



Rio Grande Project Drought Resilience Efforts Initiative 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 award 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 Program](#) page on the NFWF website for the most current dates and information.

Applicant Webinar [View Recording]	January 15 th , 2026, at 1:00pm-2:30pm MDT / 3:00pm-4:30pm EDT
Follow-up Applicant Webinar [Register Here]	February 25 th , 2026, at 11:00a-12:00pm MDT / 1:00pm-2:00pm EDT
Full Proposal Due Date	March 26th, 2026, by 9:59 MDT / 11:59pm EDT
Review Period	March 2026 – June 2026
Awards Announced	July 2026

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is requesting proposals to implement multi-benefit projects that enhance Rio Grande Project water supply to help ensure continued access to water for municipal and irrigation use, enhance habitat, decrease flooding of adjacent lands and channel sedimentation, and implement measures to build Project resilience under prolonged drought and aridification. Funding for the Drought Resilience Efforts (DRE) Initiative is expected to be available through support from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission.

Goals of the DRE include:

1. Reduce damage from flooding and sedimentation
2. Promote aquifer recharge through stormwater management
3. Improve infrastructure to manage water
4. (Required goal) Create and/or sustain habitat and promote watershed health

All projects must address at minimum two of the four goals, with a requirement that one be #4; any project that does not meet this requirement will be removed from consideration.

In 2024, NFWF made a grant award to the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute (NM WRRI) to conduct a stakeholder process that would engage community members and organizations in the lower portion of the Rio Grande Basin in New Mexico to identify project types and priority strategies to implement these multi-benefit goals. Feedback from that stakeholder process has informed this request for proposals.

GRANT AWARD INFORMATION

NFWF expects to make 5-15 grant awards from this Request for Proposals (RFP), with a minimum grant amount of \$100,000 per project. Up to \$19 million is available through this RFP. Projects should begin within six months of the award date and be completed within three years of the agreed start date.

Leverage and match is encouraged but not required. ***Leverage and match will be evaluated for its demonstration of community support and project partnerships, not for the dollar amount contributed, and can include cash, in-kind or volunteer contributions.*** Leverage should be reported in the proposal narrative in Easygrants. Matching contributions should be included in the “Matching Contributions” section of the proposal task in Easygrants. Please reach out to NFWF staff and review the [Applicant Tip Sheet](#) for additional guidance on how to report leverage and match in the proposal.

Leverage:

- Leverage does not need to follow the rules outlined below for matching contributions. Leverage is intended to demonstrate community support and project partnerships rather than commit a specific amount of funding to the project.
- Leverage does not need to be quantified with a dollar value if that is not applicable to the partnerships you wish to convey.
- Leverage could include costs or other funding related to previous or current phases of the project, including design, on-the-ground implementation, or ongoing management actions. This section can also capture grant awards that have already been used to match other funding sources but still contribute to the overall outcomes of the project.

Match:

Non-federal Matching Contributions:

- Verifiable from the grantee’s records
- Not included as contributions for any other Federal award
- Reasonable and necessary for accomplishment of project or program objectives
- Committed directly to the project and used within the period of performance
- Allowable under OMB 2 CFR 200 Cost Principles

Federal Matching Contributions:

- Verifiable from the grantee’s records
- Reasonable and necessary for accomplishment of project or program objectives

- Committed directly to the project and used within the period of performance

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The DRE will award grants in southern New Mexico and that part of Texas north west of El Paso within the Lower Rio Grande Focal Area of NFWF's [Southwest Rivers Business Plan](#) (Figure 1). This excludes the part of the focal area located in Mexico. Applicants are encouraged to consult NFWF's [Southwest Rivers Business Plan Map](#) for a more detailed view of the NFWF focal area.



Figure 1. NFWF's Lower Rio Grande Focal Area

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Project Goals Addressed. Competitive project proposals will reflect a range of approaches; thus, each project will be categorized into the particular combination of goals that the project is addressing. Noting that all projects must address Goal 4, the following list includes the different iterations of possible project goal combinations:

- 1_4 {Goal 1 Flood/sediment transport mitigation, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 2_4 {Goal 2 Aquifer recharge, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 3_4 {Goal 3 Infrastructure improvements, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 1_2_4 {Goal 1 Flood/sediment transport mitigation, Goal 2 Aquifer recharge, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 1_3_4 {Goal 1 Flood/sediment transport mitigation, Goal 3 Infrastructure improvements, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 2_3_4 {Goal 2 Aquifer recharge, Goal 3 Infrastructure improvements, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}
- 1_2_3_4 {Goal 1 Flood/sediment transport mitigation, Goal 2 Aquifer recharge, Goal 3 Infrastructure improvements, Goal 4 Habitat/watershed health}

Priority Strategies. Each project will list the strategies (or practices) planned in the project proposals. NM WRII sought stakeholder feedback in a survey on which strategies were most important to the survey participants. Below is a list of the major strategies which qualify for funding through this RFP, identified in the order ranked by respondents to the NM WRII survey. The survey asked participants to rank which of the provided strategies were higher priorities and to provide additional strategies. Find a summary of the results of the survey from the 102 respondents included as Addendum A (you can access here: <https://arccg.is/11ju8z1>). Note that we categorized the 68 responses that were provided, with several falling under the existing strategies provided.

