



Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund

2024 Request For Proposals

Applicant Webinar ([Register Here](#)): **Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at 3:30 PM-4:30 PM Eastern Time**
Full Proposal Due Date: **Thursday, August 1, 2024 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is soliciting proposals within the Cumberland Plateau region that will help accelerate the restoration and enhancement of critical forest, grassland, and freshwater habitats. NFWF seeks to increase the voluntary adoption of conservation practices on working agricultural lands in the region to benefit wildlife and improve soil health, water quantity and quality, and carbon sequestration. Funding is provided by the USDA’s Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Altria Group, Cargill and Nestlé and International Paper’s Forestland Stewards Partnership. Approximately \$2.8 million is expected to be available for grants this funding cycle.

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GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Projects within the Cumberland Plateau in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia are eligible with preference given to projects located within the identified focal areas. A PDF map of the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund Program Area and NFWF priority areas can be viewed [here](#). Priority areas are geographies where NFWF prioritizes grant awards but projects outside of these areas are eligible under this RFP. An interactive map can be viewed here: [Interactive Map](#). Priority areas were selected by analyzing upland and riparian forest and freshwater systems and represent locations with the greatest potential for restoration and benefit to priority species. Further factors that informed the selection of priority areas include resource

mapping, interviews with the practitioners in the field, funding sources for this RFP, and capacity to carry out the work.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

Projects should seek to implement one or more of the strategies below to restore forest and freshwater habitats and implement voluntary conservation practices on working agricultural lands, benefitting soil health, water quality, and populations of at-risk, listed and other wildlife species, such as northern bobwhite and prairie warbler, as well as fish, amphibians and other aquatic species. Conservation plans and other resources informing program priorities can be found [here](#).

- 1. Restoring Previously Mined Lands:** NFWF seeks projects that restore forest and native grassland habitat on previously mined state-owned or non-industrial private lands. Projects on Federally owned and tribal lands, including federal land held in trust for the benefit of tribes, are also eligible. Partnership/collaboration with state forestry agencies is encouraged.

Eligible activities include site preparation and planting, with an emphasis on planting native trees and grassland species to benefit wildlife, reduce erosion and runoff, and sequester carbon. Available funding this year is primarily focused on reforestation, though proposals may also include practices to enhance or maintain existing forests and grasslands on previously mined lands, such as thinning and invasive species removal, to improve wildlife habitat, though these activities should be a minor component of the overall project. Proposals for planting should describe all necessary site preparation, number of acres and seedlings that will be planted, timing of when planting is expected to be completed and summarize plans to manage planted stands.

Projects are encouraged to use the [Forestry Reclamation Approach](#) as outlined by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and restore habitat in a landscape context that is complementary to other ongoing restoration (e.g., priority areas for shortleaf pine and/or oak restoration, etc.). Projects located in counties with persistent poverty and/or that engage underserved and socially disadvantaged landowners also are strongly encouraged.

- 2. Increasing Adoption of Conservation Practices on Grazing Lands:** Includes projects that voluntarily implement agricultural best management practices on beef cattle grazing operations to improve soil health productivity and water quality and quantity, increase carbon sequestration, and enhance freshwater and/or terrestrial habitats benefitting pollinators and grassland birds and/or at-risk aquatic species. Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Implement prescribed/rotational grazing and complementary conservation practices, such as using native warm season grass forage to augment non-native forages to improve or maintain the quantity and quality of food and/or cover.
- Install fencing and alternative watering systems to exclude livestock from streams and/or support prescribed/rotational grazing. Preference for projects on beef cattle farms.
- Promote responsible incorporation of manures and other sources of organic matter into soil management systems.
- Establish and enhance farmer-led education and outreach programs to drive increased adoption of soil health practices and to promote stream health.

- 3. Increasing Adoption of Conservation Practices on Cropland:** Includes projects that voluntarily implement agricultural best management practices on cropland to improve soil health productivity and water quality and quantity, increase carbon sequestration, and enhance freshwater and/or terrestrial

habitats benefitting pollinators and grassland birds and/or at-risk aquatic species. Projects in this category must be focused within NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative priority areas for northern bobwhite or eastern hellbender and should primarily be focused on delivering outreach and technical assistance to private landowners to implement the following activities:

- Increase adoption of conservation cover, cover crops, reduced tillage, filter strips, field borders, diversified crop rotations and other practices that stabilize soil, reduce erosion, and provide cover, nesting habitat, and forage.
- Promote responsible incorporation of crop residue and other sources of organic matter into soil management systems.
- Establish and enhance farmer-led education and outreach programs to drive increased adoption of soil health practices and to promote stream health.

