



## **COLUMBIA BASIN WATER TRANSACTIONS PROGRAM 2026 - 2027 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. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

Applicant Webinar [[Register Here](#)] **Monday, April 20, 2026 at 11:00 AM PDT**  
Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, May 7, 2026 by 8:59 PM PDT**

### **COLUMBIA BASIN OVERVIEW**

The Columbia Basin covers 258,000 square miles, making it one of the largest river basins in the United States. The Basin includes public and private lands, multiple mountain ranges, arid valleys, lush forests, and agricultural lands. This region also contains abundant rivers and streams, stretching across Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, that deliver water to the Columbia River and its tributaries to provide important habitat for fish and wildlife, renewable energy, drinking water, irrigation for agricultural production, and scenery that makes the area a diverse and vibrant ecosystem. In addition, anadromous salmonid production in the Columbia Basin contributes more than \$150 million annually to the commercial and recreational fishing economies of the Pacific Northwest, including Idaho, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Southeast Alaska.<sup>1</sup>

The Columbia Basin is home to several federally protected threatened and endangered fish species that depend on the freshwater system to migrate and fulfill their life cycle. However, many of these streams are dewatered due to numerous factors, including over-appropriation and drought. Water scarcity can have catastrophic impacts for fish and cripple local agricultural economies. Balancing ecosystem health with the resource needs of local communities is critical to long-term resilience of fish, wildlife, and people throughout the Columbia Basin.

### **GRANTMAKING PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is requesting proposals from organizations that will work with willing landowners and water rights holders to enhance, restore, and protect aquatic ecosystems for native fish species in the Columbia Basin. The Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program (CBWTP) funds voluntary water transaction development and implementation in the United States portion of the Columbia Basin and is the largest voluntary instream flow restoration

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<sup>1</sup> Flores, L., Mojica, J., Fletcher, A., Casey, P., Christin, Z., Armistead, C., Batker, D. 2017. The Value of Natural Capital in the Columbia River Basin: A Comprehensive Analysis. Earth Economics, Tacoma, WA.



program in the country. Since its inception in 2002, CBWTP has implemented 725 voluntary water transactions and secured approximately 2.95 million acre-feet of water in flow-limited tributaries of the Columbia River Basin. This is enough water to provide for the annual domestic use of nearly 32 million Americans.

Funding for this program will primarily be provided by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and is available for programmatic support, which includes staff capacity and associated costs of developing water transactions. Once an entity is selected through this Request for Proposals (RFP), they will be considered a Qualified Local Entity (QLE) and will be able to apply for funding to pay for individual water transactions during the term of their grant agreement. Qualification status will last **three years** from the time a full proposal is approved, pending satisfactory annual performance reviews. Existing QLEs will have the option to submit an abbreviated proposal in lieu of a full proposal in the two subsequent years after initial selection.

This year, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), additional funding will be available for technical assistance to prepare future habitat restoration projects on working lands within Columbia Basin watersheds located in Washington State. Priority strategies for these technical assistance funds include assisting landowners with the development of conservation plans focused on activities to improve and protect water quality and quantity to benefit watershed resilience and native fish conservation. Projects should engage agricultural producers in conservation practices and increase participation in USDA Farm Bill Programs administered by NRCS. This funding is intended to increase the delivery and implementation of Farm Bill programs and practices including, but not limited to, the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), [Conservation Stewardship Program](#), [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#), and [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) priorities. Details for each of these programs can be found by clicking the links above.

## **GEOGRAPHIC & SPECIES FOCUS**

All proposed activities for BPA funded projects must be within the Columbia River Basin in Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Priority will be given to areas listed in the [2020 National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's \(NOAA\) Biological Opinion \(BiOp\)](#) that aims to recover the Basin's native anadromous species which are listed as threatened or endangered by the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). A portion of the funding from BPA is dedicated to the areas of the Columbia River Basin that are covered by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians. Proposals in these geographies should be separate from proposals for other geographies.