1. Restore upper watersheds to reduce floods and sediments washing into the valley, including adapting grazing management to advance and support restoration and respond to droughts
2. Projects that recharge groundwater aquifers through capturing a portion of stormwater/flood flows and/or maintaining flows for downstream riparian areas
3. Achieve groundwater resiliency for today and future generations (recharge to the aquifer is balanced with groundwater use by combinations of strategies)
4. Create and/or sustain areas of bosque (which has river health, wildlife habitat, and recreation benefits), with an emphasis on high quality habitat for native riparian birds
5. Integrated river management program to restore a bosque, natural river health and functions, and riparian habitat throughout the river corridor
6. Use of stormwater/flood flows as an alternative water source for agriculture and bosque riparian areas
7. Add ability for flood control dams to store stormwater for agricultural and recharge use
8. Policies and programs to voluntarily incentivize farm water demand reduction and conservation (e.g. cover crops, shifts to profitable low-water use crops)
9. Reduce flood risks and sediment transport into valley through improving built infrastructure

10. Improve Elephant Butte Irrigation District infrastructure to conserve water

11. *Other major strategy categories provided by survey participants:*

- a. Increase water quality and safety
- b. Include public education and engagement in projects
- c. Modify governance and increase planning

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Drought Resilience Efforts Initiative 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
Improve or construct new water delivery infrastructure	# of water infrastructure projects executed	Enter the number of water infrastructure projects constructed or modified to improve water management.
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.
Best management practices (BMP) implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction	Acres with BMPs to reduce stormwater or sediment loads	Enter the number of acres with nature-based upper watershed restoration practices to reduce stormwater and sediment flows
Increase stormwater storage	Gallons stormwater storage added	Enter the volume in gallons of additional stormwater storage created by water infrastructure projects

Economic benefits	# jobs created	Enter the number of jobs created as a result of the project
Volunteer participation	# volunteers participating in projects	Enter the number of volunteers participating in the project
Monitoring	# sites being monitored	Enter the # sites being monitored

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include: local, state 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: federal agencies, 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with program goals and priorities • Quantifiable performance metrics • Appropriate monitoring of activities and outcomes • Partnership & community engagement • Project long-term sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowable and reasonable costs • Cost effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Technical Merit – Project narrative includes clearly outlined methods and a defined technical approach to produce deliverables that fulfill the project’s goals, monitor the project to quantify the results, and secure all relevant regulatory approvals. The project narrative also includes clearly stated project practices/strategies, including which category the strategies fall into (see list under “Project Goals Addressed”). Project plans or diagrams include clear indications of the layouts, locations, and associated areas in acres of the proposed practices. Monitoring plans state quantitative success criteria, evaluation methods, and identify adaptive management steps for ensuring course correction if monitoring indicates the success criteria are not on trajectory for meeting success, as possible within 3-year project period. Project narrative includes a clear and reasonably scheduled milestones chart.

The narrative should also include a short description and any available evidence identifying what makes the project and its effects on the stated goals important or compelling. Descriptions and/or evidence of importance can include (but are not limited to): the need for the goal is greater in the project location as compared to other areas, the project will serve as a model that can be generalized to other areas, or the benefits will be comparably greater in this area as compared to other areas.

Quantitative Assessment of Conservation Outcomes – The Quantitative Assessment Sheet (QAS) is complete and supports the conservation outcome metrics claimed (ex. acres of riparian restoration, gallons of stormwater storage added). As part of their stakeholder process grant from NFWF, NM WRRI will provide Technical Assistance to Proposal Teams to help them complete their QAS in support of project proposals per the quantitative assessment technical assistance timelines and criteria described below. The QAS is available [here](#) and more details on the NM WRRI Technical Assistance Team are available [here](#). Note that the Proposal Teams will be providing the final assessment with their proposal submittal to the NFWF RFP. NM WRRI technical support will include providing Proposal Teams access to the regional assessments conducted to fulfill Technical Assistance needs when they are complete. For the initial assessment this will be no later than the date of the RFP issuance by NFWF, and updates will be released thereafter as they are completed.

- Released with this RFP: Attached to this RFP is the “Quantitative Assessment Sheet (QAS)”, and “Information on the Quantitative Assessment Sheet (QAS)”. Proposal Teams will submit a QAS as a required upload to their Easygrants application.
- Up to 2 weeks prior to RFP final submissions (but the sooner the better): Schedule an assessment meeting with members of the NM WRRI Quantitative Assessment Technical Assistance Team as necessary to identify and discuss project information needed for Proposal Teams to complete their QAS.
- As soon as possible, no later than February 23, 2026: Proposal Teams may contact the NM WRRI Quantitative Assessment Technical Assistance Team if needed to assist with providing quantitative assessment technical assistance. As requested, and within the availability limitations, Proposal Teams should submit the NM WRRI Quantitative Technical Assistance Request Form (basic project information as specified in the Information on the Quantitative Assessment Sheet (QAS) and in the chart in Addendum A) by February 23, 2026. This information is needed to conduct the quantitative assessments.

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 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 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. Applicants are also encouraged to contact the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer District IV office in Las Cruces, NM prior to submitting an application to determine if a permit will be required in cases where a project intends to impound stormwater for more than 96 hours or use groundwater or surface water in some capacity.

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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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.