

Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) Program



Request for Proposals

November 2022



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1. General Information

Declines of bees, butterflies, dragonflies and other at-risk species that support ecosystems and food systems have raised significant alarm among scientists and conservation professionals both locally and globally. This cost-share grant program is made possible through an appropriation (Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 6, Article 5, Section 2, Subd. 8b) from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) and is focused on restoring and enhancing strategically located, diverse native habitat across Minnesota on conservation lands and natural areas to benefit populations of pollinators and beneficial insects as well as overall plant and animal diversity. The program also provides co-benefits of carbon sequestration, soil health and water quality improvements, and increased landscape resiliency.

Funding available: \$273,740. Applicants can apply for grants of \$20,000 to \$60,000. Project can be located on multiple parcels.

2. Who May Apply?

Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Districts, Watershed Management Organizations and Counties are potential applicants.

3. Project Eligibility Criteria

Eligible projects can be located on lands with a long-term commitment to conservation management through conservation easements, long-term conservation contracts and public ownership. Eligible lands include those with existing RIM easements, CRP (with a long-term commitment), lands with other types of conservation easements, non-profit conservation preserves, newly enrolled CRP, city parks, county parks, and protected natural areas. Projects can be located on multiple parcels.

To the extent possible landscapes need to be specifically identified at the time of the application as information about proposed projects and their potential for benefitting beneficial insects will be part of application ranking.

Projects can focus on:

- 1) Establishing new floral-rich plots or riparian plantings 0.25 to 10 acres in size; and/or
- 2) Converting existing non-native cover to native vegetation (.25 to 10 acres in size); and/or
- 2) Enhancing prairie, savanna, wetland, and shoreline communities that are not currently dominated with invasive species and can be enhanced to provide high value habitat that is planned to benefit a variety of beneficial insects and at-risk species (no acreage maximum).
 - A plant or animal is considered “at-risk” when:
 - It is proposed for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act
 - It is a candidate species for listing; or
 - It has been petitioned by a third party for listing; or
 - Its populations are rare, declining, or may be vulnerable to decline.
 - Find a list of [At-Risk Pollinator Species](#) on the Lawns to Legumes Partners webpage.

4. Match

A minimum non-state match equal to at least 25% of the amount received is required.

5. To Apply

Applications must be submitted via eLINK. Eligible applicants without a current eLINK user account must submit a request at <https://apps.bwsr.state.mn.us/elink/Account/Register> to establish an eLINK account **no later than 7 days prior to the application deadline** in order to ensure sufficient time to create an account. As part of the application, eLINK will require applicants to map the location of the proposed project area(s).

The following application questions will be filled out in eLINK:

- Describe if and how your project’s location/s and, planning and seed mixes will benefit at-risk and/or beneficial insects.
- Discuss your project/s connection to statewide and local habitat corridors/pathways or areas mapped as important for pollinators and beneficial insects.
- How will partnerships be established or strengthened and how is equity considered for the project?
- Discuss the technical expertise of the applicants and partners that will be involved with assisting landowners.
- Describe the long-term management commitment for project/s and management activities that are planned, including protection from pesticide exposure?
- Describe how cost-effectiveness will be considered for projects.
- Explain the anticipated outcomes upon completion of the project and how these outcomes will be obtained.

Applicants will be required to complete a project budget summarizing proposed activities and expenditures including technical and administrative costs.

Proposals must include one image file of the project area in relation to the priority zones (.jpg, .tiff, .png) as an Application Image in eLINK. General attachments will not show up as part of the application report in eLINK.

6. Evaluation and Selection

Table 1: Habitat Enhancement Pilot Program Ranking Criteria	
Ranking Criteria	Maximum Points
Value to at-risk and/or beneficial insects	20
Connection to habitat corridors/pathways or areas mapped as important for pollinator and beneficial insect plantings	10
Partnerships established or strengthened and equity considerations	10
Sufficient technical capacity of applicant and partners	15
Long-term protection and maintenance/sustainability of projects, including protection from pesticide exposure	10
Cost effectiveness of projects	10
Anticipated project outcomes will be obtained	25
Total Points Available	100

7. Eligible Activities

- Project and plan development
- Site preparation, planting and management costs (tilling, burning, weed barriers, seeds, erosion fabric, hydromulch, weed free straw, containerized plants (or containers, soil and seed to grow plants), seed and seeding, containerized plant installation, inter-seeding, weed removal, mowing, conservation grazing, conservation haying, etc.). Note that non-herbicide methods of site preparation and management are preferred, see the Xerces Society guide to "[Organic Site Preparation Methods](#)." Fence materials and installation is not an eligible expense.
- Invasive species management as part of efforts to enhance or re-establish native vegetation. Note, the removal of woody invasive species and invasive grasses can be part of project costs but should not be a major component of the budget.
- Native plant rescue is an eligible cost as a source of supplemental plant materials.
- Native flowering trees and shrubs that are beneficial to pollinators and beneficial insects are eligible for funding, as they often provide early season floral resources and nesting resources.

8. Additional Information

Projects must be sustained for a minimum of 10 years and have a focus on long-term care of ecological functions and aesthetics. All grantees must follow the **Grants Administration Manual policy and guidance** (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/gam>).

Conservation plan templates for project implementation and management will be developed to be used on all projects. These templates will include detail on project site preparation, installation and management as well as the need to document the restoration process. Projects must include plans for long-term funding, maintenance, inspection, monitoring and site access for the duration of a project as part of the project file. In addition to being filed with the grant recipient and BWSR, the conservation plans must be provided to landowners to guide long-term management.

Seed and plant source, diversity levels and other topics related to vegetation are summarized in BWSR's [Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines](#). There will be an emphasis on protecting the genetic integrity of any remnant plant communities associated with projects.

