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Healthy American Forests Initiative

2025 Field Liaison-led Webinar for Applicants

October 29, 2025



Webinar Tips

- Mute yourself when not speaking
- Use the chat function to ask questions. We will address at the end of the presentation.
- We've hidden all participants names for privacy.
- If you are looking for potential partnerships, please reach out to the Field Liaisons.
- Raise your hand at the end if you would like to speak or ask a question.



Why are we here?

- A follow-up to the National Fish and Wildlife (NFWF) 2025 Applicant Webinar – Healthy American Forests Initiative (HAFI)
 - <https://www.nfwf.org/healthy-american-forests-initiative-request-proposals-0>
- Emphasize the information that MUST be included in the application.
- Provide organizations more information on how to write and present a compelling application.
- Give organizations a chance for a live Q&A

Today's Agenda

- Introduction to the Field Liaisons
- HAFI Program Refresher
- Compliance & Permitting
- Review Process Overview
- Application Do's & Don'ts
- Tips for Success
- Wrap-up
- Q&A



National Program Field Liaison Introduction

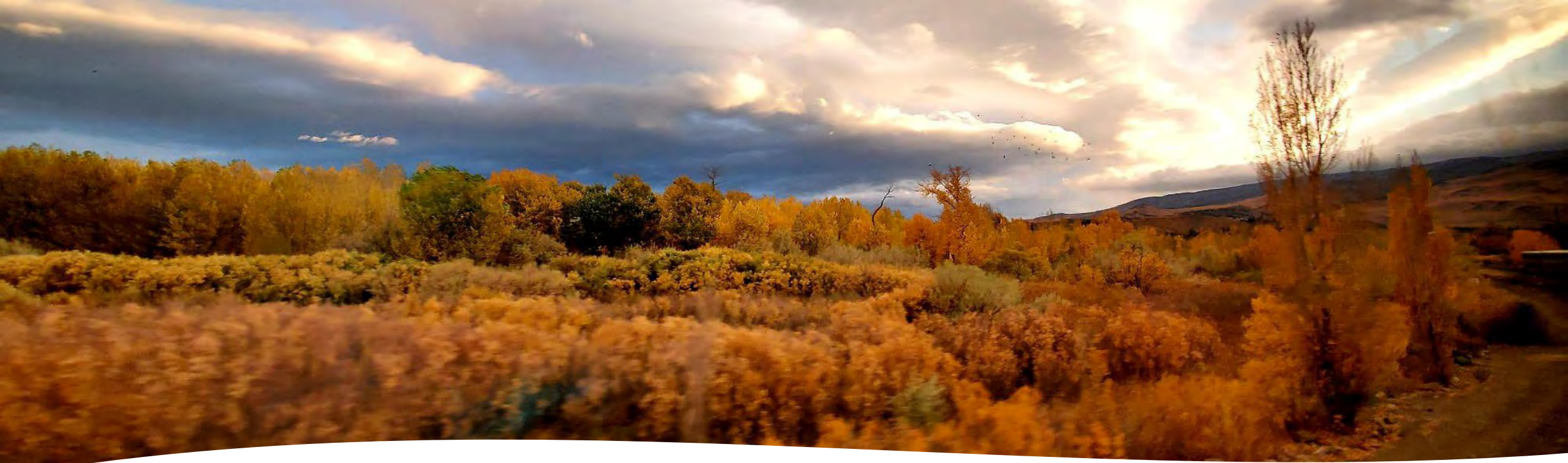
National Field Liaison Team supports applicants and grantees to:

- Better understand the HAFI Program
- Submit more competitive & compelling applications
- Workshop project ideas & grow projects into programs
- Provide proposal debriefs
- Provide administrative & technical support on funded projects

We do NOT:

- Write proposals
- Provide early full reviews and comments on applications
- The technical project work (but can provide guidance and support)





What is the Healthy American Forests Initiative (HAFI)?

