exclusion fencing and riparian vegetation planting, removal of channel stabilizing structures, and science-based design and analysis for process-based restoration projects.

Riparian habitat restoration and enhancement – Restore stream banks to increase floodplain connectivity and recruitment of native riparian vegetation. Activities may include streambank re-contouring and native vegetation planting, and engineering design and analysis for riparian restoration projects.

Instream restoration and enhancement – Restore and enhance stream channels that have suffered from channelization, thereby restoring the natural variety of stream substrate and flow patterns that benefit the life cycles of the focal species. Specific activities may include stream channel engineering and bank re-shaping.

Increase water availability for species and their habitats and/or remove barriers to flow – Make available more water for environmental flows that are necessary to drive process-based restoration and sustain species and their habitats through voluntary leasing or acquisition of water rights in the focal geographies. Remove or improve infrastructure at road crossings, culverts and check dams that act as barriers to the movement of aquatic species or promote natural dynamic processes to ensure habitat connectivity and fluvial development of the whole valley bottom.

Reintroduction and translocation of focal species – Translocation of focal aquatic species to stream reaches with improved habitat and protection from invasive species. Reintroduction of or attraction projects benefitting North American beaver in a manner

compatible with ongoing agricultural use and irrigation and land management objectives, and which benefits other focal species dependent on the habitat created by beaver activity.

Protect focal species from invasives – Remove invasive fish that compete with and/or threaten to hybridize with Rio Grande cutthroat trout from streams which are or could be occupied by the native species. Construct barriers to protect established populations from hybridization where appropriate.

Additional priority activities in both the Rio Grande and Colorado River Focal Areas include:

Increase Capacity for Low-tech Process-based Restoration implementation in and among conservation organizations working in the southwest region. Here we define increased capacity broadly, from new positions within an organization to funding for contracting with external partners that bring knowledge or manpower to deliver technical assistance for low-tech process-based restoration techniques throughout the southwest.

Increase Capacity for Implementation of NRCS conservation programs - Increase capacity for implementation of priority conservation activities through NRCS partner positions and technical assistance, including cultural compliance. Capacity grants should address the following priorities:

- *Grant recipients will provide technical assistance to interested farmers, ranchers, and private forestland owners to develop management plans, design and implement conservation practices, share their experiences and lessons learned, and participate in Farm Bill programs, especially the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). A particular emphasis should be placed on promoting, designing, and implementing conservation practices that improve soil health, support grazing system resiliency, restore wetlands, develop perennial wildlife habitat, improve nutrient management, and enhance forest health.*
- *Direct staff resources to help agricultural producers design and implement conservation practices.*
- *Increase Farm Bill program participation and conservation practice implementation among agricultural producers.*

Applications are encouraged which support new full-time or part-time partner positions at applicant organizations such as foresters, wildlife biologists, rangeland specialists, and/or other natural resource professionals that will work in conjunction with NRCS personnel in New Mexico on a daily basis. Duties of partner positions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing technical assistance in the development of conservation plans and checkouts of completed practices.
- Preparing and/or monitoring various contract management reports.
- Preparing and issuing correspondence to participants such as annual practice reminders, deferral letters, preapproval letters, and eligibility letters.

- Providing assistance with the application process such as reviewing documents for completeness, verifying control of land, irrigation history, signature authority, required electronic registrations, and troubleshooting eligibility/vendor issues.
- Assisting with contract management by uploading and maintaining documents in electronic systems; removing expired contracts from active contract filing cabinets; and ensuring appropriate signatures on documents.
- Assisting with the completion of reviews and audits by compiling documentation needed to support audit samples.

NRCS Coordination: *Please ensure the project aligns with NRCS goals, priorities, and capacity needs 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](#).*

Please note that grantees applying for these capacity building funds may be required to report on additional performance metrics related to capacity building, conservation planning, and practice implementation to be negotiated between NFWF and the grantee after award decisions have been made. Outcomes proposed under this category should comply with [NRCS Conservation Practice Standards](#).

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grant projects, the Southwest Rivers Program has a list of metrics in Easygrants for full proposal 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 this list for your project. The number of metrics selected will not have any influence on proposal competitiveness. If you do not believe an applicable metric has been provided, please contact Kirstin Neff (Kirstin.Neff@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Water acquisitions or leases	Habitat Conservation – Water acquisitions or leases – Acre feet of water leased	Enter the acre feet of water leased
Fish passage improvements	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 SARP ID--see SARP Natl. Aq. Barrier Inventory (aquaticbarriers.org). If the barrier(s) is not in SARP, provide its lat/long or its name and source.
Fish passage improvements	Habitat Restoration – Fish passage improvements – Miles of stream opened	Enter total # of miles opened to improve aquatic organism passage. Only include the miles of mainstem & smaller tributaries connected until the next barrier upstream (or headwaters), but NOT lakes, ponds,

