



SOUTHEAST AQUATICS 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.

NFWF awards are 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 on the [Southeast Aquatics Fund](#).

Applicant Webinar	May 12, 2026, 1-2 PM Eastern Time [Register]
Full Proposal Due Date	July 1, 2026, by 11:59 PM Eastern Time
Review Period	July-November 2026
Awards Announced	November 2026

***NOTE:** There are tables and links integrated into this document that will provide essential information for the application process. This includes maps and metrics.*

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks proposals to conserve aquatic habitat in the southeastern United States. Funds from this program will support projects that improve water quality, water quantity, and instream and riparian conditions. In select geographies, funding is also available to support aquatic connectivity, species recovery, monitoring, and planning. Funding is provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, Altria, and Southern Company.

GRANT AWARD INFORMATION

Grant awards are expected to range from \$150,000 to \$500,000, depending on the overall scale and duration of the project. If outside of this range, please contact the NFWF program staff listed at the end of this RFP to discuss.

Project Period: Anticipated completion time for funded projects typically will be 24 – 36 months following finalization of a grant agreement. Proponents should plan for projects to begin in the first quarter of calendar year 2027. The project narrative must include a clear timetable or schedule for project implementation from the time of a signed grant agreement.

Project start and end dates should define the period during which all proposed work is accomplished, all requested funds are spent, and all matching funds are spent. Projects may be a discrete part of a longer-term project, provided there are definable outcomes for the proposed phase of the overall effort.

Match Requirement: Projects should have a minimum of 1:1 non-federal match funding. Non-federal match may come in the form of cash or in-kind services. Higher match ratios and contributions from a range of partners will contribute to making proposals more competitive.

Applicants are encouraged to describe federal partner contributions, although those contributions will not count toward the minimum match requirement.

Applicants unable to provide the required match are eligible to apply but must contact NFWF program staff to discuss match waiver options prior to submitting a proposal. For this discussion, it will be helpful to know what types of activities will be proposed in the project, what attempts have been made to secure match, and what amount of match commitment is possible.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Grants to improve the condition of aquatic habitats may be considered across the southeast region of the US (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas). However, projects within the following geographies, as shown in Figure 1, will be most competitive:

Conasauga River Watershed (GA/TN)

The Conasauga River watershed of northern Georgia and southern Tennessee is a focal area of NFWF's [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#), (see the interactive [Digital Business Plan](#) for the geographic extent of the plan) and is a top priority for funding.

The Holly Creek sub-watershed of the Conasauga is of particular interest to NFWF. Projects in this geography may work to improve instream conditions, restore riparian habitat, engage private landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices, and reestablish *Villosa* mussels.

Middle Coosa and Locust Fork Watersheds (AL)

The Middle Coosa and Locust Fork watersheds of Alabama are focal areas of NFWF's [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#) (see the interactive [Digital Business Plan](#) for the geographic extent of the plan) and are a top priority for funding. The Big Canoe Creek sub-watershed of the Middle Coosa is of particular interest to NFWF. Projects in these geographies may work to improve instream condition, restore riparian habitat, and engage private landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices and monitor outcomes.

Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin (AL/FL/GA)

Projects will be considered within the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint basin of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, with a focus on projects in Alabama and Georgia. Projects in this geography should work to support sufficient water flows for native freshwater species and improve water quality, with an emphasis on work that engages agricultural and forest landowners.

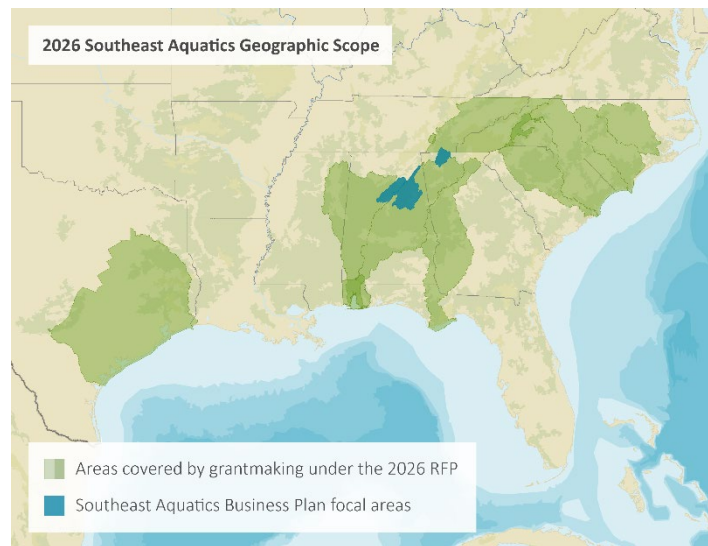


Figure 1: 2026 Southeast Aquatics Fund Focus Areas

Alabama and Mobile-Tombigbee River Basins (AL); and Neuse-Pamlico, Cape Fear, Pee Dee, and Santee River Basins (NC/SC)

Projects will be considered within the Alabama and Mobile-Tombigbee river basins of Alabama; and the Neuse-Pamlico, Cape Fear, Pee Dee, and Santee river basins of North Carolina/South Carolina. Projects in these geographies should work to engage landowners in voluntary conservation practices to improve water quality, instream condition, and fish passage.