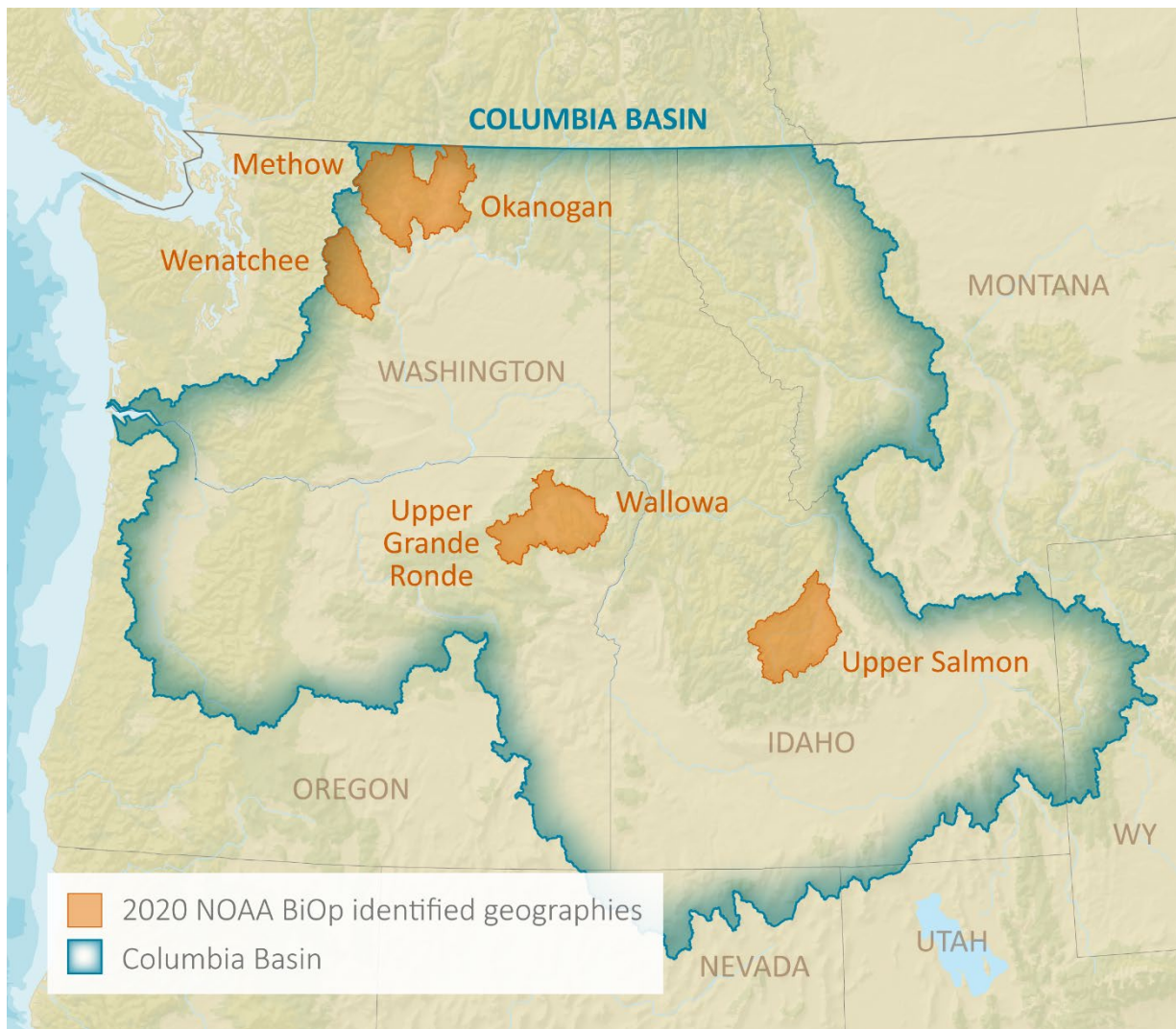


Figure 1. Columbia Basin with 2020 BiOp Identified Geographies

Proposed geographies for BPA funding must include tributaries that have identified flow as a priority limiting factor to survival of species in one or more of the categories below:

1. ESA listed species in [2020 BiOp](#) identified areas depicted in range in Figure 1.
2. ESA listed anadromous species not specified above ([National Marine Fisheries Service](#) and [2020 BiOp](#)).
3. ESA listed resident [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) or state species of concern (by one or more of [OR](#), [WA](#), [ID](#), [MT](#)).
4. Other species not listed above where a benefit can be tied to increased flows in a specific location.

