

Rio Grande Water Fund – Stream, Wetland and Aquatic Resources Program

Request for Statement of Interest

January 24, 2017

The Rio Grande Water Fund (RGWF) is an innovative public/private partnership identifying solutions to bring clean water to New Mexicans for generations to come. The primary goal is to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration treatments up to 30,000 acres per year in forested watersheds. Investing in the restoration of forested lands upstream will secure clean water for downstream communities. In the two years since the RGWF was launched, the partnership has tripled the number of on-the-ground acres treated in New Mexico by leveraging existing funds for cross-jurisdictional projects that treat more contiguous areas, and by matching diverse funding sources with appropriate projects. With more than 55 partnering organizations working towards a shared restoration goal, the RGWF now aims to broaden the scope to provide additional financial resources available for aquatic components of these forested systems.

Organizations are invited to submit a proposed restoration project to be added to the RGWF Stream, Wetland and Aquatic Restoration Program (SWARP) Candidate Project List. Projects approved for the Candidate List will be priorities for funding as opportunities become available. So far, the RGWF has raised more than two million dollars to support forest restoration projects in the upper Rio Grande Basin using this model. Funds have come from private, federal, and local governmental sources. Once an appropriate funding source is identified for a candidate project, a more detailed proposal and budget will be requested to respond to requirements specific to that funder. This RSI is essentially a pre-proposal to make your project eligible for funds secured through the RGWF.

What it means to be on the Candidate Project List

When funding becomes available for a project on the Candidate List, requirements specific to that funder will be requested and an agreement between the grantor and the grantee will be completed. The objective of the Candidate List is to provide a set of priority projects for which the RGWF Executive Committee can develop new funding sources or match with available monies from a variety of sources.

Funded projects will be required to provide an annual report to the RGWF Executive Committee on project progress (if multi-year) and provide monitoring results that are consistent with the RGWF Adaptive Management Plan. To assist project monitoring, the RGWF is setting up a dedicated, roving monitoring team that can help you to meet the Fund's monitoring requirements. Fiscal reporting will be conducted in compliance with grantor and grantee standard procedures. A final project report will be required 90 days after completion of the funded project or portion of a project. Final project reports will be posted on the RGWF website.

SWARP Guidelines

Proposed projects may include the following objectives: restore a river-floodplain connection; repair or restore slope or depressional wetlands or wetland complexes; restore ecological process, function and hydrology to increase ecosystem stability; increase native biodiversity; increase resilience to climate change through water

storage or drought resistance; and/or create or restore aquatic and riparian habitats. The RGWF seeks proposed Candidate Projects that meet the following guidelines:

Eligibility Criteria

- Proposed project must be located within one of the focal areas identified in the RGWF comprehensive plan (map on page 14). These areas include: 1) Sandia and Manzano Mountains; 2) Jemez Mountains; 3) San Juan/Chama area; and 4) West-slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.
- Proposed project must include streams, wetlands, aquatic resource or riparian areas that are part of a larger watershed restoration effort, and may include restoration projects that consider both upland and riparian areas.
- Proposed project must contain some level of partnership or collaboration in both the project development and implementation.
- Proposed project can include federal, state, tribal, county, municipal, or private lands.

Match

- There are no match requirements; however, projects that leverage additional funding (e.g., in-kind, volunteer hours, or cash) will be given a higher ranking.

Eligible Activities – Alone or in Combination

- Planning, to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including funding to conduct cultural resource and biological surveys and/or other required compliance surveys and associated reports
- Permitting, such as Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 or Endangered Species Act permitting compliance
- Technical design
- Implementation with post-treatment monitoring and maintenance (up to 5 years). If a federal nexus exists, the required compliance documentation must be in place for projects that propose only implementation activities. Monitoring is a required component of all implementation projects.

Applicant Eligibility

Applicants may represent a federal, state, county, municipal agency, a federally-recognized tribe, non-governmental organization, or political subdivision of the state, such as a soil and water conservation district or land grant.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposed projects that meet the SWARP guidelines listed above will be further evaluated and ranked on their technical merit and project narratives. Proposals should describe the strategic advantage of your project by addressing the evaluation criteria in this section. Project narratives should also address any statements or questions listed within each criterion. A technical panel will score each criterion based on the numeric points

scale indicated below and ranked by total scores. Proposals that fail to address all criteria listed will be removed from consideration.

Project Alignment (20 points) – Explain how the proposed project will mitigate wildfire or post-fire flooding impacts, contribute to watershed health, or create resilience to climate change, and how your project aligns with the objectives of the RGWF (Comprehensive Plan page 6). Describe how the proposed project meets all of the eligibility criteria and the other SWARP guidelines. Demonstrate the need for the project by identifying some level of impairment at your proposed site. This may be illustrated through existing data or other metrics such as: water quality indicators, threatened and endangered species habitat status, macroinvertebrate indicators, entrenchment ratio (geomorphic demonstration of impairment, incision-severed connection of wetland and water table), encroachment of woody species, lack of riparian or wetland vegetation, CWA Section 303d list, etc.

