

# Rio Grande Water Fund Request for Proposals 2018

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## 1. Proposal Deadlines

Proposal due: January 22, 2018, 7:00 PM MST

Technical evaluation period: January 22 – February 10, 2018

RGWF Executive Committee meeting: February 13, 2018

Notice of funding decision: February 23, 2018

## 2. Available Funds

At least \$640,000 is available for FY 2018 and for three subsequent years through FY 2021 (\$2.7 million total over four years). The range of funding amounts that will be considered in each project category are described in Section 6 of this RFP.

## 3. How to Apply

Applicants should respond to the proposal requirements listed below (Section 9), using the online form available at [www.RioGrandeWaterFund.org](http://www.RioGrandeWaterFund.org). This form will guide you through the submission process, ensure all submission requirements are met, and streamline proposal reviews. Following competition of the online form, you will receive a copy of your application. Please see RGWF RFP Frequently Asked Questions (Appendix A), or contact [RGWaterFund@tnc.org](mailto:RGWaterFund@tnc.org) for assistance applying for this RFP or call 505-946-2037.

## 4. Scope

The Rio Grande Water Fund (RGWF) is seeking to fund landscape-scale projects (e.g., 50,000 acres) that share the following goals (1-4). All projects should align with the [2014 Rio Grande Water Fund Comprehensive Plan](#).

1. Reduce the probability of historically uncharacteristic high-severity fire in forests and woodlands
2. Increase water holding capacity, biodiversity, and habitat in wetlands, riparian areas, or streams
3. Improve the resiliency of ecosystem services adjacent to communities, such as water sources, forest products, or recreation and tourism
4. Develop, or strengthen relationships between local communities, interest groups and landowners or managers by working across jurisdictional boundaries

Projects must be located within one of the focal areas identified in the RGWF comprehensive plan ([map](#)). 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. Eligible lands for projects can include federal, state, tribal, county, municipal, or private properties.

## 5. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants represent a state, county, municipal agency, Tribes, non-governmental organization, or political subdivision such as a soil and water conservation district, land grant or acequia association. Projects on National Forest System lands are eligible; however, the project must be submitted by one of the eligible applicants, who will serve in the project lead role.

Applicants should have demonstrable ability to control costs, meet deadlines, and perform high-quality work. Applicants should reference any recent relevant experience administering similar grants and contracts. The project lead must demonstrate leadership level familiarity with the project landscape, and applicants should document experience with government agencies or private industry. Ultimately, applicants must include enough detail so the Technical Review Panels can evaluate the ability of the applicant to lead and successfully manage the type and complexity of the proposed project.

## 6. Project Categories

We are soliciting proposals in three categories (I-III), each of which is further divided into project types (a-c). Project proposals may overlap between types and categories. Applicants may select more than one project category and type, and explain in the project overview how any overlap between category or type benefits the overall project.

- I. Forest Restoration Treatments
  - a. Thinning and burning activities to restore and maintain desired forest and landscape conditions, as described in the [RGWF Comprehensive Plan, Appendix D](#).
  - b. Planning activities such as archeological, plant and animal, or other surveys that support the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
  - c. Development of fuels reduction and restoration crew. *Must also apply for Capacity Building.*
- II. Stream, Wetland and Aquatic Restoration Projects (SWARP)
  - a. Activities to protect or restore riparian and wetland vegetation or watershed function, as described in the [RGWF Comprehensive Plan](#).
  - b. Planning, to comply with NEPA, may include cultural and biological resource surveys and/or other required compliance surveys, or permitting, such as Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 or Endangered Species Act permitting compliance.
  - c. Technical design, implementation and maintenance projects.
- III. Capacity Building
  - a. New "start-up" collaborative projects within the RGWF area of interest aimed at addressing the goals outlined in the scope (Section 4) and the [RGWF Comprehensive Plan](#).
  - b. Existing collaborative seeking additional funding to address complex issues or emerging conflict that are hindering restoration planning and implementation.
  - c. Existing collaborative seeking to build new skills or test innovative ideas that help achieve outcomes and goals outlined in the scope (Section 4) and the [RGWF Comprehensive Plan](#).

Funding requests for Forest Restoration Treatments and SWARP may be \$25,000 - \$250,000. Funding for Capacity Building may be from \$10,000 - \$30,000. Capacity Building projects will be eligible for an additional 1 to 3 years of funding (for 4 years total) if performance metrics are met and after completing a new application for follow-on funding.