All proposed activities for NRCS funding must be located within the Columbia River Basin in Washington State (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. Columbia Basin in Washington State

## PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The goal of the program is to work cooperatively with willing landowners and water rights holders to maximize implementation of voluntary aquatic habitat restoration in flow-limited streams critical to the survival and recovery of native fish species throughout the Columbia Basin. Applicants should have long-standing relationships with landowners and water rights users, and should have demonstrated the ability to execute the following:

1. **Voluntary water transactions** with willing water users, including the temporary lease of water rights, voluntary duty reduction, and the permanent acquisition of water rights, among other incentive-based approaches. Voluntary, market-based water transactions provide an effective and fair way to balance out-of-stream water uses with the need to maintain stream flow for imperiled fish. The greatest priority should be given to voluntary transactions that are permanent or have potential to result in permanent dedication of water flows in stream.
2. **Conserved water projects** such as conveyance efficiency projects (e.g., piping or lining ditches), upstream water conservation or tailwater reduction projects, or on-farm infrastructure upgrades (e.g., flood-to-sprinkler shifts in irrigation practices) where there is a measurable benefit to aquatic habitat. Projects may also enhance on-farm efficiency and reduce water demand to help build drought resilience for agricultural communities. Note that CBWTP funding does not currently support infrastructure implementation costs (e.g., materials, construction costs) but will support the cost associated with the conserved water that is dedicated instream as a result of the project.
3. **Community impact and landowner engagement projects** that incorporate outreach to communities, foster landowner and water user engagement, and provide technical assistance to landowners to pursue measurable conservation benefits. Priority will be given to projects that focus their efforts on improving enrollment in the USDA Farm Bill Programs administered by NRCS listed above. Additionally, projects should engage community-level partners (e.g., municipalities, NGOs, landowners, community leaders) to help implement and maintain projects to secure sustainability post-grant award.

## Additional Project Considerations

Competitive applicants should show their expertise in addressing following priorities in their proposed work:

1. **Species of concern:** Proposals must showcase how the applicant will work toward addressing the conservation needs of one or more species of concern through project implementation (species of concern are defined above, see Geographic & Species Focus).
2. **Prioritization:** Proposals should clearly articulate the prioritization efforts for each subbasin in which work will take place. Prioritization efforts should show the hierarchical planning that has gone into the selection of subbasins, streams, and water rights, properties, and landowners. The efforts should articulate why the subbasin is important compared to other subbasins, why a particular stream is important compared to other streams in the subbasin for both the recovery of the species as well as the relationships the applicant has with local landowners.
  - a. Existing plans: If prioritization plans have been completed, name and describe how they are used in transaction development and planning. If a plan already exists, please define what the quantifiable objectives are for the priority basins or streams and how many previous transactions have contributed to meeting those goals. If a named existing plan is available online, please provide a link.



b. New plans: If prioritization plans have not been developed, describe how you will use the budget to develop them.

3. **Adaptive management**: Demonstrate how your efforts are moving beyond preliminary practices and proof of concept methods. Transactions, restoration, and technical assistance should strive towards permanent instream flow and work to build on previous efforts. Applicants should use flow and species monitoring results to show how experience with local systems has contributed to selection of the most impactful projects.
4. **Monitoring**: The proposal should include a description of long-term monitoring of water flow, habitat restoration, impacts of technical assistance, and species benefits will be documented. In addition, all water transactions funded under CBWTP will be required to have compliance and flow monitoring plans unless otherwise approved by NFWF staff.
5. **Watershed Context**: The proposal should describe any collaborative efforts with other entities and document how opportunities for cost-sharing, data sharing, and project coordination were considered. The scale of any planned flow or habitat restoration projects should be measurable relative to the overall flow and the scale of habitat loss and other issues in the basin. Where applicable, proposals should document the entity’s intention of working in areas where significant seniority can be protected in-stream through state agency process or is contractually protectable instream at a time of year when needed to benefit fish and wildlife.

