



## ***Driftless Area Restoration Effort Fiscal Year 2026 Call for Aquatic Habitat Project Proposals***

The Driftless Area Restoration Effort National Fish Habitat Partnership is seeking FY2026 proposals that address aquatic habitat protection, restoration, and enhancements that benefit priority native fish species addressed by the DARE partnership or assessment and outreach/education proposals that raise awareness/benefit cold-water resources.

Funding through the National Fish Habitat Partnership Program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Funds are made available under the authority of ***America's Conservation Enhancement Act 16 USC 8201***—National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships (Pub. L. 116-188 [S. 3051], 134 Stat. 924-938)

*\*America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act was passed by Congress and signed by the President in October 2020. The legislation emphasizes actions that lead to better fish habitat conditions, increased fishing opportunities, and public use of the resource.*

### **National Fish Habitat Partnership Goals**

- Protect & maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems
- Prevent further degradation of fish habitats
- Reverse declines in quality & quantity of aquatic habitats to improve overall health of fish/aquatic species
- Increase quality & quantity of fish habitat that support natural diversity of fish/aquatic species

### **Driftless Area partnership goals:**

- Reduce sediment and nutrients inputs to Driftless Area.
- Conserve, restore and expand habitats that will increase the natural abundance, diversity, and health of fish and other aquatic life.
- Increase the quantity and quality of angling and other recreational opportunities.
- Increase awareness about Driftless Area resources and the importance of aquatic conservation and restoration through outreach and education.

### **Mission Statements:**

The mission of the Driftless Area Restoration Effort is to *work together to protect, restore and enhance cold, cool, and warmwater streams for fish and other aquatic communities in the Driftless Area region for future generations.*

### **DARE Priorities:**

- Improve riparian and in-stream habitat on cold, cool and warmwater streams
- Protect, maintain and expand self-sustaining brook trout and smallmouth bass populations
- Improve riparian and in-stream habitat for priority non-game species
- Monitor and evaluate conservation actions
- Increase angling and other recreational opportunities
- Raise awareness about upland and aquatic conservation through outreach and education

## **Application Deadline**

**Due Date:** February 7, 2025

## **Application Procedure**

Proposals should be submitted in Microsoft Word electronically to **Sara Strassman:** [sara.strassman@tu.org](mailto:sara.strassman@tu.org) and [louise\\_mauldin@fws.gov](mailto:louise_mauldin@fws.gov)

## **Funding Request:**

Funding floor \$15,000

Funding ceiling \$75,000

**Match Requirements.** A minimum nonfederal 1:1 match is required. Match may be cash or in-kind services (documented). Volunteer tracking spreadsheet will be provided to projects utilizing volunteer services. The US rate for volunteer hours averaged \$33.49 for 2023 (Independent Sector report, 2024). Please contact us if you are struggling to find match or have questions about documentation.

**Note: Other Federal funding sources can be used to complete proposed project and are encouraged; however, other federal funds cannot be used as match to NFHP funds under the ACE ACT.**

## **Eligible Projects:**

Projects considered for funding should address habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement that benefit priority native fish species addressed by DARE partnership. NFHP funds may be used for on-the-ground habitat activities. Eligible on-the-ground activities may include riparian, wetland, and instream habitat enhancement, restoration, and barrier removal.

Non-construction projects considered may include: population, habitat, or other assessments needed for planning/prioritizations leading to conservation actions; landowner/farmer BMP outreach/engagement; outreach and education; partnership support (**contact DARE manager to discuss**)

## **Applicant Eligibility:**

State, county, and local governments

Small businesses directly associated with and approved by the partnership

Private, Public, and State controlled institutions of higher education

Nonprofits having a 501 (c)(3) status with the IRS

Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)

Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized)

**Eligible expenditures.** Expenditures of NFHP funds are appropriate for the following actions and activities:

**(a)** Planning, implementation of project activities, site assessments, travel to and from the project, and project oversight.

**(b)** Equipment (e.g. small monitoring equipment- requires approval).

**(c)** Earthwork (e.g., contractual: earth moving, planting, structure installation, site preparation, materials (e.g. rock, gravel, plants and planting supplies, materials to construct habitat structures).

**(d)** Short term monitoring/evaluation. Funds may be used for pre-post project monitoring of NFHP projects to evaluate biological response to project activities. Long-term monitoring is not eligible for funding.

**Ineligible expenditures.** The following activities are **not** eligible for Action Plan funding:

**(a)** Actions required by existing Federal or State regulatory programs. Fish habitat expenditures shall be in addition to, not in lieu of, other expenditures authorized or required from other entities under other agreements or provisions of law.

- (b) Realty costs (e.g. lease or purchase interests in real property, or to make rental or other land use incentive payments to landowners).
- (c) Pre-award costs associated with preliminary design, surveys, and appraisals.
- (d) Operation and maintenance of facilities, structures, or other construction.
- (e) Habitat related projects involving credits or mitigation banking are ineligible for funding

**Projects must comply with Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.** Managers and supervisors responsible for implementing fish habitat projects must document all applicable Federal laws and regulations (e.g. National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Rivers and Harbors Act). Fish habitat projects must also comply with any applicable State, local and tribal laws and regulations that do not conflict with, or are not preempted by, Federal laws and regulations. Awardees must work with and provide necessary compliance documentation and permits to assigned USFWS project officer.

