



## FIVE STAR GRANT PROGRAM 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 program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information for the [Five Star Program](#).

[Applicant Webinar](#)

March 4, 2026

**Full Proposal Due Date**

**June 4, 2026, 11:59 PM ET (Extended)**

Review Period

June 2026 – October 2026

Awards Announced

Mid to Late November 2026

### OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in cooperation with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), FedEx, Southern Company, and Arconic Foundation are pleased to solicit applications for the 2026 Five Star program.

The Five Star grant program seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to local partnerships focused on improving water quality, watersheds and the species and habitats they support.

Projects include a variety of ecological improvements along with community outreach, education and stewardship. Ecological improvements may include one or more of the following: community tree canopy enhancement; community gardens; wildlife habitat restoration and conservation, including wetland, riparian, forest and coastal habitat.

Projects should increase access to the benefits of nature, reduce the impact of environmental hazards and engage local communities in project planning, outreach and implementation. Projects are expected to engage a range of community partners who are involved in implementing the



project and sustaining the project outcomes. NFWF may use a mix of public and private funding sources to support any grant made through this program.

## PROGRAM PRIORITIES

All proposals should address at least one element within each of the three program priorities:

1. **On-the-Ground Restoration**: *all projects must provide a direct ecological benefit through one or more of the following:*
  - Develop public open spaces, create or enhance community parks, improve and protect community tree canopy.
  - Enhance community tree canopy to help address issues such as extreme heat, flooding and stormwater run-off, and poor air quality.
  - Address key species and habitats and link directly to established watershed and conservation plans.
  - Restore migratory bird habitat, including Chimney Swift conservation activities, bird-friendly building retrofitting and design, efforts to address light pollution, and pesticide and hazardous trash reduction.
  - Create and enhance community agriculture spaces that support pollinator and migratory bird habitats as well as manage heat islands and stormwater run-off.
  - Develop/implement trash and litter prevention programs designed to keep city-based waterways and riverfronts clean.
  
2. **Environmental Outreach, Education, and Training**: *all projects must integrate meaningful outreach, education and/or training into the proposed on-the-ground activities through one or more of the following:*
  - Engage the public – particularly youth – in hands-on, outdoor experiences that build awareness of the importance of protecting and recovering priority and/or at risk species and habitats and promote stewardship and conservation practices.
  - Engage communities in restoration at public areas – such as schools, parks, birding trails and more – for public health and recreation.
  - Provide training to key stakeholders (such as volunteers, community groups, city officials) on how to use data to design environmental programs to maximize impact on issues such as heat, flooding, or air pollution.
  - Improve understanding to prevent trash, litter, and pollution impacts in local waterways that affect community health and local economies.
  
3. **Community Partnerships**: *all projects must involve five or more partners through one or more of the following:*
  - Directly engage a varied group of community partners to achieve ecological and specific educational outcomes including partnerships among upstream and downstream communities.



- Demonstrate that the project will advance existing local watershed or conservation plans and/or propose to foster and coordinate a diverse stakeholder partnership that develops and/or implements new plans.
- Identify plans to provide training, partnership meetings and presentations to build support for the project during and beyond the project period.

## PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Five Star program 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. Metrics are required for every proposal. All possible program metrics are listed below. If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Ericka Popovich ([Ericka.Popovich@NFWF.org](mailto:Ericka.Popovich@NFWF.org)) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
Land, wetland restoration	# Acres restored	Enter # acres of non-tidal freshwater WETLAND (not riparian or instream) habitat restored. In the NOTES, specify landcover before restoration (Marsh, Wet meadow, Swamp) and % of vegetation on pre-project site (0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, 61-80%, 81-100%).
Removal of invasives	# Acres restored	Enter # acres of invasives removed. In the NOTES, specify: vegetation removed, desired dominant vegetation, average frequency (in years) of future treatment, and whether removed vegetation will be left on site to decompose (Yes/No).
Land Restoration	# Acres restored	Enter # acres of habitat restored. In the NOTES, specify landcover prior to restoration (barren, cropland, grass, shrub) and post-restoration (broadleaf, conifer, redwood, grassland, shrubland, marsh, wet meadow, tidal marsh, swamp, seagrass, kelp forest).
Riparian restoration	# Miles restored	Enter # of riparian miles restored, including riparian buffers. In NOTES section, specify landcover type prior to planting (barren, cropland, grassland), dominant vegetation