### Project Metrics – NRCS Applicants Only

To better gauge progress for projects funded by NRCS, the Columbia Basin Restoration Program RFP has a list of metrics in Easygrants for applicants to choose from for reporting (commonly used metrics are shown in the table below). **Metrics submissions are only required for projects seeking NRCS funding.** We ask that you select the most relevant metrics from the below list for your project. If you do not believe an applicable metric has been provided, please contact Alex Mahmoud ([Alexander.Mahmoud@nfwf.org](mailto:Alexander.Mahmoud@nfwf.org)) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Habitat Restoration – Fish passage improvements	# Passage barriers assessed and/or with design plans	Enter the # of in-stream barriers with assessments or engineering/design plans completed in this grant. In the notes, provide the barrier’s Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) ID ( <a href="http://aquaticbarriers.org">aquaticbarriers.org</a> ). If the barrier(s) is not in SARP, provide its lat/long or its name and source.
Habitat Management – Improved irrigation practices	Acre feet of water conserved	Enter the number of acre feet of water expected to be conserved annually.

Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – Incentives	# participants receiving government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of landowners that enrolled in government cost share or financial assistance programs as a result of the project’s technical assistance activities. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP) and how you will track enrollment.
Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – 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 received by agricultural producers as a result of the project’s technical assistance activities. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP) and how the value was estimated.
Capacity, Outreach, Incentives – 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 programs as a result of the project’s technical assistance activities. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP).
Planning, Research, Monitoring – Restoration planning/design/permitting	# Engineering and design plans developed	Enter the number of Engineering and Design plans developed. Generally, there will be one plan per project to be constructed.

## ELIGIBILITY

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, and educational institutions. Ineligible applicants: businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations.

## GRANT AWARD INFORMATION

- Match is not required but encouraged and may include both programmatic and expected transactional contributions anticipated during the grant period. Matching contributions will be considered as part of the evaluation criteria. Funding or in-kind contributions from another NFWF award or other BPA funding is not allowable match.
- Once an entity is considered qualified and receives a BPA funded grant through this solicitation, they are then eligible to submit water transaction projects through CBWTP’s



closed water transaction solicitations. There is a separate review and evaluation process for those proposals.

## 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 CBWTP’s overall habitat and species conservation goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities.

**Technical Merit** – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical, and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design, and implementation to ensure activities are technically sound and feasible.

**Partnership and Community Impact** – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with 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 and spent for the Project during the Period of Performance. Larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a variety 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 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 represents 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.

**Long-term Sustainability** – Project will be maintained to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time. This includes future transaction projections, and how future funding will be secured to implement long-term deals, monitoring and maintenance activities.

**Past Success** – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.

## **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.
- Pursuant to the American Security Drone Act (ASDA), effective December 22, 2025, applicants proposing activities funded in whole or in part with federal funds may not use, operate, or purchase any drone or uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) included on the Covered Foreign Entities (CFE) List. This prohibition applies to both new purchases and continued use of existing UAS, including certain widely used commercial platforms, such as DJI and Autel. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all proposed and existing UAS used in connection with federally funded activities comply with applicable federal law and are not included on the CFE List. Noncompliance may affect eligibility for funding.
- 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 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, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. 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. 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.



## 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 <a href="#">[Register Here]</a>	April 20, 2026 at 11:00 AM PDT
Full Proposal Due Date	May 7, 2026 at 8:59 PM PDT
Review Period	May – August 2026
Awards Announced	Late August 2026

## 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](https://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.

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](mailto: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.