

2017 Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program

Accelerating protection of America's healthy freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) seeks applications for the 2017 Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program. This opportunity closes **February 1, 2017, at 8:00 p.m. Eastern**. Proposals received after this time may not be considered.

Applicants are strongly urged to contact Peter Stangel (peter@usendowment.org; 404-915-2763) or Jeff Lerner (jlerner@americanforests.org; 202-236-1883) to discuss project ideas before submitting an application.

Funding

Up to \$2 million is available for the 2017 grant round. Funding for the Healthy Watersheds Consortium is provided by the Endowment, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Water and Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Grants may be a subaward of federal financial assistance or non-federal funds, or a combination of both. Funding at about this level is anticipated to be available on an annual basis at or around this time each year through 2020. A review committee will make final project recommendations. Projects funded with multi-year awards in this cycle must conclude no later than December 31, 2020.

2016 Funded Projects

To read about the projects funded in 2016, see the Press Release [here](#).

Program Goal

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program goal is to accelerate strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds. Therefore, the primary focus for applicants should be protection and stewardship of the landscape that comprises the watershed, rather than restoration of degraded habitats or projects with a strictly water quality improvement outcome. This goal will be achieved by:

- Developing funding mechanisms, plans, or other strategies to implement large-scale watershed protection, source water protection, green infrastructure, or related landscape conservation objectives;
- Building the sustainable organizational infrastructure, social support, and long-term funding commitments necessary to implement large-scale protection of healthy watersheds; and
- Supporting innovative or catalytic projects that may accelerate funding for or implementation of watershed protection efforts, or broadly advance this field of practice.

Subawards will be considered in the following three categories. These categories are not rigid; they simply reflect the Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program's approaches to watershed protection. Your proposal will be moved, if necessary, to the appropriate category without penalty.

- 1) Watershed Action Projects — Specific projects that fulfill components of an established watershed or source water plan or similar guiding document. These projects will typically leverage a Healthy Watersheds Consortium subaward many times for maximum results. Watershed Action Projects should be part of a broader watershed strategy developed at the HUC 8 scale or larger. Applicants may seek additional funding for new projects in the same watershed in future subaward cycles (\$50,000 - \$250,000 award size).

- 2) **Building Watershed Protection Capacity** —The objective of these subawards is to grow the organizational capacity needed for large-scale, long-term protection of healthy watersheds. Applicants to this category should identify existing or proposed funding sources or strategies that will be tapped with increased capacity for project implementation over the long-term. In other words: how will increased capacity allow your organization to secure the funding or strategy needed to accelerate watershed protection? Subaward duration of up to four years with funding renewed annually, based on performance. (\$50,000/year - \$150,000/year over multiple years. For example, \$75,000/year could be requested for four years, for a total subaward of \$300,000).
- 3) **Advancing the State of Practice**—One-time subawards for new or experimental technologies, methods, financing strategies, or approaches to incentivize watershed protection that can be scaled to accelerate protection of healthy watersheds on a broader level. Training projects may be proposed if they relate to gathering or exchanging information to advance the state of practice. Proposals must include a plan for scaling projects and disseminating information to relevant users. Proposals should also include a demonstrated need from end users, via letters of support (\$50,000 - \$200,000 award size).

Eligible Projects

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program was conceived by EPA to protect healthy, aquatic ecosystems and their watersheds. Funding will be considered for projects that:

- Achieve large-scale, measureable outcomes (acres protected, etc.);
- Tap into new or existing funding sources for highly leveraged outcomes;
- Develop mechanisms for securing financing necessary to implement protection projects;
- Involve multiple watersheds that are adjacent or clustered in a single geography;
- Implement protection-related activities in existing watershed, source water, or similar plans;
- Develop and/or implement large-scale green infrastructure projects;
- Protect drinking water sources and watersheds;
- Create/expand organizational/social infrastructure to accelerate healthy watershed protection;
- Create sustainable landowner incentives for watershed protection;
- Develop sustainable land-use planning that protects healthy watersheds;
- Demonstrate or quantify the economic benefits of healthy watersheds;
- Demonstrate the human health (e.g. drinking water, fishable/swimmable water), recreation, and other benefits of healthy watersheds;
- Communicate the value of healthy watersheds to key constituencies to enhance protection;
- Develop watershed protection plans and the funding needed to implement those plans; and
- Develop a community of learning for watershed protection groups to share information.

Funding Restrictions and Ineligible Projects

Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program subawards *may not* be directly used for land acquisition, conservation easements, or habitat restoration, unless as smaller components of catalytic or innovation projects with clear, scalable applications. Subawards *may* be used to secure other sources of funding that can be used directly for land acquisition. Subawards may not be used for lobbying, fundraising, political advocacy, or litigation.