		or distance downstream from the barrier removed.
Restore stream geomorphology to increase aquatic species habitat	Habitat Restoration – Instream restoration – Miles restored	Enter instream miles restored for focal species
Remove invasive species that threaten non-focal fish species	Habitat Restoration – Removal of invasives – Miles restored	Enter total # of stream miles with goals met for reduction of predation or hybridization of non-focal fish species. In notes specify which species for which you are reducing predation or hybridization.
Remove invasive species that threaten Rio Grande cutthroat trout	Habitat Restoration – Removal of invasives – Miles restored	Enter total # of stream miles with goals met for reduction of predation or hybridization of Rio Grande cutthroat trout.
Reconnect floodplain and reestablish native riparian vegetation	Habitat Restoration – Riparian restoration – Acres restored	Enter the number of riparian acres restored, including riparian buffers. In the NOTES section, specify the landcover type prior to planting (barren, cropland, grassland), the dominant vegetation being planted (Broadleaf, Conifer, Shrub, Grass, Wet meadow), and the average width of the riparian buffer.
Installation of livestock exclusion fencing to protect riparian habitat	Habitat Management – BMP implementation for livestock fencing – Miles of fencing installed	Enter miles of fencing installed to improve habitat for focal species
Engage landowners regarding beaver introduction or engage other stakeholders regarding conservation actions	Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – Outreach/Education/Technical Assistance – # people reached	Enter the number of people reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities
Volunteer participation	Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – Volunteer participation – # volunteers participating	Enter the number of volunteers participating in projects
Installation of barriers to prevent the migration of invasive aquatic species	Species-specific Strategies – Invasive animal or predator removal/ Fencing nests from predators – # barriers created	Enter the number of barriers constructed to protect populations of non-focal fish species from invasive species. In notes specify which species you are constructing a barrier to protect.
Installation of barriers to protect Rio Grande cutthroat trout from invasive aquatic species	Species-specific Strategies – Invasive animal or predator removal/ Fencing nests from predators – # barriers created	Enter the number of barriers constructed to protect populations of Rio Grande cutthroat trout from invasive species.
Translocation of beaver for reintroduction and riparian habitat restoration	Species-specific Strategies – Translocation – # translocated/stocked	Enter the number of beaver translocated in the course of the project

Support future expansion of beaver	Habitat Restoration – Restoring Hydrology - # sites with restored hydrology	Enter the number of distinct project locations (more than 2 miles apart) where process-based restoration will be implemented.
Conduct translocation projects for target native fish species	Species-specific Strategies – Translocation – # translocations and/or social attraction projects	Enter the # translocations and/or social attraction projects initiated for non-focal fish species. In notes specify which species you are translocating.
Conduct translocation projects for Rio Grande cutthroat trout	Species-specific Strategies – Translocation – # translocations and/or social attraction projects	Enter the # translocations and/or social attraction projects initiated for Rio Grande cutthroat trout.
Expand species monitoring to new and additional sites	Planning, Research, Monitoring – Monitoring – # sites being monitored	Enter the # sites being monitored
Population	Population – Miles of habitat occupied by the species	Enter the number of miles of habitat occupied by beaver
Economic benefits	# jobs created	Enter the # of individuals hired to directly work on the project (non-volunteers). Jobs should be directly engaged in grant activities, funded by the grant, and shouldn't have existed prior to the grant. The starting value for this metric should be zero and target value should be a whole number. In the NOTES section, provide the FTE for the jobs created.
Economic benefits	# jobs sustained	Enter the # of paid jobs that are partially or fully sustained through this grant. The starting value for this metric should be zero and target value should be a whole number. Jobs should have existed prior to the grant, be funded by the grant, and be directly engaged in project activities.
Incentives	# participants receiving gov't agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of participants enrolled in government cost share or financial assistance programs. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP), how you will track enrollment. This should be equal to or less than the “# people with changed behavior” metric.

Incentives	Dollar value of government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the dollar value of federal, state, or local government agency cost share or financial assistance. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP) and how the value was estimated.
Incentives	Acres covered by government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of acres enrolled in government agency cost share or financial assistance. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP). If applicable, number should be equal to or less than “Acreage of project footprint” metric.
Outreach/ Technical Assistance	# people with changed behavior <i>*to report # of farmers changing practices</i>	Enter the number of producers implementing new conservation practices with or without federal, state, local, or private financial assistance. This should be equal to or greater than the “# of farmers receiving gov't agency cost share or financial assistance” metric.
Project footprint	Acreage of project footprint	Enter the total number of unique acres where one or more conservation practices were implemented. Only count an acre once, even if multiple activities or treatments will occur on that acre during the project.
BMP development	# mgmt plans with BMPs	Enter the number of completed management plans into which Best Management Practices (BMPs) were incorporated.
BMP development	# acres covered by conservation plan	Enter the number of acres that are receiving conservation planning and other technical assistance to help producers meet eligibility requirements for USDA NRCS conservation programs and other Federal, State, and local conservation programs.

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.

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.

Conservation Outcomes	Budget	Technical
• Alignment with program goals and priorities • Quantifiable performance metrics • Appropriate monitoring of activities and outcomes • Partnership & community engagement • Project long-term sustainability	• Allowable and reasonable costs • Matching contributions • Cost effective	• Technically sound and feasible • Logical and achievable work plan and timeline • Engages technical experts • Accurate spatial data • Sound compliance approach (permits, NEPA, QAQC) • Past grantee success • Transferable

Partnership and Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with 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. 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 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.

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.

Matching Contributions – Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised, spent, and acquired for the Project during the Period of Performance. Larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a range of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

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 the 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.

Spatial Data – Project spatial data submitted to NFWF’s online mapping tool accurately represent the location(s) of conservation activity(ies) at the time of proposal submission. Successful projects will be required to submit improved spatial data for each conservation activity within the period of performance as necessary.

OTHER

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- NFWF funds and matching contributions are strictly prohibited from being used for a number of reasons to include, for example, political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities, or in violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. See [OMB Uniform Guidance](#) for additional information.
- 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 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.

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), and carbon accounting (e.g., sequestration, avoided emissions).

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 award 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. Requests for monthly advances will not be considered.

Compliance Requirements – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and the 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 sufficient 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.

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:

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Emma.Wigger@nfwf.org
(202) 888-1680

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.