4. Establishing, Enhancing and Maintaining Forest Habitats: In addition to the forest restoration priorities and activities listed under the restoring previously mined lands priority above, NFWF seeks projects that establish new upland oak-pine and/or riparian forests and enhance and maintain existing upland pine-oak and/or riparian forest habitats on public and private lands (other than previously mined lands), with an emphasis on improving forest conditions to benefit wildlife, water quality and carbon sequestration. Eligible activities include:

Tree Planting

- Planting projects should describe all necessary site preparation for planting, number of acres and seedlings that will be planted, timing of when planting is expected to be completed and summarize plans to manage planted stands. **Preference will be given to projects that plant white oak and/or other upland oak species, shortleaf pine, and/or native riparian tree species.**
- Projects that expect to plant a mix of tree species should include an estimate of the number of seedlings of each species that will be planted in their proposal.

Prescribed Burning

- Increase application of prescribed fire on private and public lands, including capacity, coordination and collaboration through fire teams, prescribed burn associations, and/or other strategies.
- Pursue innovations and address specific barriers or roadblocks to prescribed burning.

Other Forest Enhancement and Management Treatments

- Pre-commercial thinning, crop tree release, group openings/gap cuts, shelterwood establishment cuts and other treatments aimed at reducing tree density, improving forest structure and composition, and promoting regeneration and release of white oak and/or other upland oak species, shortleaf pine, and/or riparian forest species.
- Mid-story treatments including mechanical and chemical treatments to remove or control mid-story encroachment and improve forest habitat conditions.
- Underplanting/enhancement planting of white oak and/or other upland oak species, shortleaf pine and/or riparian forest species and /or planting native under-story and groundcover species to improve wildlife habitat and support the application of prescribed fire, where appropriate.
- Invasive species treatments including herbicide or mechanical treatments to control non-native, invasive plant and/or insect species, such as hemlock woolly adelgid, which threaten riparian forest health. Applicants should describe which invasive species will be treated and whether the invasive species are expected to require single or multiple treatments.
- Expand and conserve riparian buffers and/or forested streamside management zones to protect water quality and wildlife habitats.

5. Restoring Instream Habitats to Support Aquatic Species: Includes projects that restore instream habitats to improve watershed health, enhance freshwater habitat and support at-risk aquatic species. Eligible activities include:

- Restore wetland, streambank, and instream habitat that otherwise would not be addressed through agricultural or forestry best management practices to support watershed health and improve native aquatic species populations.
- Remove or retrofit stream barriers (low-head dams) and stream crossings (culverts, concrete fords) to improve aquatic habitat connectivity and reduce sedimentation. Preference will be given to projects within focal area watersheds.

6. Helping Landowners - Expanding and Coordinating Technical Assistance and Outreach:

Significant funding is available this year from USDA NRCS to support projects that implement targeted outreach and assistance to private landowner and/or producer to increase voluntary participation in Farm Bill programs and implementation of conservation practices. Projects that increase conservation program participation and practice adoption among USDA defined [Historically Underserved](#) and [Special Emphasis](#) farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners are strongly encouraged.

Proposals must estimate the number of acres and/or miles to be restored or enhanced as a result of proposed technical assistance and outreach activities. Projects should effectively align with and complement other existing private land initiatives, implementation plans or programs. Coordination with USDA's NRCS is expected. Strategies may include:

- Providing technical assistance to interested landowners to develop management plans, design and implement conservation practices, and participate in Farm Bill programs. As a funder, USDA has a special interest in bolstering enrollment into the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). There is a particular emphasis this year on promoting, designing, and implementing [climate-smart agriculture and forestry \(CSAF\) conservation practices](#) and reducing the Farm Bill practice contracting and implementation backlog.
- Proposals requesting funds for forestry outreach and technical assistance on private lands should demonstrate how the project will support NRCS's Working Lands for Wildlife Initiatives, including the Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands and Savannas Framework, Eastern Hellbender Initiative and/or Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative.