## 7. Review Processes

Following submission, a panel of technical experts for each project category—convened by the Nature Conservancy—will review each proposal and make recommendations to the RGWF Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will make the final decisions on which projects to fund. Applicants should reserve 1 hour during the week of February 5, 2018 to answer questions by phone during the panel review. We will provide exact panel review dates and times no later than January 22, 2018. Proposals recommended to the executive committee by the review panel should plan to have the application leader attend the RGWF executive team meeting February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in Albuquerque, where they will present a 5-min overview of their proposal and answer questions from the executive team.

## 8. Process Transparency

All applicants will be informed why their project was or was not selected for funding at this time. All funded projects and those on the candidate projects list will be available for viewing on the [RGWF website](#). In the future, the RGWF Executive Committee may choose to modify the application process for subsequent request for proposals to better meet the evolving goals of the RGWF. Regardless of any changes, projects that have previously been added will remain on the candidate list. Technical review panel members will recuse themselves from evaluating or selecting projects that would create or may be perceived as a conflict of interest.

## 9. Responding to this Statement of Interest Request

We require projects to be part of broader landscape-scale efforts. Please briefly describe the strategies, goals, size (acres), location, and planning status of your landscape-scale effort in the project narrative. Explain how the proposed project fits within ongoing efforts (e.g., Landscape Restoration Strategies, Community Watershed Protection Plans). Proposals seeking to initiate collaborative groups should consider applying for the capacity building category of this RFP (Section 9.4). Be specific about how results of the project will contribute to landscape-scale outcomes.

All proposals should be based on sound science and include a list of references.

Monitoring of ecological and socio-economic variables are required component of *all* RGWF projects. Applicants can perform monitoring or defer to the RGWF to manage project monitoring. Please see decision support matrix (monitoring section of submission form) to help determine whether the applicant's organization has the capacity to perform required monitoring.

### 9.1 All projects must:

- Define project goals, outcomes to achieve, and deliverables with proposed funding
- Explain how project fits within the scope of the RFP and meets the goals of the RGWF (Section 4).
- Describe existing partnerships. Diverse and balanced partners are encouraged, these should include appropriate Federal, Tribal, State, County, and Municipal government representatives.

- Tell a story: Tell us what is compelling about your project and how we can explain your story to the public.
- List objectives.
- List deliverables.
- Provide a workplan for project implementation – a table of what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done by.
- Produce a map of the project location.
- Include a statement of project lead’s qualifications, include educational and relevant work experience, and provide evidence of successful performance in project and financial management by the applicant.
- Include letters of commitment from partners.
- Letters from local governments should explicitly state any cash funding. Projects with local government match will be given higher priority for funding.
- Compliance Documentation:
  - For planning projects on landscapes with federal NEPA requirements, you must also include a letter from the relevant line officer committing to completing the NEPA if funds are requested for planning assistance.
  - For implementation projects on landscapes with federal jurisdiction, you must also provide documentation that all NEPA requirements have been completed.
  - For stream, wetland and aquatic restoration projects, evidence must be provided that the required federal compliance documentation is in place.
- Monitoring: Develop a monitoring plan OR elect to defer monitoring to RGWF
- Budget: Describe how RGWF and other funding will be used in the project.
- Produce budget narrative and spreadsheet: [click here to download budget template](#)
  - Amount of funding requested.
  - List specific activities RGWF monies would pay for.
  - Every budget expense *must* have a unit cost, number of units, and total cost portrayed in the budget spreadsheet and detailed in the budget narrative.
  - Match or leverage: contributions of cash, in-kind support.
    - For this RFP leverage is defined as all funding provided by any partner toward achieving the project goals, in the past 5 years.
    - For this RFP match is defined as non-federal in-kind or cash contributions, and must be tracked by the Uniform Guidance for matching funds.
- Include monitoring in your budget only after you have reviewed the monitoring requirements and elected to monitor your own project.

## 9.2 Requirements for Forest Restoration Projects:

Describe the opportunity to act, or the strategic advantage of the project, to reduce the risk of high-severity fire, reestablish natural fire regimes, and/or increase the resilience of forest-based ecosystem services. All proposals must describe the scientific and evidence based rationale for your proposed activity or prescription. In the project narrative, please respond to the series of questions below. Not all questions may be relevant to all projects. If a question is not relevant to

the proposed project, please state why. For all proposals, clearly describe the outcomes, in terms of forest acres restored, jobs created, and/or local economic impacts.