- A one-time national NFWF program funded by the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Supports watershed restoration and vegetation management projects on National Forest System lands
- Promotes healthy forests, reduces wildfire risk, and strengthens timber production
- Enhances community safety, ecosystem resilience, and economic benefits



HAFI Grant Basics

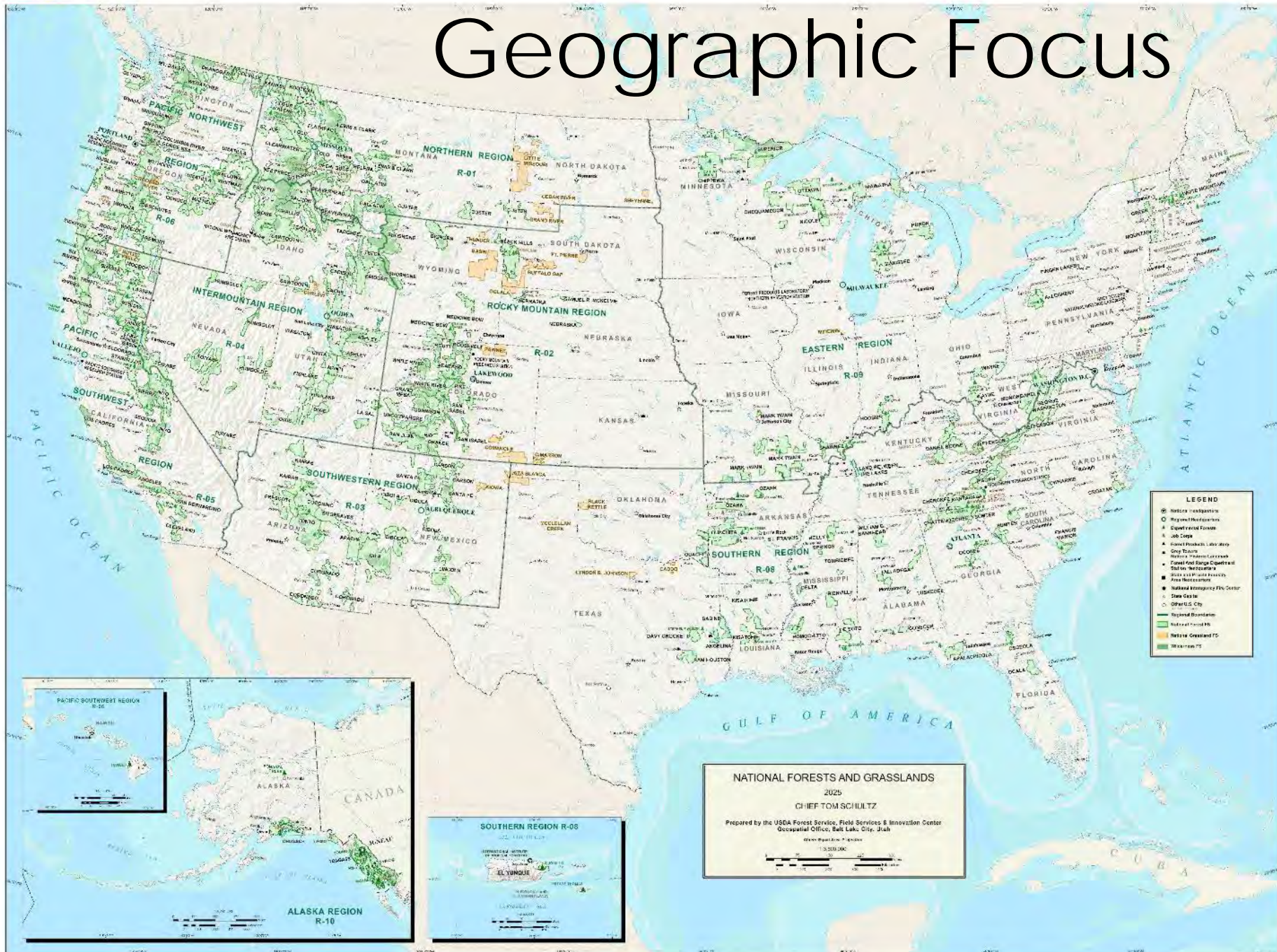
- Eligible Applicants: non-profits (501(c)s) state government agencies, local governments, Tribal governments and organizations, and educational institutions.
- 10–15 awards expected
- \$250,000–\$2 million per award
- Maximum Period of Performance of 2 years (must end by May 30, 2028)
- 20% non-federal match required (25% of NFWF request)
- Primary focus of projects must be implementation. Planning projects will not be funded.

