

Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program (HELP) Request for Proposals



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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 2023, Chapter 60, Article 1, Section 4 paragraph (J)) and is focused on restoring and enhancing strategically located, diverse native habitat across Minnesota on conservation lands and natural areas to benefit populations of bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, and other wildlife. The program also provides co-benefits of carbon sequestration, soil health, water quality improvements, and increased landscape and climate resiliency.

- 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.

Funding available: Total funding available is \$3,560,000. Applicants can apply for grants of \$50,000 to \$500,000. One grant proposal can comprise multiple eligible activities on multiple parcels. Proposals submitted that do not fall within this dollar range will not be accepted.

2. Reason for the Request for Proposal (RFP)

This Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) cost-share grant program is focused on restoring and enhancing strategically located, diverse native habitat across Minnesota on conservation lands and natural areas to benefit populations of pollinators, beneficial insects and other wildlife species with declining populations and provide co-benefits of carbon sequestration, soil health, water quality improvements, and increased landscape resiliency. 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. Program requirements from this RFP will remain as specified in the grant agreement for successful applicants that receive a grant from BWSR.

3. Who May Apply?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Watershed Districts
- Watershed Management Organizations
- Municipalities
- Contractors
- Nongovernmental Organizations
- Tribal Governments
- Counties
- Local Government Joint Power Boards
- Park Districts

4. Practice Eligibility Criteria

Eligible practices must be located on lands with a long-term commitment to conservation management through

conservation easements, long-term conservation contracts or public ownership. Example eligible lands include those with existing Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easements, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), lands with other types of conservation easements, non-profit conservation preserves, city parks, county parks, and protected natural areas.

Practices 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 applicable provisions of the Grants Administration Manual (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/gam>)

To the extent possible landscapes and projects need to be specifically identified at the time of the application as information about proposed projects and their potential for benefitting populations of bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, other wildlife, and/or at-risk species will be part of application ranking.

Eligible activities include but are not limited to:

- 4.1. **Technical Assistance.** Development of practice plans and specifications, assisting landowners, developing Operation and Maintenance plans, and other activities that support the establishment and long-term maintenance of eligible practice(s).
- 4.2. **Grant Management and Reporting.** Grant funds may be used for grant management and reporting that are directly related to and necessary for implementing the program.
- 4.3. **Conservation Practice Cost Share and Incentives.**
 - 4.3.1. Eligible practice types include:
 - 4.3.1.1. Establishing new floral-rich plots or riparian plantings, including native flowering trees and shrubs (0.50 to 20 acres in size per practice); and/or
 - 4.3.1.2. Converting existing non-native cover to native vegetation, including native flowering trees and shrubs (.50 to 20 acres in size per practice); and/or
 - 4.3.1.3. Enhancing prairie, savanna, wetland, woodland ephemerals, and shoreline communities that are not currently dominated with non-native or invasive species and can be enhanced to provide high value habitat that is planned to benefit populations of bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, other wildlife, and at-risk species (no acreage limit).
 - 4.3.2. 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.](#)"
 - 4.3.3. Non-native and invasive species management as part of efforts to enhance or re-establish native vegetation. Note, the removal of non-native and invasive species can be part of projects but should not be a major component of the budget.
- 4.4. **Maintenance through grant period.** It is important that projects funded through this program are maintained through the grant period. Grants funds can be used for maintenance activities completed within the terms of the grant agreement. All land occupiers receiving funding will be asked to sign a cost share contract and operation and management plan that summarizes their maintenance responsibilities for the effective life of the practice.

5. Match

A minimum 10% match is required from non-state funds. State funded loans repaid with non-state funds may be used for the match. The anticipated source(s) for the match shall be identified in the grant proposal. Match can be provided by a landowner, land occupier, private organization, local government or other non-state source and can be in the form of cash or the cash value of services or materials contributed to the accomplishment of grant objectives.

6. Ineligible Expenses

See the unallowable costs as defined in the Grant Administration Manual – [Allowable and Unallowable Cost section](#).

Although conservation grazing is an eligible activity for this grant, fence materials and installation is not an eligible expense but can be used to meet the required 10% match.

Purchasing equipment for practice installation and maintenance.