Technical Approach (20 points) – Describe the technical approach to the proposed project, including any specific treatments, materials, design principles, or scientific methods you plan to use. Demonstrate the technical merits and project effectiveness through scientific rationale. A literature cited page should be included if peer-reviewed or other literature is referenced. This page will not count toward the page limit. Proposals may also include figures, photos or conceptual designs that help illustrate the project plan or technical approach, although these will count towards the page limit.

Landscape Context (15 points) – Provide the context for your project by describing how it contributes to a larger landscape restoration project or management plan goal. The project area may have been identified as an important ecological site by regional or state planning efforts. Proposed project areas with existing planning documents will be given higher ranking. Planning efforts may be demonstrated by links to: completed CWA Section 319h Watershed-Based Plans (following CWA guidelines through State), land management agency NEPA documents, State Wildlife Action Plan identifying the proposed area as a priority, State Forest Action Plan identifying the proposed area as a priority, Regional Water Plans or other commensurate plans. Existing planning documents should be no more than 10 years old.

Project Readiness (20 points) – Demonstrate the feasibility and opportunity for the proposed project location. For example, the project is located on property with a willing landowner, planning or permitting is complete, a functional collaborative has formed, or other work in the area has taken place.

Community participation is important. Describe the level of collaboration used to develop the proposed project. Proposed projects may be formed by a simple partnership or a multi-party community collaborative, but must include at least three (3) parties. Please provide a list of resource users and active stakeholders in the watershed (affected by the project) and demonstrated support of resource users and stakeholders with an economic or legal right. Provide a framework for how this partnership or collaboration will lead to the long-term success of the project and the ability of the group to maintain the area after implementation.

Demonstrate local support and community participation of the proposed project through letters of commitment (provided in the Supplemental Materials). Please specify the role of each partner in developing this project proposal, carrying out the project, and maintaining the project after funding ends. This may be demonstrated in a table format.

Monitoring (5 points) – Outline any qualitative or quantitative metrics proposed to measure success in meeting project objectives or goals. Proposals should clearly demonstrate resources and commitment to on-going

project success following implementation through project monitoring. Monitoring is required for proposed implementation projects, and highly recommended for planning proposals to establish project-specific baseline datasets. Use existing baseline data and projected outcomes from post-treatment monitoring to identify any potential maintenance needs post-implementation. The RGWF has identified the Rapid Stream-Riparian Assessment methodology by Stacey et al. 2006 as the preferred monitoring technique.

Budget Narrative and Budget Table (15 points) – Provide a description of the funding amount requested and specific tasks these monies would be applied to. Include a description of any matched funds that are leveraged and how the RGWF monies would allow the project to work towards or achieve its goals and objectives. Be sure to address how the scale of the requested budget and matching funds is sufficient to meet the identified goals and objectives. Also include which components or tasks are of the highest priority for funding.

Leveraged Funding (5 points) – Provide the amount and source for any existing funding that would be applied to the proposed project, or other programs where funding has been sought. Leveraged funding may be from any federal or non-federal source. You may include funding that was obtained for any planning efforts referenced above.

Supplemental Materials – Additional materials that are required, but do not count toward the 5-page limit include: maps, letters of commitment, budget spreadsheet using the provided template, and a 1-page resume or qualifications of project lead.

Scoring Note: A deficient score in any of the project evaluation criteria or missing supplemental materials could result in the exclusion from the candidate list. Our panel may provide comments or questions and request that the proponent resubmit their application for further consideration.

Proposal Review Process

Proposals will be reviewed by a five to seven-member Technical Review Panel (Panel), comprising known experts in forestry, watershed management, aquatic ecology, wildlife and fisheries management, and/or water resources depending on the number and nature of the projects proposed. Panel members may include experts representing federal or state agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, or industry.

Panel members will review and score proposals based on the evaluation criteria, and then through discussion come to a consensus of the final ranking and recommended disposition of funds. Based on these rankings, proposals will fall into one of three categories; 1) Accept and Recommend for Funding, 2) Not Recommended for Funding at this Time, with Opportunity to Resubmit; or 3) Not Recommended for Funding. The RGWF Executive Committee will select candidate projects after reviewing the recommendations of the Panel. Projects accepted and added to the Candidate List will be posted on the RGWF website.

Process Transparency

All applicants will be informed why their project was or was not selected. All projects on the Candidate Projects List will be available for viewing on the RGWF website. The RGWF Executive Committee may choose to modify the application process to better meet the goals of the RGWF or to better address the needs of applicants. Regardless of any process changes, projects that have previously been added will remain on the List. Executive Committee members will recuse themselves from evaluating or selecting projects that would create or may be perceived as a conflict of interest.