Geographic Focus

All projects MUST occur on National Forest Services lands!

USFS National Forest System Lands Maps found here:

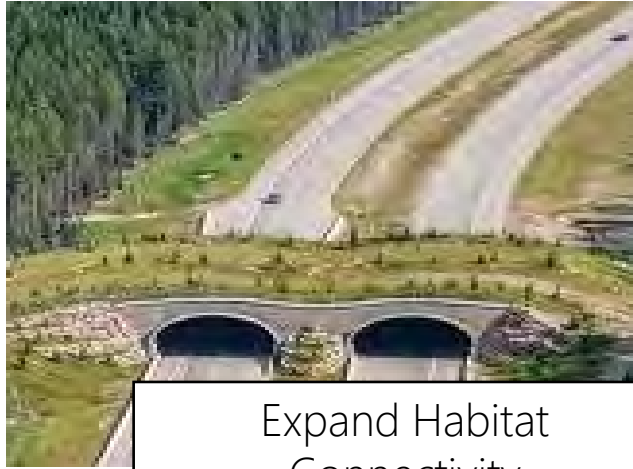
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9ab8d03e2bec4d7fbfc27ba836e70aed/page/Home>



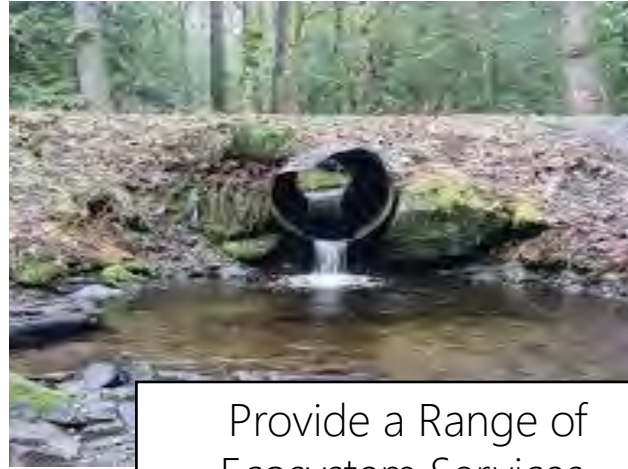


Be specific as to HOW your project meets some (NOT ALL) these priorities.

HAFI Program Priorities



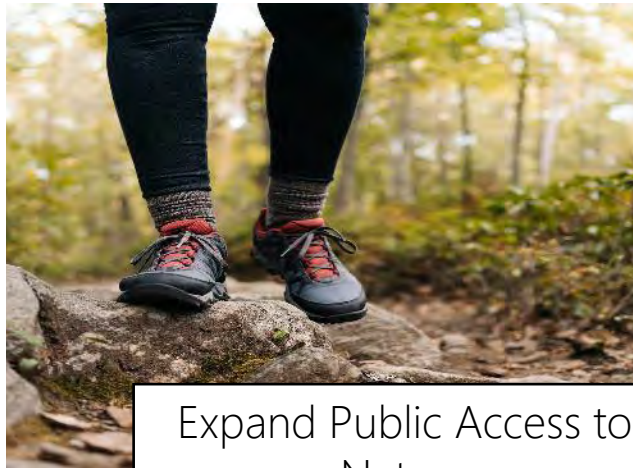
Expand Habitat Connectivity



Provide a Range of Ecosystem Services



Strengthen Ecosystem and Community Health



Expand Public Access to Nature



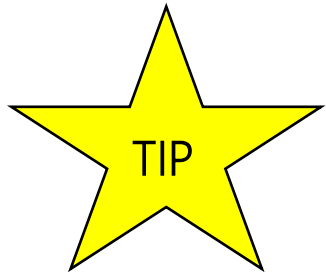
Contribute to Local and/or Regional Economies



Contribute to Workforce Development

Eligible Activities

- Vegetation management and fuels reduction (mechanical, hand, prescribed fire)
- Watershed and aquatic habitat restoration
- Riparian and floodplain restoration
- Invasive species removal
- Decommissioning of unauthorized or temporary



