

# SUSTAIN<sub>OUR</sub> GREATLAKES

## Stewardship Grants Program 2012 Request for Proposals

Through this Request for Proposals, *Sustain Our Great Lakes* invites applications for competitive funding through its **Stewardship Grants Program**. To be considered for funding, pre-proposals must be submitted online ([www.nfwf.org/easygrants](http://www.nfwf.org/easygrants)) by **February 15, 2012** prior to midnight.

*Sustain Our Great Lakes* awards funding annually through: 1) the Stewardship Grants Program and 2) the Community Grants Program. This Request for Proposals is for the Stewardship Grants Program only. The Community Grants Request for Proposals is currently available at: [www.sustainourgreatlakes.org](http://www.sustainourgreatlakes.org).

### Sustain Our Great Lakes Overview

*Sustain Our Great Lakes* is a public-private partnership among ArcelorMittal, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Its mission is to sustain, restore and protect fish, wildlife and habitat in the Great Lakes basin by leveraging funding, building conservation capacity, and focusing partners and resources toward key ecological issues. The program achieves this mission, in part, by awarding grants for on-the-ground habitat restoration and enhancement. From 2006 through 2011, the program awarded 133 grants worth \$20.6 million in federal and corporate partner funding. Grantees matched this funding with an additional \$21.8 million, for a total conservation investment of \$42.4 million. Some of the important outcomes generated by this investment include:

- Restoration of aquatic connectivity to 774 stream miles
- Restoration of 17,000 acres of wetland, coastal and associated upland habitat
- Restoration of 86 miles of stream and riparian habitat



## Stewardship Grants Program Overview

The purpose of the Stewardship Grants Program is to support **large-scale, on-the-ground** habitat restoration and enhancement projects that will have enduring and significant positive impacts on the ecological condition of the Great Lakes basin.

Projects that receive funding typically:

- Restore or enhance habitats at scales on the order of hundreds of acres or tens of stream miles or larger.
- Apply the bulk (>90%) of grant funding to on-the-ground habitat improvement work and minimize expenses for planning, design and engineering.
- Have completed planning, design and engineering stages to the extent that on-the-ground implementation can begin shortly after the grant is awarded.
- Include pre- and post-implementation monitoring to document habitat improvements and other project outcomes.
- Provide long-lasting ecological benefits, as demonstrated by provisions for long-term maintenance and management as appropriate.

Projects with smaller scales may be better-suited for the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* Community Grants Program.

## Grant Eligibility

Eligible applicants include: non-profit 501(c) organizations; state, tribal and local governments; and educational institutions. Individuals, federal agencies, and private for-profit firms are not eligible for grants through the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* Stewardship Grants Program.

To be eligible for consideration, projects must 1) occur within the Great Lakes basin and 2) direct the bulk of grant funding toward on-the-ground habitat restoration. A small percentage (<10%) of a grant award may be applied toward completion of final planning, design and engineering stages.

The Stewardship Grants Program does not provide grants for education or community outreach. For the 2012 funding cycle, grant funding will **not** be provided for land protection (e.g., acquisition and easement), rain barrels, rain gardens, green roofs, or research. Projects that seek funding for political advocacy, lobbying, litigation, fundraising, or legally mandated mitigation projects are not eligible.

## Grant Size and Available Funding

Grant awards will range from \$150,001 to \$1,500,000.

At the time of this announcement, it is anticipated that approximately \$3–7 million will be available for grant awards under the Stewardship Grants Program.

The bulk of that funding will be directed toward implementing on-the-ground habitat restoration. However, some funding will be used to support technical assistance to private landowners for improving wildlife conservation on private lands. Additional details are provided in the Special Considerations section below.

## Funding Priorities

Funding priority is assigned to improving the quality and connectivity of **tributary, wetland** and **coastal** habitats through the following four action categories.

- **Restoration of Aquatic Connectivity**

Important activities within this category include but are not limited to: removal of dams, replacement of bridges and culverts that are barriers to aquatic organisms, and installation of fish passage structures.