7. To Apply

7.1. Set up your eLINK user account

Proposals need to be submitted via [eLINK](#). Eligible applicants without a current eLINK user account must register for an account at <https://elink.bwsr.state.mn.us> no later than seven days prior to the proposal deadline. See the “[Setting up an Account](#)” webpage for directions on creating an eLINK account. For eLINK related questions, first visit the eLINK section of the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) page. If your question is not addressed here, please contact elinksupport@state.mn.us.

7.2. Complete your funding request (proposal)

See the “[Completing a Funding Request in eLINK](#)” under the “[eLINK Training Videos](#)” tab on the eLINK webpage to view a 11-minute online module describing how to complete a Funding Request within eLINK.

- As part of the proposal, eLINK will require applicants to map the location of the proposed project area.
- Answers to each question is limited to 2,000 characters. Due to differences in how programs are encoded, be aware that the character limit in eLINK is not the same as Microsoft Word or other text editors.
- Proposals **MUST** include only one image file showing the project(s) location in relation to BWSR’s [Pollinator Priority Areas](#) as an Application Image in eLINK. The ArcGIS Shapefile for the Pollinator Priority Areas can be downloaded here: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/lawns-legumes-partner-resources>. General attachments will not show up as part of the application report in eLINK. Only .jpg, .tiff, or .png file types are allowed.

Applicants must provide answers to the following questions as part of their proposal submitted in eLINK. The questions are related to the ranking criteria categories, which determine how proposals are scored by reviewers. The ranking criteria can be found in the “Evaluation and Selection” section of this RFP.

The following application questions will be filled out in eLINK:

1. (A) List the project(s) location and anticipated benefits to populations of beneficial insects, bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, other wildlife, and/or at-risk species. (B) To the extent known, describe existing project(s) site conditions and processes being used to achieve project goals, including planned site preparation and seeding methods; and seed mix design(s) for projects establishing new or enhancing existing native vegetation.
2. Discuss your project(s) connection to statewide and local habitat corridors/pathways or areas mapped as important for target species.
3. How will partnerships be established or strengthened and how is social equity considered for the project?
4. Describe the technical assistance capability and availability of local natural resources professionals, contractors and/or officials. (Remember that the technical assistance provider must meet BWSR's definition in the [Grants Administration manual](#).)
5. Describe the long-term management commitment for project(s) and management activities that are planned, including protection from pesticide exposure.
6. Explain the anticipated measurable outcomes upon completion and how these outcomes will be obtained. Provide information showing evidence of landowner interest.

8. Evaluation and Selection

Ranking Criteria	Maximum Points
Value to populations of beneficial insects, bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, other wildlife, and at-risk species	30
Connection to habitat corridors/pathways or areas mapped as important for target species	25
Partnerships and collaboration established or strengthened and social 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
Anticipated measurable project outcomes will be obtained	10
Total Points Available	100

9. Pre-award Review

Applicants will be required to comply with [OGM Policy 08-06](#), and will be asked to submit documents relevant to their entity type.

Nonprofit organizations

All nonprofit organizations applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant award of \$50,000 and higher.

To comply with Policy 08-06, applicants must submit the following:

- A completed “Pre-Award Nonprofit Form” available on the [Apply For BWSR Grants webpage](#), posted with this RFP.
- Related documentation requested within the form may include but is not limited to: A copy of the nonprofit’s most recent Form 990 or Form 990-EZ, most recent certified financial audit, confirmation of good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State.

Completed forms and related documentation should be submitted to BWSR.grants@state.mn.us at the time of application.

If the completed form and related documents are not submitted by the application deadline, the application will be considered incomplete and will not be reviewed.

For-profit businesses

All for-profit businesses applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant award of \$50,000 and higher.

To comply with Policy 08-06, applicants must submit the following:

- A completed “Pre-Award Business Entity Form” available on the [Apply For BWSR Grants webpage](#), posted with this RFP.
- Related documentation requested within the form may include but is not limited to: A copy of the business’ most recent federal and state tax returns, confirmation that the business entity is not under bankruptcy proceedings and does not have any liens on business assets, confirmation that the business is in good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State.

Completed forms and related documentation should be submitted to BWSR.grants@state.mn.us at the time of application.

If the completed form and related documents are not submitted by the application deadline, the application will be considered incomplete and will not be reviewed.

Political sub-divisions

All political sub-divisions selected for a grant award must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant agreement. Applicants may be asked to submit additional information once the application period closes.