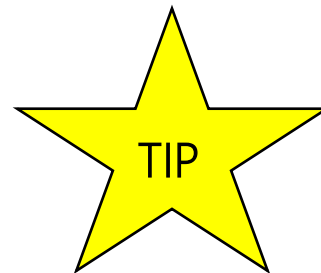
Detailed activities are helpful for reviewers – provide as much detail as possible under Q7 of the narrative





Projects MUST

- Be on National Forest System lands
- Tie back to a water source protection plan (WSPP) as developed under section 303(d)(1) of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA)
- OR tie back to a watershed restoration action plan (WRAP) developed under section 304(a)(3) of the HFRA
- Be pre-approved or supported by the National Forest Unit in which the project will be implemented.



Submit proof of support from the USFS with the proposal.

What the heck are WSPPs & WRAPs?



WRAPs are programmatic documents in which the Forest Service describes existing resource conditions and identifies possible management actions that could be taken to move the Agency towards a desired future condition.



WSPPs are plans on National Forest System lands that identify and manage potential threats to drinking water sources such as rivers, streams, & groundwater. These plans involve protecting water quality through watershed restoration, forest management activities, and voluntary public-private partnerships.

WSPPs & WRAP Resources



FY 2021 Watershed Restoration Action Plan
Watauga District, Cherokee National Forest

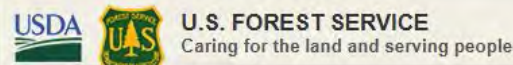
- WRAPs easier to source online than WSPPs
- Best way to find both – **contact your USFS representative**
- Some WRAPs can be found online through the USFS
 - [Watershed Restoration Program Overview](#)
 - [Watershed Condition Framework](#)
 - Use the interactive map, the map User Guide, and/or look through the table containing the prioritization information
- Video on next slide walks you through how to find if your forest and/or watershed of interest has a completed WRAP.

USDA Forest Service Watershed Condition Framework FY2021 TRANSITION WATERSHED RESTORATION ACTION PLAN DOE RIVER

1. Summary

- Watershed Name and HUC:** All of the sub-watersheds of the Doe River are grouped together for efficiency:
 - Buck Creek – 601010030401
 - Upper Doe River - 601010030402
 - Little Doe River – 601010030403
 - Laurel Fork – 601010030404
 - Lower Doe River – 601010030405
- General Location:** The watershed is located in Carter County, Tennessee south of Elizabethton, including Hampton and Roan Mountain.
- Total Watershed Area:** 87,459 acres **NFS area within watershed:** 40%

Watershed	Acres	%NFS Ownership
Upper Doe River	19,433	36%
Buck Creek	8,731	13%
Little Doe River	21,048	30%
Laurel Fork	16,804	72%
Lower Doe River	21,443	38%



Enter Search Words Search

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FOREST SERVICE HOME » S.USDA.GOV » NATURALRESOURCES » WATERSHED » BPR STAFF PROGRAM - WATERSHED CONDITION FRAMEWORK

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- Documents & Publications
- Tools
- Water Education
- Watershed Related Links

Watershed Condition Framework

The Forest Service has released the first national [Watershed Condition Framework](#) and the accompanying [Watershed Condition Classification Technical Guide](#). The Watershed Condition Framework establishes a new consistent, comparable, and credible process for improving the health of watersheds on national forests and grasslands. This framework will help focus our efforts in a consistent and accountable manner and facilitate new investments in watershed restoration that will provide economic and environmental benefits to local communities. The technical guide provided the protocol for the agency's first national assessment of watershed condition across all 193 million acres of National Forest System lands.

<Alternative site for [Framework](#) and [Technical Guide](#)>

Watershed Condition and Prioritization Interactive Map Website

Watershed condition classification was completed on National Forest System lands in May of 2011. During the summer and fall of 2011, priority watersheds were identified and work began on Watershed Restoration Action Plans. Watershed Restoration Action Plans are programmatic documents in which the Forest Service describes existing resource conditions and identifies possible management actions that could be taken to move the Agency towards a desired future condition. If the Forest Service determines that it wants to move forward with any of these possible actions, the proposed actions will be subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements at the time the projects are proposed. NEPA may have already been completed or may be underway on some of the projects described in the Action Plans.