- **Riparian and In-stream Habitat Restoration**

Important activities within this category include but are not limited to: streambank stabilization, control of invasive species, restoration of native vegetation, restoration of canopy cover, placement of in-stream habitat structures, and hydrological restoration.

- **Wetland Restoration**

Important activities within this category include but are not limited to: control of invasive species, restoration of native vegetation, and hydrological restoration.

- **Near-shore/Shoreline Habitat Restoration**

Important activities within this category include but are not limited to: restoration/enhancement of spawning reefs, removal of artificial structures causing shoreline fragmentation, restoration of natural beach topography, and control of invasive species.

## Special Considerations

Within the four priority action categories identified under the previous heading, preference will be given to projects that:

- **Benefit Species of Conservation Concern**

To receive priority consideration in this category, applicants must identify pertinent species of conservation concern and demonstrate how the proposed work will benefit them. Species of conservation concern include, but are not limited to, animals and plants identified as threatened, endangered, or special concern at the state, provincial or federal level. Preference will be given to proposals that quantify: 1) the expected increase in high-quality habitat available to the identified species; and 2) the expected population benefits to those species.

- **Accelerate Beneficial Use Impairments Delisting within Great Lakes Areas of Concern**

To receive priority consideration in this category, applicants must identify pertinent Beneficial Use Impairments within one or more U.S. Areas of Concern (AOCs) and clearly demonstrate how the proposed work will accelerate their delisting. Preference will be given to projects identified as priorities in Stage 2 Remedial Action Plans. At the full proposal stage, applicants seeking consideration in this category will be required to submit a letter of support from the local Remedial Action Plan (RAP) implementation group, defined as the state agency responsible for implementing the AOC program or the local public stakeholder group working with the state agency on implementing the RAP. The letter of support should state whether the proposed project is needed to achieve AOC delisting. More information on AOCs and Beneficial Use Impairments can be found at: <http://epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/index.html> and [www.ijc.org/rel/boards/annex2/buis.htm](http://www.ijc.org/rel/boards/annex2/buis.htm).

- **Implement Control of Aquatic Invasive Species**

To receive priority consideration in this category, applicants must demonstrate how the proposed work will reduce ecological threats from aquatic invasive species. Preference will be given to on-the-ground control of high-risk aquatic invasive species such as Phragmites and purple loosestrife or as identified in state- and tribal-approved aquatic invasive species management plans. In addition, priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate how 1) the proposed work relates to a comprehensive invasive species control strategy and 2) the outcomes of the work will be sustained through time.

- **Reduce Phosphorous Inputs to Streams and Lakes**

To receive priority consideration in this category, applicants must demonstrate how the proposed work will reduce phosphorous inputs to specific waterways. Preference will

be given to proposals that quantify the expected reduction in terms of absolute inputs (i.e., weight) as well as percentage (e.g., X% reduction in P entering water body Y).

- **Provide Technical Assistance to Private Landowners**

Some funding has been allocated specifically to support technical assistance to farmers, foresters and other private landowners to help optimize wildlife conservation on private lands. This technical assistance funding is intended to increase the effectiveness of Farm Bill programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Conservation Reserve Program, among others. Grant funding may be used to hire field biologists and other habitat professionals (botanists, ecologists, foresters, etc.) who will work with NRCS field offices for up to two years of full-time employment. A matching contribution of at least 1:1 non-federal cash or in-kind services is required. At the full proposal stage, applicants seeking consideration in this category will be required to submit a letter of support from the NRCS State Conservationist(s) in the state(s) where work is proposed. Additional information on the requirements of this funding can be found at [www.nfwf.org/conservationpartners](http://www.nfwf.org/conservationpartners).

A single proposal may address more than one of these special consideration categories. However, proposals do not need to address multiple categories to be competitive. For example, an applicant proposing installation of a fish ladder should not feel compelled to incorporate an unrelated phosphorous-reduction component to the project.