The following types of projects are not likely to be competitive for funding:

- Dam removal to facilitate fish passage;
- Restoration of highly degraded lands;

- Land stewardship projects that are unsustainable;
- Invasive, exotic removal/control projects that are unsustainable;
- Amelioration of point source pollution sources;
- Activities solely related to water quality improvements that do not include a landscape conservation component;
- Urban activities;
- Plans or capacity building without a clear link to existing or potential funding for implementation;
- Research without a clear link to measurable protection;
- Education or communication programs without a clear link to measurable protection;

Competition for Funds

Competition for funds in the inaugural year was intense; 169 applications were received and only nine were funded (5%). In 2017 priority will be given to proposals that maximize measurable outcomes for watershed protection (e.g. acres protected, progress toward protection goals, degree of watershed function protected, etc.).

What is a Healthy Watershed?

For the purposes of this program, a healthy watershed is one in which the hydrological, biological, and land-based functions of the ecosystem are largely intact. The EPA defines a healthy watershed as one in which natural land cover supports dynamic hydrologic and geomorphic processes within their natural range of variation (i.e., sediment storage and deposition), where there is habitat of sufficient size and connectivity to support native aquatic and riparian species, and where water quality is adequate to support healthy biological communities. For more information about EPA’s literature on what constitutes a healthy watershed, visit the [Healthy Watershed Consortium’s webpage](#).

A healthy watershed may include natural, semi-natural, and well-managed lands and may contain a variety of human land uses. Healthy watersheds don’t have to be pristine, but should be in relatively good condition. *It is up to applicants to present their case to the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program review committee that their watershed is healthy.*

What does “Protection” Mean?

The goal of this Grant Program is to conserve healthy aquatic ecosystems and the supporting natural and managed landscape and watershed processes, such as hydrology, that support them. The principle is to protect and sustain healthy watersheds so that they will continue to provide ecological services such as clean water, drinking water, habitat for fish and wildlife, recreation, and protection from natural hazards.

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program encourages creative, cost-effective, locally-developed approaches to watershed protection. The review committee challenges applicants to propose protection strategies that best fit their watershed.

Achieving large-scale protection of healthy watersheds may take decades. The Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program seeks to create and build the sustainable organizational infrastructure and financing mechanisms needed to help communities protect their healthy watersheds over the long-term.

Two types of protection activities will be considered:

- 1) *Land acquisition and conservation easements*: The primary focus of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is to prevent conversion of a healthy watershed to uses that would diminish its function. This is traditionally accomplished through land acquisition or use of conservation easements from willing landowners. Although Healthy Watershed Consortium subawards may not be directly used for acquisition or easements, applications are encouraged for developing or supporting efforts that enable acquisitions or easements on a larger or sustainable scale. Easements should be long-term or preferably in perpetuity.
- 2) *Land stewardship*: A secondary focus of this grant program is for lands that are already protected (public ownership or secured with easements), that are in good condition, and that have appropriate land cover, but that require stewardship to maintain or enhance watershed function. In these cases, applications will be considered for stewardship and that provide measurable benefits to watershed function (e.g. reduced wildfire hazard). For example, projects that:
 - Incentivize private landowners to enhance stewardship;
 - Certify forests and appropriate agricultural systems to improve landscape condition;
 - Deliver cost-share or education programs to landowners; and
 - Improve watershed management on public lands.

As with the acquisition approach described in the previous paragraph, Healthy Watershed Consortium subawards *may not* be directly used for stewardship activities (e.g. funding to treat 100 acres). Applications will be considered for developing or implementing financing or other mechanisms that will result in stewardship on a larger, sustainable scale (e.g. funding to secure financing from other entities or to develop mechanisms to treat large acreages). Applicants must demonstrate to the review committee that proposed stewardship projects will take place on land that is already protected or provide assurance that stewardship activities will be sustainable over the long-term.

Multiple Values

Watershed protection is a holistic endeavor. Healthy Watershed Consortium grants should benefit a wide range of values, including but not limited to water quality and quantity, source water and drinking water, wildlife, local economies, and recreation.

Letters of Support

A key goal for the Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program is to enhance communication and cooperation among groups with similar interests. *Applicants should provide at least three, but no more than five, letters from relevant partners demonstrating their awareness of and support for your project.* Project partners should be explicit in describing how your proposed project integrates with and preferably leverages ongoing work in the watershed. Such groups might include State Departments of Natural Resources, Forestry, and Water Quality and Drinking Water Programs; land owners; tribal entities; state or regional offices of federal natural resource agencies; source water collaboratives; and non-governmental conservation groups with a significant presence in the watershed. A [sample letter of support](#) is available on the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program website. Letters of support should be attached to your application and sent as one file to peter@usendowment.org.

Metrics and Evaluation

It is essential that applicants provide a practical, cost-effective approach for measuring the success of their efforts. This includes describing clear, specific objectives for your work, and the strategies, activities and outcomes necessary for your project to succeed. The application will guide you through a process for developing these parameters. Assistance is available to applicants to help develop these important tools for their projects. Additional information on defining [Goals, Hurdles, and Outcomes](#) is available on the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program website.

Watershed Scale

The Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program seeks protection at larger scales. The minimum scale considered for funding are projects designed to apply within a HUC 8 subwatershed planning unit. Activities that are tied to implementation of a larger-scale plan are most desirable.

Geographic Eligibility

Work must be in the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories.

Indirect Rates

Please review the Endowment's [Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#) prior to preparing your program budget.