Federal funding available under the America’s Conservation Enhancement Act and National Fish Habitat Partnership Program will fund top ranked proposals nationally.

**Partnership project ranking will include criteria listed below:**

- NFHP Board priorities for 2025
- Adequately addresses the root causes and processes behind the decline of fish or fish habitat
- Promotes habitat connectivity and integrity for native fish species
- Identifies appropriate monitoring and evaluation measures and criteria
- Provides a well-defined budget linked to deliverables and outcomes
- Includes an outreach or education component that includes the local or regional community

**Areas of Priority (not exclusive):**

Upper La Crosse River watershed, WI  
 Black River watershed, WI  
 Trempealeau River watershed, WI  
 Buffalo River watershed, WI  
 Whitewater River watershed, MN  
 Upper Wapsipinicon River watershed, IA  
 Apple-Plum River watershed, IL  
 Maquoketa River watershed, IA  
 Kickapoo River watershed, WI

**DARE priority native aquatic species.**

<b>Coldwater streams</b>	<b>Cool and Warm water streams</b>
Brook trout	Smallmouth bass
Sculpin (Mottled/Slimy)	Black redbhorse
American brook lamprey	Blacknose dace
Northern brook lamprey	Longnose dace
Slippershell mussel	Ozark minnow
Black sandshell mussel	Ellipse mussel

**Tentative Timeline:**

<b>February</b>	2025	Applicant deadline for proposal submission and review of proposals
<b>March</b>	2025	Submission of priority DARE projects to NFHP Board
<b>June</b>	2025	NFHP Board review of projects submitted by fhps
<b>Sept</b>	2025	Department of Interior (DOI) Review of projects
<b>February</b>	2026	Announcement of awarded projects
<b>May-July</b>	2026	Project recipient completes registrations, on-line application, agreement documents
<b>July-Aug</b>	2026	FWS Processing of agreements for approved projects

**Questions can be addressed by:**

**Sara Strassman**  
 DARE Coordinator  
 Trout Unlimited  
[sara.strassman@tu.org](mailto:sara.strassman@tu.org)

**Louise Mauldin**  
 Fisheries Biologist  
 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
[louise\\_mauldin@fws.gov](mailto:louise_mauldin@fws.gov)

**It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure completion of the below enrollments if proposal is selected for federal funding.**

**A. Required Registrations and Enrollments of Successful Award Recipients**

U.S. non-profit, non-governmental organizations must provide a copy of their Section 501(c)(3) or (4) status determination letter received from the Internal Revenue Service.

**B. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM.gov)**

**Registration:**

Federal law mandates that all entities applying for Federal financial assistance must register in <http://www.sam.gov> prior to submitting a federal award application. Federal award recipients must continue to maintain an active SAM.gov registration with current information through the life of their federal award(s). The Service may not make a federal award to an applicant that has not completed the SAM.gov registration. If an applicant selected for funding has not completed their SAM.gov registration by the time the Service is ready to make an award, the program may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award. Once registered in SAM, entities must renew and revalidate their SAM registration at least every 12 months from the date previously registered. *This requirement does not apply to individuals applying for funds as a private citizen (i.e., unrelated to any business or nonprofit organization you may own or operate in your name) or any entity with an exception approved by the Service under 2 CFR 25.110(d).*

**C. Reimbursement Payments:**

Your organization will be required to complete enrollment in U.S. Treasury's Automated Standard Application for Payment (ASAP) system ([https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap\\_home.htm](https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm)) before an award can be put in place with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Successful recipient will need to contact USFWS project officer to initiate enrollment in ASAP. Recipient will be responsible for following the steps to obtain an ASAP ID and register in the payment system.

**D. Enrollment in Grant Solutions:**

Successful recipient will be required to register and set up an account in <https://grantssolutions.gov> to submit their application package, financial and performance reports.

## **TITLE II—NATIONAL FISH HABITAT CONSERVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**

### **SEC. 201. PURPOSE.**

The purpose of this title is to encourage partnerships among public agencies and other interested persons to promote fish conservation—

- (1) to achieve measurable habitat conservation results through strategic actions of Fish Habitat Partnerships that
  - lead to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities by—
  - (A) improving ecological conditions;
  - (B) restoring natural processes; or
  - (C) preventing the decline of intact and healthy systems;
- (2) to establish a consensus set of national conservation strategies as a framework to guide future actions and investment
  - by Fish Habitat Partnerships;
- (3) to broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation by—
  - (A) increasing fishing opportunities;
  - (B) fostering the participation of local communities, especially young people in local communities, in conservation activities; and
  - (C) raising public awareness of the role healthy fish habitat play in the quality of life and economic well-being of local communities;
- (4) to fill gaps in the National Fish Habitat Assessment and the associated database of the National Fish Habitat Assessment—
  - (A) to empower strategic conservation actions supported by broadly available scientific information; and
  - (B) to integrate socioeconomic data in the analysis to improve the lives of humans in a manner consistent with fish habitat conservation goals; and
- (5) to communicate to the public and conservation partners—
  - (A) the conservation outcomes produced collectively by Fish Habitat Partnerships; and
  - (B) new opportunities and voluntary approaches for conserving fish habitat.