## Matching Contributions

To qualify for funding through the Stewardship Grants Program, applicants must offer a **minimum of \$150,001** in matching contributions for most projects (note: a minimum 1:1 non-federal match is required for private landowner technical assistance projects; see description in previous section). The ratio of matching funds offered is one criterion considered during the review process, and projects that meet or exceed a 1:1 match ratio will tend to be more competitive.

Matching funds may include cash, in-kind contributions of staff and volunteer time, work performed, materials and services donated, or other tangible contributions to the project objectives and outcomes. The cost of recent land acquisition or easement may also qualify as match for a project involving work at the acquired site. In addition, if they would not be paid with requested grant funding, indirect costs up to 15% of the project's direct costs may be applied as match by an applicant with a federally approved indirect rate (more information about using indirect costs as match can be found at: [www.nfwf.org/indirect](http://www.nfwf.org/indirect)).

To be eligible, matching contributions must be:

- non-Federal (U.S.) in origin (federally appropriated or managed funds are ineligible);

- raised and dedicated specifically for the project;
- voluntary in nature (mitigation, restitution, or other permit or court-ordered settlements are ineligible);
- applied only to the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* Stewardship grant and not to any other matching program(s); and
- spent/applied between the project start and end dates designated in the grant application (the start date may be back-dated up to 1 year prior to the pre-proposal deadline to allow recent work directed to the project to be applied as match).

## **Project Duration**

Anticipated completion time for funded projects will typically be 2 years following finalization of a grant agreement. Projects may be a discrete part of a longer-term project, provided there are definable outcomes for the proposed phase of the overall effort. The project narrative should include a clear timetable or schedule for project completion.

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. The start date may be back-dated up to 1 year prior to the pre-proposal deadline to allow work directed to the project to be applied as match (back-dating does not reduce the prospective 2-year duration of a grant going forward).

## **Evaluation Criteria**

The most-competitive proposals will demonstrate:

- Close alignment with funding priorities
- Clear definition of activities and anticipated ecological results
- Strong technical merit
- Competitive project costs
- Experienced project teams and partner engagement
- Plans for pre- and post-implementation monitoring to document habitat improvements and other project outcomes

A panel of state, tribal and provincial reviewers and the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* advisory team will use those criteria as a strong basis for project selections; however, project selections will also be based on other considerations, such as availability of funding, geographic balance, and balance among project types. In addition, selections may be based on how activities advance goals of established watershed, regional, tribal, state, federal and provincial conservation plans. A few examples among the many relevant existing plans include Area of Concern Remedial

Action Plans, Lakewide Management Plans, endangered species recovery plans, and aquatic invasive species management plans. Applicants are encouraged to identify how the project will increase habitat resilience within the context of increased stress from a changing climate.

## How To Apply

All application materials must be submitted online through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Easygrants system. Hard-copy applications will not be considered for funding. An application can be started by clicking on the following link: [www.nfwf.org/easygrants](http://www.nfwf.org/easygrants) (Note: the internet browser pop-up blocker must be disabled prior to beginning the application process). New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting their application. Once an application has been initiated, it may be saved and then modified and submitted at a later time, up to the application deadline. Other useful information for applicants, including videos that demonstrate the Easygrants online system can be found at: [www.nfwf.org/applicantinfo](http://www.nfwf.org/applicantinfo).

At the **pre-proposal stage**, the only file that an applicant must upload into Easygrants is a three-page Pre-proposal Narrative. An applicant invited to submit a full proposal will be required to upload several additional files. Required and optional files to be uploaded for the **full proposal** are described in Table 1 on the following page.

## Grant Application Webinar

*Sustain Our Great Lakes* partners will host a webinar on **January 11, 2012 at 11 AM Eastern Time/10 AM Central Time**. The webinar will provide additional information on *Sustain Our Great Lakes* grants programs, provide additional guidance on the application process, and provide answers to participant questions. Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to participate. Webinar participants can **register** at: <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/544871304>.

## Application and Review Timeline

To be considered for funding, pre-proposals must be submitted online by **February 15, 2012** prior to midnight. Invited full proposals will be due on **April 25, 2012**.