- ❑ Risk: How does your project contribute to reducing wildfire risk in the adjacent larger landscape? Provide a map that shows the strategic placement of your project and in the narrative, your assumptions about why it will be effective.
  - ❑ Why is this project urgent?
  - ❑ What community values are at risk?
- ❑ Describe the engagement of local communities and agency cooperators (documentation in letters of commitment). Provide specific examples and extent of engagement
- ❑ Implementation: Are the proposed on-the-ground actions listed in the as described in the [RGWF Comprehensive Plan, Appendix D](#)?
  - ❑ How will the implementation help achieve the goals outline in Section 4?
  - ❑ What capacity exists within the landscape to ensure successful completion of the implementation plan?
  - ❑ Project funding is available to develop, fund, and run a local (place-based) fuels reduction and restoration crew. The crew must be able work across boundaries, and may be tied to a specific geography with diverse ‘shovel ready’ projects. Please describe innovative strategies to accomplish restoration, employ local youth, involve multiple agencies, and work across boundaries. *Must also apply for Capacity Building (Section 9.4)*
- ❑ Economics: What are the opportunities for economic and community development?
  - ❑ Will your project supply wood products to existing wood processing businesses OR is there potential for new wood-using industry?
  - ❑ Will your project provide for traditional and community wood supply (e.g., free or low-cost firewood)? If yes, include an estimate of the volume.
  - ❑ Will the project create jobs? If yes, describe the nature, estimated numbers, and skills of the necessary workforce.

### 9.3 Requirements for SWARP Projects:

Describe the opportunity to act, or the strategic advantage of the project, to 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. In the project narrative, please respond to the series of questions below. Not all questions may be relevant to all projects. If a question is not relevant to the proposed project, please state why. For all proposals, describe the outcomes in terms of wetland acres, and stream miles restored.

- ❑ Impairment: What is the cause of the impairment within your proposed project area?
  - ❑ What evidence do you have that illustrates that an impairment exists?
  - ❑ Have you quantified the level of degradation? Yes/No if, yes explain:
    - You may illustrate this 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.

- How will your proposed project address the source of the impairment?
- Technical Approach: Describe the technical approach to the project; including any specific treatments, materials, and design principles. Demonstrate the technical merits and project effectiveness through scientific rationale. Proposals may also include figures, photos or conceptual diagrams that help illustrate the project plan or technical approach.
  - Is there recent peer-reviewed research that supports the use of your proposed technique(s)?
  - Are there successful examples of the proposed technique(s) implemented in New Mexico or other Southwestern ecosystems?
  - If applying a new technique, what is the rationale for using this method and what evidence do you have that it will be successful over other non-experimental methods? How will you monitor the effectiveness of your treatment/restoration project?
  - What metrics will you use to indicate success and how often will you measure them to determine any long-term effects?
    - Is there any baseline data? If so, who collected it? Will you use a similar protocol and match the frequency of data collection? If different, why?
- Project Alignment: How does your project align with the objectives of the RGWF?
  - How is local support for your project expressed?
  - What was the community participation in your project planning and development?
  - Who are the active members in your process?
- Proposals for implementation on grazed land *must* have a letter of support from the land owner or permittee.

#### **9.4 Requirements for Capacity Building Projects:**

Describe additional capacity needed to develop or improve the collaborative landscape restoration process in the context of project landscape. Proposal narrative should describe the long-term outcomes of the collaboration and future projects, including expected changes to land management. Applicants should discuss how they intend to increase their capacity, and the capacity of others, for collaborative management within the proposal landscape.

- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a group? How will this funding build capacity to address your weaknesses and capitalize on your strengths? Submit self-assessment using the survey tool on the submission form.
- Specifically, how will the project outcomes increase capacity for collaboration and lead to restoration outcomes? Tie your outcomes to the goals of the Rio Grande Water Fund.
- How will your project leverage the funds requested into increase local capacity for restoration?
- What opportunities for innovation exist within the collaborative?
- How is leadership shared among the partners in this project? Describe who is involved and what their individual roles will be in leading and commitment to the capacity building actions.