In addition to the conservation priorities and strategies listed above, applicants are encouraged to describe how projects will achieve the following, if applicable:

Conservation Co-Benefits: Projects that will implement voluntary habitat restoration or improvement practices that benefit wildlife while also sequestering carbon and/or improving water quantity or quality are encouraged, with a particular interest in tree planting projects and/or projects that implement prescribed/rotational grazing and associated practices within cattle-producing counties within the region. Applicants should reach out to program staff prior to submitting a proposal to discuss projects that will address carbon and water outcomes. Note: NFWF intends to calculate the estimated carbon benefits associated with any given project. These calculations will not be used to generate carbon credits, but rather for narrative and demonstration, such as communicating to partners and their supply chain networks about the potential carbon value and other co-benefits of any project and conservation practice(s) supported through this program.

Community Impact and Engagement: Projects that incorporate outreach to communities, foster community engagement, and pursue collaborative project design, implementation and management leading to measurable conservation benefits are encouraged. When working with tribes, applicants should incorporate traditional ecological knowledge where relevant. Examples of community-level partners include

municipalities, non-governmental organizations, community organizations, community leaders, tribes, and private landowners.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund has a list of metrics in Easygrants for full proposal applicants to choose from for 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 shown in the table in [Appendix A](#). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Zack Bernstein (Zachary.Bernstein@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.
- 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 submit an application.

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.
- 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.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

The Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund anticipates awarding approximately \$2.8 million in grants in 2024. Grant awards are expected to range from \$250,000 to \$750,000. Applicants considering proposals outside of this funding range are encouraged to contact NFWF prior to submitting. This program has one annual application cycle and awards approximately 4-8 grants per year.

Project Period: Anticipated completion time for funded projects typically will be 24-48 months following finalization of a grant agreement. Significant progress with project implementation is expected to be achieved in year one, including interim deliverables. 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 or applied.

Matching Funds: Projects should have a minimum match of 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind, but larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive. Projects unable to provide a 1:1 non-federal match are eligible, but applicants must contact NFWF to discuss options such as match waivers prior to submitting a proposal. Applicants are encouraged to describe federal partner contributions in the proposal narrative, although those contributions will not count toward the 1:1 match.

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 the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund’s habitat and species goals and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics that will be tracked and measured to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities outlined in the request for proposals.

Funding Need – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

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, and design and implementation.

NRCS Coordination – Projects that will provide outreach and technical assistance to private landowners or that will be implementing work on private lands should be shared with the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist to ensure the project is in alignment with NRCS goals and priorities. A list of NRCS state contacts can be found [here](#).

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.

Monitoring – 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.

Letters of Support

- Letter(s) from the appropriate [State forestry office\(s\)](#) highlighting how the proposed project is being coordinated with their office are recommended for projects that include work on state and/or private lands.
- Letter(s) from the appropriate [NRCS State conservationist\(s\)](#) acknowledging how the applicant is coordinating with NRCS are recommended for projects that include work on private lands.
- Letter(s) from the appropriate [State Department of Wildlife Conservation](#) and/or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acknowledging how the proposed project supports a State Wildlife Action Plan or conservation and recovery of at-risk or listed species.
- Letters documenting the support/contributions of all other project partners are strongly encouraged.

Long-term Sustainability – Project will be maintained to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time. This should include how future funding will be secured to implement necessary long-term monitoring and maintenance activities.

Partnership and Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with diverse 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. Non-traditional partners or communities should be engaged, when possible, to broaden the sustained impact of the project. Within the application, applicants will be prompted to 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. Applicants should use demographic 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.

OTHER

Applicant Demographic Information – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic demographic information on applicants and their organizations via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers and will not be considered when making grant decisions. For more details, please see the tip sheet and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

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.

Environmental Services Markets and Credits – 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), carbon accounting (e.g., sequestration, avoided emissions), environmental justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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 diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

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.

Federal Funding – The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

USDA Historically Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories – The [historically underserved farmer and rancher categories](#) include those with limited resources, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged (American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics) and veterans. The [special emphasis categories](#) are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Disability, Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Hispanic, and Veterans.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information – [Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund](#).

Applicant Webinar [Register Here]	June 11, 2024 at 3:30 PM – 4:30 PM Eastern Time
Full Proposal Due Date	August 1, 2024, 11:59 PM, Eastern Time
Review Period	August 2024 – November 2024
Awards Announced	November 2024

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.