Project assessments/evaluations will be completed by local staff working with landowners after completion and every three years (or on existing inspection cycles for easement lands or CRP) as a follow-up to ensure that project goals are being met and to document project success. These evaluations will also play a key role in determining if any specific maintenance activities are needed for projects.

Projects are strongly encouraged to be located in areas protected from pesticides (at least 200 feet away from pesticide application). See the BWSR/Xerces Society fact sheet on [Protecting Conservation Lands from Pesticides](#) for additional protection strategies.

When practical, pollinator focused projects must have at least three blooming species during, spring, summer and fall, with high diversity is strongly encouraged. Use of milkweeds is encouraged to provide monarch habitat.

- Additional details about species for pollinator plantings are included in BWSR's [Pollinator and Biodiversity Toolbox](#). The Minnesota DNR has a [list of native plant vendors](#) (it is important to check with any vendor to ensure that their plants are neonicotinoid free).

Consideration should be given to contracting with the Conservation Corps of Minnesota for projects. For additional public outreach tools see BWSR’s brochure on “[Protecting Minnesota’s Pollinators](#),” and [Featured Plant Articles](#) that include over seventy species for benefitting pollinators and a wide range of resources on BWSR’s [Lawns to Legumes Webpage](#).

It is encouraged to use this program in combination with other non-state funding sources and practices.

9. Proposed Timeline

November 3, 2022	Application period begins
February 23, 2023	Application deadline at 4:30 PM
April 26, 2023	BWSR Board authorizes grant awards
May 2023	BWSR grant agreements sent to recipients (proposed)
June 6, 2023	Work plan submittal deadline
June 20, 2023	Grant Execution deadline

10. Incomplete Applications

Applications that do not comply with all requirements, including incomplete or missing application components, will not be considered for funding.

11. BWSR Grant Administration

BWSR reserves the right to partially fund any and all proposals based on the amount of funding available. Proposals that are deemed complete may be considered for future available funds.

12. Grant Execution

Successful applicants will be required to develop and submit a work plan in eLINK prior to execution of the grant agreement.

13. Payment Schedule

Grant payments will be made on a quarterly reimbursement schedule after submission of documentation of eligible expenditures and approval by the program manager, provided the grant applicant is in compliance with all BWSR reporting requirements for previously awarded BWSR grants. Upon award, see grant agreement for dates of quarterly submittal.

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) funding cannot be used to pay for space and other associated overhead costs. Billing rates charged to these grants may include the employee’s base hourly rate plus benefits. Required match can be provided through other facilities and administration costs such as space, vehicle, computers, and other associated overhead costs. Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) grants can only be used for the grant program and not for other Federal or State programs.

14. Project Period

The project period starts when the grant agreement is fully executed, meaning all required signatures have been obtained. Work that occurs before this date is not eligible for reimbursement with grant funds and cannot be used as match. All grants must be completed by December 31st, 2024.

15. Project Reporting Requirements

- All grantees are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments of grants. All BWSR funded projects are required to develop a work plan, including detail of each eligible activity, a description of the anticipated activity accomplishments, and grant and match funding amounts to accomplish each of the activities. All activities will be reported via the eLINK reporting system. For more information about eLINK, go to: <http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/elink>.
- BWSR funds will be administered via a standard grant agreement. BWSR will use grant agreements as contracts for assurance of deliverables and compliance with appropriate statutes, rules and established policies. Willful or negligent disregard of relevant statutes, rules and policies may lead to imposition of financial penalties on the grant recipient.
- Grant recipients must display program goals and major program activities on a fact sheet (or a separate webpage) that is linked to their website.
- Descriptions of actual results and financial expenditures for each work plan activity must be reported in eLINK by March 15th and September 15th each year along with any reimbursement requests. Optional reimbursements can also be requested on June 15th and December 15th with a report. A final report and submission of reimbursements is also due by December 31st 2024 which is the completion date for the grant (a December 15th report is not required prior to the final report).

16. Grants and Public Information

Under Minnesota Statute 13.599, responses to a Request for Proposals are nonpublic until the application deadline is reached. At that time, the name and address of the applicant, and the amount requested becomes public. All other data is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee is completed. After the application evaluation process is completed, all data (except trade secret data) becomes public. Data created during the evaluation process is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee(s) is completed.

17. Conflict of Interest

State Grant Policy 08-01 (see [Grants Management Policies, Statutes, and Forms / Minnesota.gov \(mn.gov\)](#)) Conflict of Interest for State Grant-Making, also applies to BWSR grantees. Grantees' conflicts of interest are generally considered organizational conflicts of interest. Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

1. A grantee is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice due to competing duties or loyalties,
2. A grantee's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties, or

3. A grantee or potential grantee has an unfair competitive advantage through being furnished unauthorized proprietary information or source selection information that is not available to all competitors.

18. Prevailing Wage

It is the responsibility of the grant recipient or contractor to pay prevailing wages on construction projects to which state prevailing wage laws apply (Minn. Stat. 177.41 – 177.44). All laborers and mechanics employed by grant recipients and subcontractors funded in whole or in part with state funds included in this RFP shall be paid wages at rates not less than those prevailing on projects of a character similar in the locality. Additional information on prevailing wage requirements is available on the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) website <https://www.dli.mn.gov/business/employment-practices/prevailing-wage-information>. Questions about the application of prevailing wage rates should be directed to DOLI at 651-284-5091.

19. Questions

For more information concerning the request for proposal, contact BWSR's Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program coordinators:

For technical program questions contact Dan Shaw at dan.shaw@state.mn.us or at 612-236-6291