		being planted (see list), and average width of riparian buffer. Provide # miles riverbank planted (decimals are acceptable)
Land, wetland restoration	# Trees planted	Enter # trees planted. In the NOTES, specify landcover type prior to planting (barren, cropland, grass, shrub), # of acres, forest type planted (broadleaf, conifer, redwood, swamp--either broadleaf or conifer, shrub), density per acre, and mortality rate.
Best Management Practices implementation for livestock fencing	# Miles of fencing installed	Provide # miles fencing installed
Best Management Practices implementation for stormwater runoff	# Acres with Best Management Practices	Provide # acres managed with Best Management Practices including the type of nature-based infrastructure being implemented
Improved management practices	# Acres under improved management	Enter # of acres under improved management to benefit people and wildlife, and indicate the types of best management practices (including nutrient and sediment reduction) in the NOTES section. Only count an acre once, even if multiple activities or treatments will occur on that acre during the project
Building institutional capacity	# of organizations contributing to project goals	Provide # partner organizations Identify each partner's sector (e.g. non-profit, private, local or state government)
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# social media posts	Include platforms and size of target audience, and a brief statement on the purpose of the posts.
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# people targeted	Provide total # of people targeted through email and newsletters
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# people reached	Provide # of people actively engaged through workshops, classes or other demonstrations



Volunteer participation	# volunteers participating	Provide number of community members directly volunteering in project. If volunteers include youth (up to age 18) or veterans, specify # youth or # veterans.
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# of educational signs installed	Enter the number of educational signs installed by project
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# internships or fellowships	Enter the number of people employed as interns or fellows, and provide a general estimate of hours worked
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# teachers reached	Provide # of teachers reached through teacher training activities
Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance	# of students reached	Enter the total number of students in pre-school-grade 12 engaged. In the notes, identify the grade level(s) for all students reached
Monitoring	# streams/sites being monitored	Identify the number of sites that will be monitored as part of the project
Restoration planning/design/permitting	Acres restored	Enter the number of acres for which planning, design, or permitting activities are being conducted under this project. Provide # acres impacted directly by plan.
Other	#lbs of trash or debris removed or prevented from entering waterways	Provide lbs of trash or debris removed from waterways or other restoration sites or expected amount prevented from entering waterways and specify removal or prevention.

**GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS**

Based on anticipated funding availability in 2026, projects will be prioritized to the following locations:

STATE	PRIORITY LOCATION
Alabama	Huntsville; All counties except for Lauderdale, Colbert, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, Jackson, and DeKalb
Alaska	Anchorage (priority for migratory bird projects)
Arizona	Phoenix
Arkansas	Little Rock



<b>California</b>	Oakland (priority for tree canopy enhancement projects); Los Angeles, North and central ( <a href="#">electric</a> and <a href="#">gas</a> PG&E service areas); Kern, Fresno, and Imperial counties; San Francisco (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Colorado</b>	Denver
<b>Connecticut</b>	Hartford (priority for migratory bird projects), New Haven (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Florida</b>	Miami (priority for tree canopy enhancement projects)
<b>Georgia</b>	Atlanta; all counties except for Union, Fannin, and Towns
<b>Illinois</b>	Chicago; Will, Henry, Knox, Mercer, Rock Island, Kendall, DuPage and Kane counties
<b>Indiana</b>	Princeton
<b>Iowa</b>	Davenport; Clinton, Muscatine, Scott counties
<b>Kansas</b>	Lyon and Osage counties
<b>Kentucky</b>	Georgetown
<b>Louisiana</b>	New Orleans
<b>Maryland</b>	Baltimore (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Boston, Springfield (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Michigan</b>	Detroit, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, Lansing (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Minnesota</b>	Minneapolis-St.Paul
<b>Mississippi</b>	Jackson; Blue Springs; Leake, Neshoba, Kemper, Scott, Newton, Lauderdale, Smith, Jasper, Clarke, Jefferson Davis, Covington, Jones, Wayne, Marion, Lamar, Forrest, Perry, Greene, George, Stone, Pearl River, Hancock, Harrison and Jackson counties
<b>Missouri</b>	Columbia, Kansas City, and St. Louis
<b>Nevada</b>	Clark county
<b>New Mexico</b>	Albuquerque
<b>New York</b>	New York

<b>North Carolina</b>	Liberty; Rutherford county
<b>Ohio</b>	Cleveland
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Grant, Kay, and Murray counties
<b>Oregon</b>	Portland
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Pittsburgh (priority for tree canopy enhancement projects); Philadelphia; Lancaster; Allegheny, Westmoreland, Berks, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York counties
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Providence (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>South Carolina</b>	Columbia
<b>South Dakota</b>	Deuel county
<b>Tennessee</b>	Memphis (priority for tree canopy enhancement projects); Nashville (priority for migratory bird projects); Alcoa; Blount, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Sevier, Bradley and Hamilton counties
<b>Texas</b>	Houston; Dallas; San Antonio; Concho, Crosby, Donley, Floyd, Gray, Haskell, and Pecos counties
<b>Utah</b>	Ogden (priority for migratory bird projects)
<b>Virginia</b>	Richmond, Chesapeake, Hampton City, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth City, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach
<b>Washington</b>	Seattle (priority for migratory bird projects); Lewis and Thurston Counties
<b>West Virginia</b>	Greenbrier County
<b>Wyoming</b>	Laramie county