10. Project and Practice Assurances

The applicant must provide assurances that installed conservation practices and projects meet the purposes of the grant program, will remain in place for the required 10-year lifespan, and will provide benefits for bees, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, and other wildlife. Such assurances may include easements, deed recordings, and enforceable contracts. BWSR may allow replacement of a practice or project that does not comply with expected lifespan requirements with a practice or project that provides equivalent benefits. BWSR Guidance for project and practice assurances can be found in the [Grant Administration Manual](#).

11. Additional Information

Projects must include plans for long-term funding, maintenance, inspection, monitoring and site access for the duration of a practice as part of the project file. In addition to being filed with the grant recipient, the plans must be provided to landowners to guide long-term management.

The planting of native vegetation is required for providing landscape benefits. The seed/plant source sequence in Section 2 of [BWSR's Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines](#) must be followed. 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.

Practice site inspections must be completed at the end of the first, third, and ninth years following the certified installation of the practice (or on existing inspection cycles for project(s) enrolled in state or federal programs) to ensure that project goals are being met and to document project success. The findings of site inspections will be documented and kept in the project file.

Practices 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. 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.

12. Proposed Timeline

March 27, 2024	Application period begins
June 27, 2024	Application deadline at 4:30 PM
August 2024	BWSR grant agreements sent to recipients (proposed)

October 15, 2024	Work plan submittal deadline
December 13, 2024	Grant Execution deadline
December 31, 2026	Grant Agreement Expiration Date

13. Incomplete Applications

Applications that do not comply with all requirements, including incomplete or missing application components, match amount does not meet grant requirements, or minimum grant dollar amount is not met, or the maximum amount is exceeded will not be considered for funding.

14. BWSR Grant Administration

Proposals may receive partial funding based on eligibility or availability of funds. Prior to final selection, BWSR may engage applicants to resolve questions or to discuss modifications to the project or funding request. Actual awards may be less than this minimum if proposals receive partial funding. Applications may receive partial funding for the following reasons: 1) an absence of or limited identification of specific project locations, 2) budgeted items that were not discussed in the application or have no connection to the central purpose of the application were included by an applicant; 3) to address budget categories out of balance with the project scope; 4) application contains ineligible components; and 5) insufficient funds remaining in a grant category to fully fund a project. Prior to final selection, BWSR may engage applicants to resolve questions or to discuss modifications to the project or funding request. Proposals that are deemed complete may be considered for future available funds.

15. Grant Work Plan and Execution

Successful applicants will be required to develop and submit a work plan in eLINK prior to execution of the grant agreement. Work cannot begin prior to an executed grant agreement. Note that all successful grantees must be registered as a vendor in the state procurement system prior to grant execution and to use eLINK <https://mn.gov/mmb/accounting/swift/vendor-resources/>

16. Payment Schedule

Grant payments will be distributed in three installments to the grantee. The first payment of 50% of the grant amount will be paid after work plan approval and execution of the grant agreement provided the grant applicant is in compliance with all BWSR website and eLINK reporting requirements for previously awarded BWSR grants. The second payment of 40% of the grant amount will be paid once the grantee has provided BWSR with notification and BWSR has reviewed and approved the eLINK reporting, financial report, and possibly completes a grant reconciliation of the initial payment. The last 10% will be paid after all final reporting requirements are met, the grantee has provided BWSR with a final financial report, and BWSR has reconciled these expenditures.

17. Project Period

The project period starts when the grant agreement is fully executed, meaning all required signatures have been obtained. Costs for expenditures and activities prior to the grant agreement being executed are not eligible for funding. All grant activities must be completed by December 31st, 2026.

18. Grant Reporting and Reconciliation Requirements

All grantees are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments of grants. 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.

All grantees must follow the grant agreement and applicable provisions of the Grants Administration Manual [Grants Administration Manual](#). See specifically the [Reporting Requirements](#) and [Grant Closeout Process](#) 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.

19. 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.

20. 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:

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

21. 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.

22. Questions

For more information concerning the request for proposal or for technical program questions contact Jason Beckler at Jason.beckler@state.mn.us (507-829-8204)

History

Version	Description	Date
1.0	Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program Request for Proposal; first adoption	03/27/2024

Contact

For additional information, contact Jason Beckler at Jason.Beckler@state.mn.us or 507-829-8204.