- ❑ What are the 6-, 9- and 12-month project benchmarks? (Note: The more money requested the higher the required benchmark standards)

## 10. Expectations Following Selection

Projects selected for funding will work with the RGWF to finalize project budgets, expectations, and timelines. Funded projects will be required at a minimum to provide an annual final report to the RGWF Executive Committee on project progress (if multiyear) and provide monitoring results as directed by the RGWF Adaptive Management Plan. Specific program updates may also be required quarterly or semi-annually depending on the individual project. The RGWF is increasing the availability of the dedicated roving monitoring team to assist project managers 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. Other project expectations include:

- Programmatic and Fiscal Audits may be required
- Legal review of contracts and agreements is required for awarding funds
- TNC Due Diligence standard operating procedures will be followed
- Awardees are required to be responsive to all deadlines
- Awardees are required to meet all Reporting requirements
- All Monitoring requirements met

The RGWF intent is to act not as a funder, but as a partner in your project. We hope to learn together and work together to build capacity across the entire RGWF footprint. We will host a 1-2 day "hands on" workshop (don't expect just a show and tell), and we expect all funded projects to send representatives. TNC will organize the workshop based on the needs of the funded projects and will utilize the expertise of the project partners.



## Attachment A: FAQs

November 27, 2017

### Where can I find general information about the Rio Grande Water Fund (RGWF)?

*The best sources of information about the Water Fund project goals, current funders, annual accomplishments and more can be found at:*

[www.nature.org/riogrande](http://www.nature.org/riogrande)

[www.riograndewaterfund.org](http://www.riograndewaterfund.org)

### What are the goals of the Rio Grande Water Fund?

*The Water Fund will generate sustainable funding for a 20-year program of large-scale forest and watershed restoration treatments—including thinning overgrown forests, restoring streams and enhancing local capacity for collaboration.*

### What is the RGWF Executive Committee?

*The Executive Committee comprises representatives from the diverse funding agencies and organizations that are signatories to the Rio Grande Wildfire and Water Source Protection Collaborative Charter and providing funding for projects. The Executive Committee has established three Technical Review Panels to review responses to RFPs and recommend projects for funding. The members of the Executive Committee make the final project funding decision according to the terms of the Charter.*

### Where does the Water Fund money come from?

*The Water Fund is a mechanism for businesses, foundations, and federal and state agencies to invest in watershed health and to leverage their monies to protect the water that sustains New Mexico communities. Funding sources are highly varied, from private and corporate foundations to individuals and government agencies.*

### How much money is in the fund?

*Rio Grande Water Fund partners have committed approximately \$30 million dollars to forest restoration since its inception in 2014, that has leveraged \$3.64 million of private funding. New sources of funding are continuously being developed to get closer to the goal of \$21 million per year. As of November 2017, at least \$640,000 will be available for FY 2018 and for three subsequent years through FY 2021 for a total of \$2.7 million over the next four years.*

### When will projects receive funding?

*Projects that are recommended by the technical review panels and approved by the Executive Committee will be notified of their selection for funding and will enter into an agreement with the Nature Conservancy to receive funding. If there are more approved projects than available funding, projects will be put on the Candidate List to await future funding. Since funding is drawn from a variety of sources, the sources may have unique requirements and timelines.*

**What does it mean if my project is on the Candidate List?**

*Being on the Candidate List brings restoration project greater exposure and enhances chances for increased funding through new investments and through existing funding. In its first three years, the RGWF provided \$2 million of direct funding for on-the-ground projects and NEPA surveys, and was able to provide resources to most of the projects on the initial candidate lists. The RGWF Executive Committee actively seeks funding opportunities for candidate projects year-round.*

**Is there a match requirement?**

*While matching contributions are expected of all participants, the RGWF has not set a specific required amount. However, to be a viable candidate project, substantial investment by the applicant and partners is important. Funding preference will be given to projects that have cash match from local government. The projected total of match should be reported as cash contributions and in-kind contributions. Budgets and budget narratives should also explain the leveraged dollars from others that you are providing.*

**What if my project is not in a RGWF focal area?**

*Please consult the focal area map ([map](#)) when applying for funding to make sure your project is located within one of the geographies selected for RGWF investment. Projects outside the focal areas will not be considered. If the boundary is unclear or your project area straddles the boundary, please send an email to the address below to verify your project eligibility.*

Please send additional questions to [RGWaterFund@tnc.org](mailto:RGWaterFund@tnc.org). Check this page for future updates.