

Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) Program Policy

Supporting Pollinators and Other At-risk Wildlife Enhancement Pilot Program

From the Board of Water and Soil Resources, State of Minnesota



Version: 1.00
Effective Date: December 16, 2021
Approval: Board Order #21-XX



Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear expectations for the implementation of grants delivered through this program. More specific requirements or criteria may apply when specified by statute, rule, funding source, or appropriation language.

Reason for the policy

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. \$674,500 is available through this Request for Proposal. Applicants can apply for grants of \$20,000 to \$40,000 which can include projects on multiple properties.

Grantees are responsible for the administration and decisions concerning the use of these funds in accordance with applicable Minnesota Statutes, state agency policies, and other applicable laws. BWSR will use grant agreements as contracts for assurance of deliverables and compliance with applicable laws and program policies.

The BWSR Grants Administration Manual (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/gam>) the primary framework for management of these funds.

Beneficial Insect Grant Program Requirements

1. Applicant Eligibility

Eligible applicants include any of the following entities from across the State of Minnesota:

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Watershed Districts
- Watershed Management Organizations

2. Match Requirements

A minimum non-state match equal to at least 25% is required.

3. Eligible Activities

The primary purpose of activities funded through this program is to increase the populations of at-risk beneficial insects through planting and landscape management activities. Eligible activities include the following categories:

3.1 Technical Assistance. Eligible activities include but are not limited to: development of project plans and specifications.

3.2 Grant Management and Reporting. Grant funds may be used for local grant management and reporting that are directly related to and necessary for implementing the program.

3.3 Conservation Practice Cost Share and Incentives. Eligible expenses include:

- Project and plan development
- Site preparation, planting and management costs (tilling, burning, weed barriers, seeds, erosion fabric, hydromulch, weed free straw, containerized plants, 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.](#)"
- 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 projects but should not be a major component of the budget.
- Tool purchases (weed wrenches, backpack sprayers, hand shovels, hand rakes or similar equipment) must not exceed \$600.00. All tools purchased shall be used as a shared landowner resource and remain with grantee.
- 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

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

3.4 **Maintenance through grant period.** It is important that plantings that are funded through this program are maintained through the grant period. All landowners receiving funding will be asked to sign a cost-share agreement summarizing their maintenance responsibilities and they will receive a copy of the conservation plan templated completed for the project.

4. Ineligible Expenses

4.1 See the unallowable costs as defined in the Grant Administration Manual – [Allowable and Unallowable Cost](#) section. The following activities are ineligible for these funds.

4.2 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. Grants through this program can only be used for the grant program and not for other Federal or State programs.

5. Technical Quality Assurance

Technical advisors working with landowners on project design and implementation must have experience working on residential habitat, native vegetation projects, and be able to successfully guide project design and maintenance. See also the Technical Quality Assurances section of the Grants Administration Manual.

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 local SWCD office(s) and BWSR, the conservation plans must be provided to landowners to guide long-term management.

6. BWSR Grant Work Plan, Reporting and Reconciliation Requirements

To ensure the success of the program, development of grant work plans, regular reporting of expenditures, and technical assistance and accomplishments are required.

6.1 **Grant Execution.** Grant agreement must be executed (signed by grantee and BWSR) before work can begin. The grant period begins once the grant is executed and all work must occur within the grant period.

6.2 **Grant Work Plan.** Work plans shall be developed in eLINK and must be approved before work can begin on this grant. Work plans shall reflect each eligible activity, a description of the anticipated activity accomplishments, and grant and match funding amounts to accomplish each of the activities.

6.3 **Grant Reporting.** Descriptions of actual results and financial expenditures for each work plan activity must be reported in eLINK by February 1 of each year.

6.4 **Grant Closeout.** Within thirty (30) calendar days of the expiration of each grant agreement or expenditure of all grant funds, whichever occurs first, grantees are required to:

- a. Provide a summary of all work plan accomplishments with grant funding in eLINK; and
- b. Submit a signed eLINK Financial Report to BWSR.

6.5 **Grant Agreement.** Read through agreement for further directions and reimbursement request deadlines.

7. BWSR Grant Administration Requirements

BWSR staff is authorized to review grant applicant’s financial records to establish capacity to successfully manage state grant funds, develop grant agreements, including requirements and processes for work plans, project outcomes reporting, closeouts, and fiscal reconciliations. All grantees must follow the grant agreement and applicable sections of the Grants Administration Manual.

In the event there is a violation of the terms of the grant agreement, BWSR will enforce the grant agreement and evaluate appropriate actions, up to and including repayment of grant funds at a rate up to 100% of the grant agreement.

History

Version	Description	Date
1.00	Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) Program Policy	December 16, 2021

Contact

Dan Shaw, Senior Ecologist/Vegetation Specialist