East Texas

Projects will be considered within east Texas that work to support sufficient water flows for native freshwater species as well as engage landowners in voluntary conservation practices to improve water quality, instream condition, and fish passage. There is particular interest in recharging the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer in the following river basins: Brazos, Colorado, Guadalupe, Lavaca-Guadalupe, Neches, San Antonio, and Trinity Rivers. *Please consult with NFWF program staff to share your project concept.*

Alabama Coastal Zone - Baldwin and Mobile Counties

Projects will be considered for the two coastal counties of Alabama: Baldwin and Mobile. These projects should support forest health and green infrastructure to improve water quality in watersheds that terminate in the Gulf. *Please consult with NFWF program staff to discuss a project concept before developing a full proposal.*

Southern Appalachia (NC, TN, SC)

Support is possible for aquatic and forest restoration activities. *Please contact NFWF program staff for information on this funding opportunity before considering submittal of a proposal.*

PROGRAM GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The priorities of the Southeast Aquatics Fund are informed by the aquatic goals of the [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#), which was adopted by the NFWF Board of Directors in 2018 (updated 2023). The plan seeks to conserve the extraordinary biodiversity found across the southeast, prioritizing northern Alabama and northern Georgia due to the conservation need and partner focus in those geographies. It utilizes a suite of aquatic species as indicators of healthy aquatic habitat in prioritized watersheds. Because of the priority given to this subregion, funding is available for a wide range of activities in the Conasauga River (GA) and Locust Fork and Middle Coosa (AL) watersheds.

Priority will be given to projects that would benefit the following species in these focal geographies:

- Conasauga River – endemic and native fishes (Alabama shiner, banded sculpin, blue shiner, bridled darter, Coosa darter, Coosa shiner, greenbreast darter, tricolor shiner, and trispot darter) and *Villosa* mussels
- Middle Coosa – trispot darter

Funding priorities are also informed by the goals of NFWF's funding partners, State Wildlife Action Plans and the collaborative regional initiatives that set aquatic priorities for the region. This includes the Southeast Aquatics Regional Partnership (SARP) and the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS). To the extent possible, proposals should describe how activities will advance specific goals and objectives of the [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#) and/or other relevant conservation plans.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

NFWF will fund projects that address the threats facing native freshwater species by implementing one or more of the activities described below.

***NOTE:** Priority metrics are included with each of the listed priority programmatic activities. A full table of eligible metrics can be found by following this [link](#). All applicants should utilize the metrics table to select the most relevant metrics. If an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact NFWF program staff to identify viable options.*

1) Water Conservation and Aquifer Recharge in Texas

Eligible Geographies (River Basins): Neches, Trinity, Neches, Brazos, Colorado, Guadalupe, Lavaca-Guadalupe, San Antonio

Corporate funding may be available to support projects that achieve significant and measurable aquifer recharge and/or conservation. Projects should either benefit Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer recharge or the Colorado River Basin. Projects should also achieve improvements in aquatic habitat through improved practices, land use, riparian and/or forest restoration, or conservation.

Metrics: Please include the following metric: acres under improved management.

2) Forest Management for Improved Gulf Water Quality

Eligible Geographies: Baldwin and Mobile Counties, Alabama

Water quality improvement through forest restoration and management practices actions in Gulf watersheds. These projects should restore and conserve Gulf watersheds and wildlife habitat through working with landowners to plan for and implement BMPs. Eligible activities also include natural infrastructure approaches that will lower sediment and other pollutants into waterways through planting of native vegetation and other restoration actions. Innovative measuring and prioritization projects will also be considered.

Metrics: Please include the following metric: acres under improved management.

3) Aquatic, Riparian, and Forest Restoration and Recovery

Eligible Geographies: Eastern Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and South Carolina Piedmont

NFWF program staff is seeking indications of interest for implementation of aquatic restoration and forest recovery and management activities in storm impacted areas. Aquatic restoration activities may include streambank and riparian bioengineering and restoration to provide suitable habitat for native species. Forest management and restoration activities may include removal of hazardous fuels, invasive species control, and actions to promote forest regeneration. *Please contact NFWF program staff for more details including eligible metrics and consultation before submitting a proposal.*

4) **Restore and Enhance Instream and Riparian Habitat**

Eligible Geographies (River Basins): Alabama, Mobile-Tombigbee, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint

Improve instream habitat and aquatic connectivity to benefit native aquatic species:

- Improve instream habitat to support key functions of the watershed by restoring wetland, streambank, and instream habitat. Proposals should discuss conservation outcomes for target species and how the project has been prioritized within the watershed.
- Improve aquatic connectivity by removing or retrofitting stream barriers and stream crossings (culverts, concrete fords). Projects should remove high priority barriers and crossings based on surveys or assessments with an emphasis on high return methods in areas where priority habitat is fragmented.

