



2018-2019 Request for Letters of Interest

Timeline

October 9 – Request opens

November 1 – Information presentation at RGWF Signatories Meeting

November 16 – Letters of Interest are due to collin.haffey@tnc.org

November 26 – Technical review panel meetings; applicants notified of request for full proposals

February 1, 2019 – Full proposals due

February 19-21 – Full proposal review and decisions

Background

The Rio Grande Water Fund (RGWF) is an innovative public/private partnership with the goal of restoring 600,000 acres of at-risk forests over 20 years to secure clean water for New Mexicans now and for generations to come.

This request for Letters of Interest (LOI) aims to attract strategically placed forest restoration projects in frequent fire, dry conifer forests (including thinning and controlled burning), stream or wetland restoration, and innovative ideas that will help scale up forest or stream restoration across the Rio Grande Water Fund footprint.

Forest restoration projects should focus on dry conifer systems with historically frequent fires. Projects should also focus on restoring ecological process and function to the landscape and may include secondary benefits.

Stream, wetland, and riparian restoration projects are those that focus on perennial or intermittent streams, wet meadows, wetlands, or riparian corridors within the Rio Grande Water Fund footprint.

Funding Available

At least \$700,000 is available for FY 2019 and for three subsequent years through FY 2021. Individual projects may request between \$25,000 and \$250,000.

Match: there are no match requirements. However, projects that leverage additional funding (e.g., in-kind, volunteer hours, or cash) are encouraged.

Project funding is available for one year, with the option to extend.

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, traditional land uses/users, 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.

Project Eligibility

All projects must have an ecological restoration goal and applicants should clearly describe how this goal will be achieved. Additionally, letters should briefly highlight secondary benefits (e.g., water source protection, community wildfire preparation, local economy, traditional communities) of each project when possible.

All projects should contribute to broader landscape restoration efforts and are open to all land ownerships and may cross boundaries. Projects are encouraged to involve multiple stakeholders and partners from diverse backgrounds and expertise. Eligible projects fall into one of two broad categories: Forest Restoration and Stream, Wetland and Aquatic Restoration Projects (SWARP). The descriptions below outline the type of project that are eligible under each category.

Forest Restoration

- Thinning and burning activities to restore and maintain desired forest and landscape conditions, as described in the RGWF Comprehensive Plan, Appendix D.
- Planning activities such as archeological, plant and animal, or other surveys that support the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Stream, Wetland and Aquatic Restoration Projects (SWARP)

- Activities to protect or restore riparian and wetland vegetation or watershed function, as described in the RGWF Comprehensive Plan. This can include the technical design, implementation and maintenance projects.
- Planning projects 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.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants represent a state, county, municipal agency, Tribe, non-governmental organization, or political subdivision such as a soil and water conservation district, land grant or acequia association. Private for-profit companies and federal agencies are not eligible. However, projects on federal lands are eligible provided the project is 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, contracts and collaborative projects. The project lead must demonstrate leadership level familiarity with the project landscape, and applicants should document experience with government agencies or private industry. Proposed project should be 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.

Submission guidelines

Letters of Interest should be no more than three pages of text and may include up to five additional pages of tables, figures, a reference list, and a signature page. A detailed map of the proposed project area must be included for all restoration projects. If this proposal is part of a larger landscape project, please include the boundary of the larger landscape effort, if applicable. Letters should indicate the support of key partners and provide contact information for each partner¹. For all restoration projects, environmental and cultural heritage compliance must be completed before funds will be distributed, please indicate the date of completion in the letter. *See template (final page of this document) to use as a guide for organizing your letter of interest.*

LOI Review Process

Letters of Interest 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 the letters based on the evaluation criteria, and through discussion, come to a consensus of which projects to recommend for a full proposal submittal. The RGWF Executive Committee will select candidate projects after reviewing the recommendations of the Panel.

Process Transparency

All applicants will be informed why their project was or was not selected. In the future, the RGWF Executive Committee may choose to modify the application process for

¹ The partner contact information is meant to replace a letter of support for the LOI stage. Full letters of support will be requested as part of a full proposal.

requests 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.

Letter of Interest Template

Please use the following 8 section headings (indicated in bold).

1. Project Name:

2. Applicant Name and Organization:

3. Background:

Briefly describe the need, scientific justification, and area of the work to be done (approx. 150 words).

4. Goal(s):

What will be different once the project is finished? (approx. 150 words)

5. Outcomes:

List and describe the outcomes and deliverables. (approx. 400 words)

6. Work Plan:

Briefly describe the lead applicant's and partner's experience. (approx. 100 words)

How and when will the work get done? (approx. 250 words)

7. Partnerships:

Describe your partnerships and how they will help the work be done. If this proposal is part of a larger landscape project, please name and describe the larger effort. (approx. 250 words)

8. Budget:

How much RGWF funding are you requesting?

How much leveraged funding or match is included (none is required)? Here, match is funding that could be officially committed to a project, such as that from another grant; leveraged funding is other funding spent on the project without official commitment.

How will this money be spent? (approx. 200 words)

Send a PDF version of your letter of interest -- with up to 3 pages of text and 5 additional pages of maps, figures, tables, literature cited, and list of partners and contact information -- to collin.haffey@tnc.org by close of business on November 16, 2018.

please direct all questions to: collin.haffey@tnc.org
(505) 946-2037