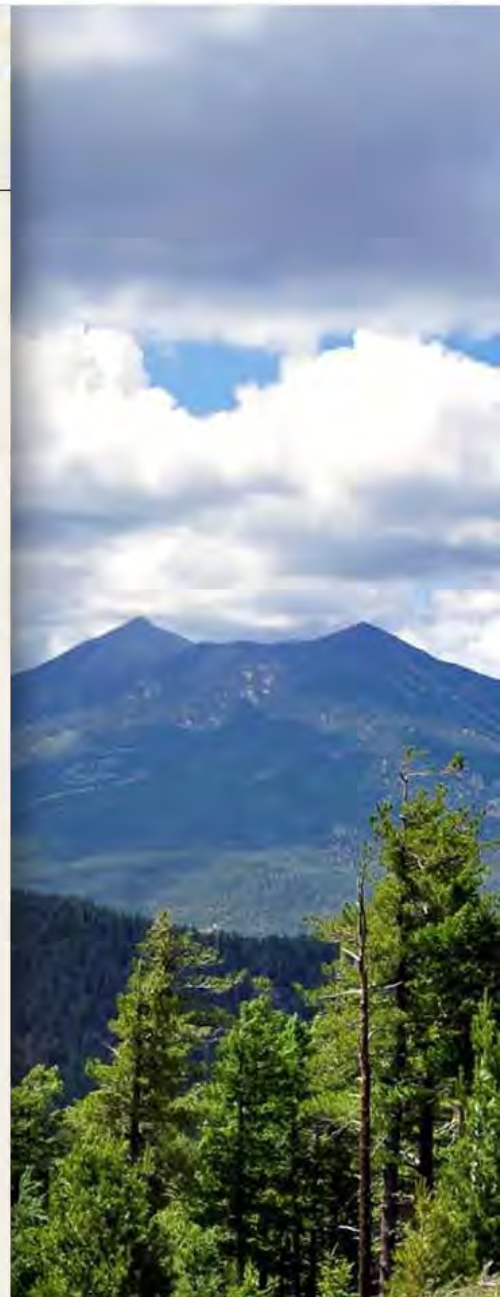
The results of the Forest Service Watershed Condition Framework planning work are available through a map viewer website where users can view the priority watersheds, read about why the watershed was selected, download the Watershed Restoration Action Plans and learn about other important planning items, including estimated costs and restoration partners. Each watershed on the map also contains information on the overall watershed condition rating and the individual rating of its 12 watershed condition indicators.