*\*Successful applicants for select geographies (Miami, Memphis, Pittsburgh, Oakland) with tree canopy enhancement activities included in their proposal will be required to work with partners, including the World Resources Institute, to use WRI data and tools to inform project design and report project impacts.*

## **FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCHING CONTRIBUTIONS**

NFWF anticipates one round of full proposals annually for this program. Awards range from \$30,000 to \$150,000 with 30-40 grants awarded per year. Grants should span 12 to 18 months with a start date no earlier than January 2027.



Projects are required to meet or exceed a 1:0.75 match ratio to be competitive (e.g., a \$60,000 grant request should be matched by contributions totaling \$45,000). Matching contributions must be non-federal and may include in-kind contributions of staff and volunteer time, work performed, materials and services donated, cash or other tangible contributions to the project objectives and outcomes.

Applicants are encouraged to contact NFWF for assistance in determining what qualifies as in-kind or any other matching contribution.

To be eligible, matching contributions typically must be:

- Not paid by the Federal government under another Federal award
- Verifiable from the grantee’s records
- Not included as matching contributions for any other award
- Necessary and reasonable for accomplishment of project or program objectives
- Allowable costs based on the program and funding source guidelines
- Committed directly to the project and used within the period of performance

**ELIGIBILITY**

**Eligible and Ineligible Entities**

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, Tribal Governments and Organizations and educational institutions
- Ineligible applicants include unincorporated individuals, businesses, international organizations and U.S. Federal government agencies

**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	Technical Merit	Partnership and Community Impact	Budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with program goals and priorities</li> <li>• Quantifiable performance metrics</li> <li>• Appropriate monitoring of activities and outcomes</li> <li>• Project long-term sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technically sound and feasible</li> <li>• Engages technical experts</li> <li>• Logical and achievable work plan and timeline</li> <li>• Sound compliance approach (permits, NEPA)</li> <li>• Accurate spatial data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborates with local community</li> <li>• Partners help sustain impact of project</li> <li>• Describes outreach and community engagement activities</li> <li>• Includes letters of support from community partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowable and reasonable costs</li> <li>• Matching contributions</li> <li>• Cost effective</li> </ul>

### **Conservation Outcomes**

- Project clearly addresses all three of the listed Program Priorities: On-the-Ground Restoration; Environmental Outreach, Education, and Training; and Community Partnerships.
- Project results in specific and measurable ecological, educational, and community benefits through quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success.
- Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during and after the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.
- Project will be maintained to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project beyond the grant period including how future funding will be secured and how to implement necessary long-term monitoring and maintenance activities.

### **Technical Merit**

- Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation to ensure activities are technically sound and feasible.
- Project sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline.
- 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.

### **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 to ensure long-term sustainability and success of the project.
- Partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project.
- Proposal describes outreach and community engagement activities and how those will be monitored and measured.
- Proposal uses data to support descriptions and submits letters of support from community partners, and/or collaborators demonstrating their commitment to the project and engagement in project activities as proposed.

### **Budget/Cost-Effectiveness**



- Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF's [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. Federally funded projects must be in compliance with [2 CFR 200](#) as applicable.
- Amount requested is proportional to expected outcomes.
- Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the most efficient way to meet project objectives. 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.

## OTHER

### Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- 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 and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements.



However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

**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.

**Compliance Requirements** – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As may be applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.



**Permits** – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements. Where projects involve work in the waters of the United States, NFWF strongly encourages applicants to conduct a permit pre-application meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers prior to submitting their proposal. In some cases, if a permit pre-application meeting has not been completed, NFWF may require successful applicants to complete such a meeting prior to grant award.

## **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. 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:

Zoey Apelt  
Coordinator, Regional Programs  
(202) 915-0971  
[Zoey.Apelt@nfwf.org](mailto:Zoey.Apelt@nfwf.org)

Ericka Popovich  
Program Manager, National Programs  
(202) 595-2451



[Erica.Popovich@nfwf.org](mailto:Erica.Popovich@nfwf.org)

Sydney Godbey  
Program Director, National Programs  
(202) 595-2612

[Sydney.Godbey@nfwf.org](mailto:Sydney.Godbey@nfwf.org)

**For one-on-one guidance, sign up for a virtual proposal lab:**

NFWF staff will be holding 20-minute virtual proposal labs for the 2026 RFP on Tuesday through Thursday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m eastern time. You can make an appointment through our [Bookings page](#).

**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.