Matching Fund Requirements

Applicants should provide at least 25% of the total project cost. This may include cash donations or in-kind contributions from third-parties and allowable costs incurred by the applicant in the project.

Because Healthy Watershed Consortium subawards may include non-federal (Endowment) and/or federal funds (EPA/NRCS), it is important to clearly state the origin of proposed match in the application. The Endowment may decrease the matching requirement to as low as 10% if the applicant can demonstrate in writing that fiscal circumstances are constrained to such an extent that fulfilling the matching funds requirement would impose undue hardship. NOTE: Applicants are strongly urged to request decreased match requirements in writing prior to submitting a full proposal. Submit your request to peter@usendowment.org.

Eligible Applicants

Not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organizations, for-profit companies, tribes, intertribal consortia, interstates, state, and local government agencies including water utilities and wastewater facilities, and colleges and universities are eligible for funding. Unincorporated individuals and federal agencies are not eligible. Public/private partnerships are particularly desirable.

The Endowment does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in any of its programs or activities.

2017 Process Schedule

The Endowment will coordinate a proposal review committee and will engage successful applicants in subaward contracting at the earliest possible time.

RFP Issued:	September 2016
Proposal Deadline:	February 1, 2017 (8 p.m. Eastern)
Proposal Review Completed:	Week of March 20, 2017
Applicants notified:	Week of March 27, 2017

Subaward paperwork should be completed within four to eight weeks after notification unless complications arise.

Application Assistance

For questions or clarification please contact Peter Stangel (peter@usendowment.org; 404-915-2763) or Jeff Lerner (jlerner@americanforests.org; 202-236-1883). A Sample Application is also posted on the [webpage](#).

Informational webinars

A webinar will be held on October 25, 2016 and in early January, 2017 to provide additional information on the program and to answer questions—check the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program [webpage for updates](#) and other helpful information. Answers to common application questions will be posted on the webpage for your reference. A Sample Application is also posted on the [webpage](#).

Proposal Submission

Only proposals submitted on the Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program application form will be considered. The application form, letters of support and up to two maps (optional) should be combined in to one document and submitted via email to peter@usendowment.org. Receipt of your application will be acknowledged within two business days. If you don't hear from us, send an email to peter@usendowment.org.

Post-Grant Support

The goal of this Grant Program is to help communities protect their healthy watersheds. The Endowment's and EPA/NRCS's staffs are committed to our subawardee's success. We and our consultants are available to support subawardees in all aspects of their work. We seek to be active partners in problem-solving and information dissemination. Funding has been reserved to secure the services of experts to help improve the effectiveness and scalability of protection projects. These services may include, but are not limited to, communications, technical review, monitoring design and implementation, group facilitation, and project design.

Grantee Annual Meetings

To maximize effective project implementation and to enhance information-sharing, subawardees are invited to participate in one or more Healthy Watershed Consortium meetings. Subawardees will be actively engaged in setting the agenda for these meetings to ensure that their time is well-spent. Travel funding will be built into grant awards.

Criteria for Evaluating Proposals

There are seven primary criteria for evaluating proposals, with one criterion specific to each of the three grant categories. Total points available = 100 + 5 bonus pts.

- 1) To what extent has the applicant shown theirs is a healthy watershed? (Yes or No).
- 2) Projected measurable outcomes for short-term (duration of contract) and long-term landscape conservation or stewardship (acres protected, acres with improved stewardship, etc.).
- 3) To what degree does the applicant's treatment of the Success Factors demonstrate that the proposed project has the ingredients to be successful, or could have them in the near future?

- 4) Degree to which the applicant has the experience, personnel and partnerships to accomplish the proposed work.
- 5) Do the goals, hurdles, strategies and activities present a logical approach to achieving stated outcomes? Are the proposed metrics appropriate for measuring project success?
- 6) Is the budget sufficient to accomplish the proposed project? Is there strong potential for leveraging funds to improve the project’s cost-effectiveness? (5 pt. bonus.)
- 7a) Watershed Action Projects: What is the scale of proposed outcomes and extent to which the proposed work accelerates implementation of an existing watershed/conservation plan?
- 7b) Building Watershed Protection Capacity: To what degree has the applicant identified a significant watershed protection outcome and demonstrated a need and readiness for increased capacity?
- 7c) Advancing the State of Practice: To what extent is the proposed work impactful and to what extent can it be demonstrated that the practice can be scaled and transferred to other watersheds?

Healthy Watersheds Consortium Proposal Evaluation	Watershed Action Projects (WAP)	Building Watershed Protection Capacity (BWPC)	Advancing the State of Practice (ASP)
Healthy Watershed	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
Proposed Outcomes	30 pts.	30 pts.	30 pts.
Success Factors	10 pts.	10 pts.	10 pts.
Experience, Personnel, & Partners	15 pts.	15 pts.	15 pts.
Goals, Hurdles & Activities	15 pts.	15 pts.	15 pts.
Budget & Leverage	15 pts.	15 pts.	15 pts.
Implementation & Impact	15 pts.		
Need & Readiness		15 pts.	
Scale & Transferability			15 pts.