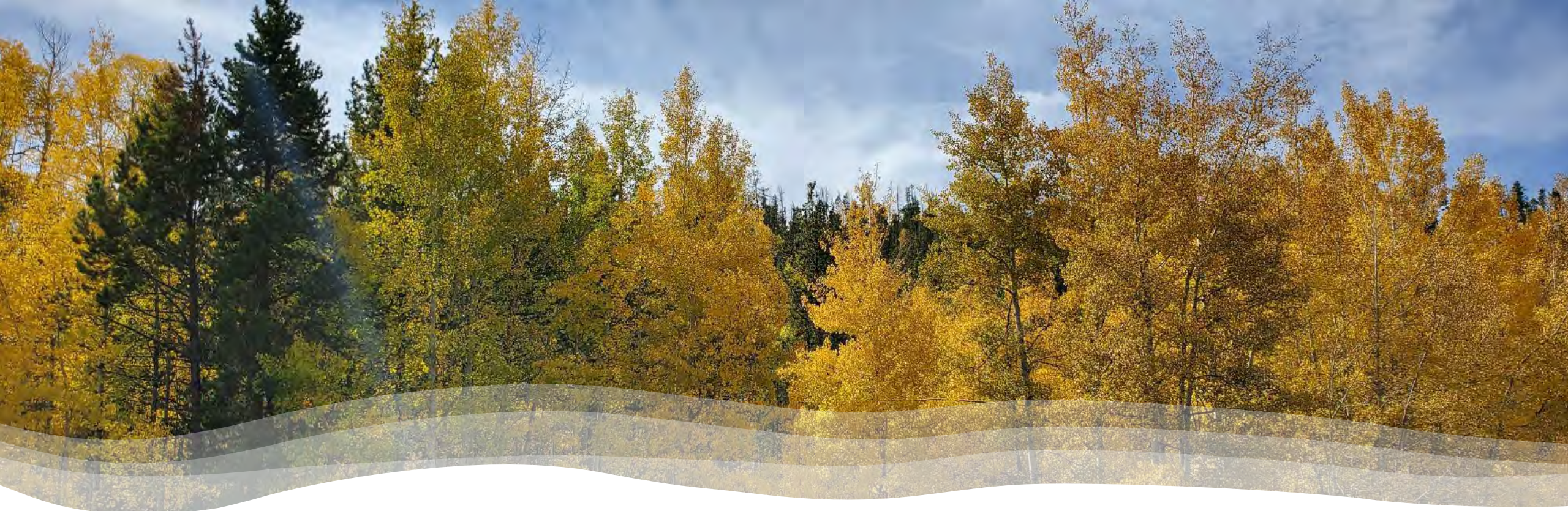
The U.S. Forest Service's watershed condition classification, priority watershed designation and Watershed Restoration Action Plans are the first three steps in the agency's Watershed Condition Framework. This interactive mapping capability will better provide current and future partners important information on potential needs for watershed restoration and maintenance and will also increase the public's awareness of their local watershed conditions and the role they can play in improving them.

- The [USDA Forest Service Watershed Condition Classification and Prioritization Interactive Map](#)
- [Interactive Mapping User Guide](#) (PDF | 1.6MB)
- [Download a table containing the WCC and Prioritization information](#) (HTML | 7.25MB)
- For GIS Application [download a shapefile with WCC and Prioritization information](#) (ZIP | 227MB)

Watershed Condition Classification Maps

The Watershed Condition Classification maps characterize the health and condition of National Forest System lands in the more than





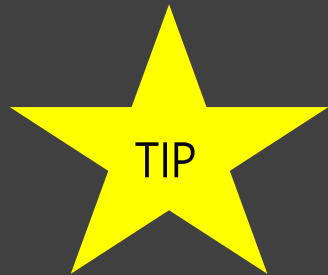
Some Notes on WSPPs & WRAPs

- The entire project doesn't have to fall within the boundary of the WRAP/WSPP, but it does have to overlap.
- The WRAP/WSPP needs to be active, not completed.
 - If you're unsure – reach out to your USFS Rep!
- If the USFS is in process of writing a WRAP/WSPP then you can apply if you reasonably believe it will be complete by end of project.



Important Dates

- January 13, 2026 @ 11:59 PM EST: Proposals Due
- Mid-January 2026 – May 2026: Reviews
- Mid to late May 2026: Awards Announced
- June – August: Contracting



DO NOT set a start date of May 2026 if you're just beginning a project!

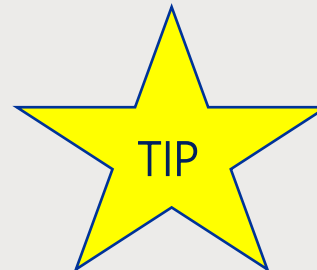


Environmental Compliance & Permitting



NEPA

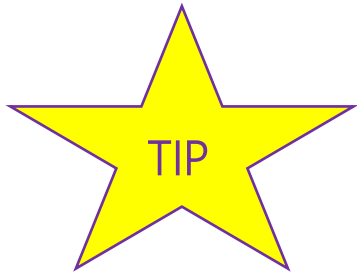
- Federal Action = Funding the HAFI Program
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA – state too if applicable), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).
 - May also be subject to the Clean Water Act – if proposing in-water work.
- If awarded – ground disturbing work cannot begin until compliance approval is recorded by NFWF and the USFS.
- Planning work to start when waiting for full approval.