- Feb 15, 2012: Pre-proposals due
- Feb 16 – Mar 29, 2012: Pre-proposals reviewed
- Mar 30, 2012: Applicants notified of pre-proposal decisions; full proposals invited
- Apr 30, 2012: Full proposals due
- May 1, 2012 – Jun 14, 2012: Full proposals reviewed
- Jun 15 – Jul 15, 2012: Congressional notification of intent to award grants
- Jul 16 – Jul 31, 2012: Anticipated announcement of awards
- Aug – Oct 2012: Grant agreements developed with successful applicants

Table 1. Required and optional files to be uploaded at the **full proposal stage**.

<b>File</b>	<b>Required or Optional</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Full proposal narrative	Required	Template provided in Easygrants; completed narrative not to exceed 6 pages in length
Board of Trustees	Required	Provide a list of members of Board of Trustees, Directors or equivalent. If your organization does not have a Board, upload a document stating so.
A-133 Audit	Required	If your organization has not expended more than \$500,000 in Federal funds in the past year, upload a statement stating that an A-133 Audit is not required.
GAAP audited financial statements	Required	If your organization does not have GAAP audited financial statements, you may upload a balance sheet and profit/loss statement instead.
IRS Form 990	Required	If your organization is not a non-profit organization, upload a document stating that a 990 Form is not required. If your non-profit organization is based in Canada, you may upload a T3010A Form instead of a 990 Form.
Statement of Litigation	Required	Template provided in Easygrants
Map of project location	Required	Map should show the project location with respect to major landmarks (e.g., cities, rivers). A Google map is sufficient.
Map of project site/restoration design	Optional	To provide finer resolution than map of project location.
Letters of Support	Required	Include a letter of support from the landowner(s) where the proposed restoration would occur. Applicants seeking consideration in the Area of Concern category must submit a letter of support from the local Remedial Action Plan (RAP) implementation group. Applicants seeking consideration in the technical assistance category must submit a letter from the relevant NRCS State Conservationist(s). Letters from other significant partners, especially those providing match, are encouraged.
Other relevant documents, figures and photos	Optional	10-page limit

## General Procedures for Grant Recipients

After project selection, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation staff will work with applicants to prepare grant agreements and other necessary paperwork, all of which will be completed electronically using the Easygrants system. Additional information about the grantee's organization and its finances may be solicited during this time. Please note that preparation of grant agreements will require approximately 4 to 8 weeks after the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation receives the additional required information from the grantee. Once grant agreements are finalized, funds will be advanced to qualified grantees based on cash needs of the project; some awards may be made on a reimbursable basis. Grantees will be required to submit interim and final financial and programmatic reports.

## Regulatory Compliance

Grantees must document compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and any other relevant federal, state and local regulations. If a project involves environmental monitoring, data collection/generation, or data use, the grantee will be asked to develop a Quality Assurance Project Plan as part of the grant ([www.epa.gov/quality/qapps.html](http://www.epa.gov/quality/qapps.html)). Applicants should budget time and resources to complete these tasks. Compliance with these regulatory requirements must be documented prior to the initiation of activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s).

## Additional Information and Application Assistance

For more information about the grants program or for assistance with the application process, please contact Todd Hogrefe ([todd.hogrefe@nfwf.org](mailto:todd.hogrefe@nfwf.org); 612-564-7286) at the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Additional information can also be found on the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* website at: [www.sustainourgreatlakes.org](http://www.sustainourgreatlakes.org).

## Partner Information

For additional information on the *Sustain Our Great Lakes* partners and their work in the Great Lakes basin, please click on the following links:

- ArcelorMittal: [www.arcelormittal.com/usacr](http://www.arcelormittal.com/usacr)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/ghf.html](http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/ghf.html)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: [www.fws.gov/midwest/greatlakes/glcoastal.htm](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/greatlakes/glcoastal.htm)
- U.S.D.A. Forest Service: [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us)
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation: [www.nfwf.org](http://www.nfwf.org)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: [www.habitat.noaa.gov/restoration/programs/greatlakes.html](http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/restoration/programs/greatlakes.html)
- National Resources Conservation Service: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)