Metrics: Proposals must estimate the number of acres and/or streambank miles to be restored or enhanced and the number of landowners implementing practices because of the proposed activities. Please refer to the “Project Metrics” table for a full list of metrics.

5) **Assessment, Prioritization and Planning for Watershed Resilience and Aquatic Connectivity**

Eligible Geographies (River Basins): Alabama, Mobile-Tombigbee, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint

Assessment of barriers to habitat connectivity and prioritization for removal of barriers. This includes deepening understanding of the importance of aquatic habitat for resilience of target species. Barriers to habitat connectivity should be identified as a main factor impacting targeted species. The proposed work should demonstrably build on existing assessments and/or conservation plans. Emphasis will be placed on lowest cost/highest gain opportunities and identifying willing landowners.

Metrics: Proposals should estimate the number of research studies (including barrier assessments) used to inform prioritization of barriers.

6) **Private Landowner Technical Assistance and Project Implementation**

All Eligible Geographies

Build capacity to deliver technical assistance to private landowners. Grant recipients will provide technical assistance to interested farmers and ranchers to develop management plans, design and implement conservation practices, and assist with enrollment in cost share through Farm Bill programs, especially the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). A particular emphasis should be placed on designing and implementing agriculture and forest practices that benefit aquatic conservation, such as:

- Practices to improve/maintain riparian and watershed function and temperature, protect surface and ground waters from nutrients, and avoid erosion.
- Increase native riparian herbaceous cover and/or forest buffer width for sediment and nutrient reduction and enhancing or increasing wildlife habitat.
- Reduce aquatic temperature through shading.
- Restore floodplain hydrology including the use of low-tech process-based restoration methods.
- Restore rare or declining natural communities.
- Contingency planning.

- Improved grazing practices, including but not limited to rotational grazing, alternative water sources, and fencing.

Proposals are encouraged to demonstrate how the project will support NRCS's Working Lands for Wildlife Initiatives, in particular the Aquatic Connectivity Framework. Information about the objectives of the Aquatic Connectivity Framework can be found [here](#).

NRCS Coordination – For projects that will be providing outreach or technical assistance to support NRCS Farm Bill programs, please ensure the project is in alignment with NRCS goals and priorities 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](#).

Metrics: Please include the following metrics: number receiving technical assistance; number of participants receiving government agency cost share or financial assistance; dollar value of government agency cost share or financial assistance; acres covered by government agency cost share or financial assistance; acres under improved management. Please refer to the "Project Metrics" table for a full list of metrics.

7) **Accelerating Species Recovery and Response Monitoring**

Villosa Mussels Propagation

Grants are available for restoration of two *Villosa* mussel species (Alabama rainbow and Coosa creekshell) in the Conasauga River watershed streams with suitable water quality. This includes stocking to add to existing populations. These actions can be in addition to habitat restoration activities listed in Program Priority #2.

Metrics: Proposals should include the species-specific strategies: # translocated/stocked, the number of sites restocked with new individuals. Please refer to the "Project Metrics" table for a full list of metrics.

Focal Species Monitoring

Funding is available for monitoring of the population status and habitat conditions for the focal and prospective species identified in the [Longleaf Forests and Rivers Business Plan](#), which are endemic native fishes (Alabama shiner, banded sculpin, blue shiner, bridled darter, Coosa darter, Coosa shiner, greenbreast darter, tricolor shiner, and trispot darter) in Conasauga and Middle Coosa; *Villosa* mussels (Alabama rainbow and Coosa creekshell) in Conasauga; and the Black Warrior waterdog and flattened musk turtle in Locust Fork.

Metrics: Proposals should include the following metric: # of sites being monitored

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Southeast Aquatics 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 as indicated in each section above.

A table of relevant metrics for the Southeast Aquatics program, and the project activities associated with each, can be found by following this [link](#). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Kat Sanz, Coordinator at Kat.Sanz@nfwf.org to discuss acceptable alternatives.

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.
- Applicants must comply with or be exempted from federal single audit requirements.
- Ineligible applicants include U.S. Federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations. U.S. Federal agencies are encouraged to partner with applicants but are not eligible to apply.

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.

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 • Matching contributions • 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

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. 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 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 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

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. 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 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 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 [Application Information](#) page.

For more information or questions about this RFP, please contact:

Will Singleton

Program Director
Southern Regional Office
202-595-2607

Will.Singleton@nfwf.org

Zack Bernstein

Senior Manager
Southern Regional Office
202-595-2433

Zachary.Bernstein@nfwf.org

Kat Sanz

Coordinator
Southern Regional Office
202-888-1671

Kat.Sanz@nfwf.org

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.