New projects will be solicited periodically. Once projects are added to the Candidate Project List, the RGWF Executive Committee may supply the requested funds for the highest priority projects and continue to seek funding for any lower priority projects that were not funded in the first round. Candidate projects will be invited to provide any needed revisions to their requests six months after project acceptance.

Important Dates

Deadline for Questions: February 24, 2017

RGWF Response to Questions: March 3, 2017

Proposals due: March 24, 2017

Review Period: March 27 to April 7, 2017

Announcement of Projects added to the Candidate List: April 14, 2017

How to Apply

Any questions regarding the Request for Statements of Interest may be directed to RGWaterFund@tnc.org. Questions are due by February 24, 2017. A spreadsheet of submitted questions and answers to these questions will be posted no later than March 3, 2017.

Submit all materials by email to: RGWaterFund@tnc.org by **4:00pm MST, March 24, 2017**. You will receive a confirmation email of the receipt of your submitted packet.

Proposal Instructions & Template

Submittal packages should include three files; (1) Project Narrative; (2) Budget spreadsheet completed from template provided; and (3) Supplemental Materials. Project narrative and supplemental materials should be in PDF format, and the budget spreadsheet should remain in excel format. Submit proposals packets to RGWaterfund@tnc.org no later than **4:00 pm MST, March 24, 2017**. You will receive a confirmation email that your proposal package was received by the due date.

Project Narrative

No more than 5 pages, single spaced, no smaller than 11 pt. font. Carefully review the RSI program guidelines and evaluation criteria for additional project narrative content. Provide detailed answers to all questions or requested information in the Evaluation Criteria, or indicate where a request is not applicable to your project. Project Narratives will include the follow sections:

Project Title/Name: Include landscape name and specific activity you would like funded, for example: "Comanche Creek Restoration at the Valle Vidal, Carson NF."

Contact Information: Name of project lead and their contact information including mailing address, email and phone number.

Project Alignment: This section includes background, project description, alignment with RGWF objectives, demonstration that the project meets all of the eligibility criteria and need. *See the Proposal Evaluation Criteria section for additional detail on content for this and all other sections identified in this template.*

Technical Approach: This section includes a detailed description of the technical approach to the project as well as the technical merits and project effectiveness through scientific rationale.

Landscape Context: This section provides the context for your project by describing how it contributes to a larger landscape restoration project and/or management plan goal.

Project Readiness: Demonstrate the feasibility, opportunity, community participation, and local support for the proposed project at its proposed location.

Monitoring: Outline base-line or post-implementation monitoring metrics selected from the Rapid Stream-Riparian Assessment methodology by Stacey et al. 2006.

Budget Narrative and Budget Table: The Budget Table should be referenced in this section but must be included in the supplemental materials. The Budget Narrative should be included in this section and describe how the scale of requested funds matches the scale of the project, as well as any priority components for funding if only a portion of the project is funded.

Leveraged Funding: Provide a detailed description of the source, quantity, and use of any leveraged or match funding.

Literature Cited: Please provide full references for any literature or resources referenced in the text of the proposal. This section will not count toward your page limit of the Project Narrative.

Budget

Use the provided spreadsheet template to record dollar values for identified tasks or project components in your Project Narrative. This spreadsheet should complement the budget narrative also provided in the Project Narrative. Spreadsheet should include a total amount requested for each task or project component, a breakdown of cost by category, and any leveraged or match funds available by category.

Supplemental Materials

Supplemental materials are required; however, do not count toward the page limit of the Project Narrative. All supplemental materials listed below should be combined into a single PDF document.

Maps: Please provide maps that show: (1) the strategic restoration landscape to which your project contributes; and (2) the specific location of your project. Maps should be in PDF format.

Statement of Qualifications: A 1-page resume for project leads or key personal should include:

Name and title of the project lead(s)

Education

Descriptions or links to completed project(s) of similar nature, size and complexity to the activity/activities proposed as a candidate project

Document familiarity with location of proposed project

Letters of Commitment: Letters may also illustrate the on-going effort and commitment to the project following the completion of the funding. If collaborators are offering matching contributions, the letters should document this commitment. The sponsorship/support of the jurisdictional agency, agencies, or landowner where the project is to take place should be documented by a letter of commitment. Please keep letters limited to key project stakeholders, landowners, agency personal, or organizations who played a role in the development or implementation of the project.

Approvals: Has approval by persons/agencies with jurisdiction in the project area been received? If you are proposing work on a landscape you do not own or manage, include a separate letter of concurrence and commitment from the responsible official or landowner. Indicate that a Record of Decision has been signed by the responsible official if NEPA is required for implementation projects. If the project occurs within a grazing allotment, the proposed project should include a letter of commitment from the grazing permittee.