SWCA Environmental Consultants is the environmental compliance contractor for HAFI. Questions? atbcregulatory@swca.com

Environmental Compliance & Permitting

- The level of assessment is dependent on your proposed activities
 - NEPA Compliance - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/regulations-policies/nepa>
- Easiest path to environmental compliance is already existing USFS compliance materials.
- If compliance documentation does NOT exist – discuss with USFS.
- If awarded, SWCA reach out during contracting to begin the process.



Conduct early coordination & research into compliance, and don't forget to budget time and money in your project for these planning activities.



Some activities, such as wide-spread or aerial herbicide application may be more difficult to approve



HAFI Application Review Process



Conservation Outcomes

- Aligns with Program Goals & Priorities
- Quantifiable Metrics
- Appropriate Monitoring
- Project Sustainability

Technical Merit

- Sound & Feasible
- Appropriate Technical Experts Involved
- Achievable timelines & work plans
- Sound environmental compliance approach

Partnership & Community Impact

- Collaborates with the community
- Has partnership and stakeholder buy-in
- Includes letters of support or other documentation

Budget

- Budget is reasonable
- Has matching contributions



Application Do's & Don'ts



Do

- Double & triple check eligibility
- Clearly align proposal with HAFI priorities
- Provide strong letters of support
- Set a realistic project timeframe
- Propose clear, itemized budget
- Define targeted, achievable metrics
- Introduce partners & engage meaningfully
- Connect the reader to specific content in the "Other Uploads" Section.

Don't

- Apply if the project isn't covered by a WRAP or WSPP or on USFS land.
- Just check boxes – tell us the HOW
- Avoid coordinating with the USFS Unit you're proposing work in.
- Propose a start date of May 2021 unless you have match to count.
- Don't select all the metrics
- Say you'll engage without a meaningful plan
- Add hundreds of pages as "Other Uploads"



TIP

Don't forget – humans are the reviewers! Tiny, single space font is difficult to read, and we can sniff out AI generated proposals!

Tips for a Compelling Narrative

- Narrative is the heart and soul of the application & you only have 5 pages!
- You can adjust the formatting (e.g., change to single spaced, adjust the margins)
- Technically sound proposal are important, but the audience is not a technical specialist, so highly technical writing is not needed/wanted.
- We appreciate well written applications, but you don't have to be a professional grant writer.
- State the "how" – how will your project meet the program priorities? How will the project outcomes be accomplished? How will engagement occur?

1. → Is this project occurring on National Forest System land? Yes No — If yes, name the location[s] below. If no, this project is not eligible for this funding opportunity. ¶
¶
2. → Does this project align with a watershed restoration action plan (WRAP) or a water source protection program (WSPP)? Yes No — If yes, upload this document. If no, this project is not eligible for this funding opportunity. ¶
¶
3. → Do you have a letter of support provided by each Forest Service Unit? Yes No — If yes, upload each letter. If no, explain. ¶
¶

Narrative Questions 1 - 3

- Questions 1 – 3: Check boxes that require small amounts of information & uploads.
- Letters of Support: Easier on partners if this is a template
- Older LOS are okay- just make sure fairly recent (last few years) and mentions the project.
- Any acknowledgement by the USFS of the project and their support is better than nothing.

Narrative Question #4

Have you discussed
Federal Environmental
Compliance with the
Forest Service?

Based on our conversations with the USFS (state the forest name), NEPA, NHPA, and ESA compliance documentation that covers our proposed activities will be required. Additional information about the required permits is outlined in EasyGrants, as well as in our proposed budget and budget narrative.

The USFS (insert forest name) has approved NEPA documentation that covers our proposed activities. This documentation will be provided to NFWF upon contract award. Based on conversations with the USFS, the USFS will be responsible for coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and any tribal consultation. In addition, avoidance and minimization measures will be employed during implementation.

From our conversations with the USFS (insert forest name), no existing NEPA, ESA, or NHPA documentation will cover our proposed activities. However, we believe the work can be covered under USDA Categorical Exclusion USDA-47d-USFS "Forest and grassland management activities with a primary purpose of meeting restoration objectives or increasing resilience. Activities to improve ecosystem health, resilience, and other watershed and habitat conditions may not exceed 2,800 acres." We will work with SWCA and NFWF on completing the necessary paperwork to gain environmental compliance approval under this CatEx.

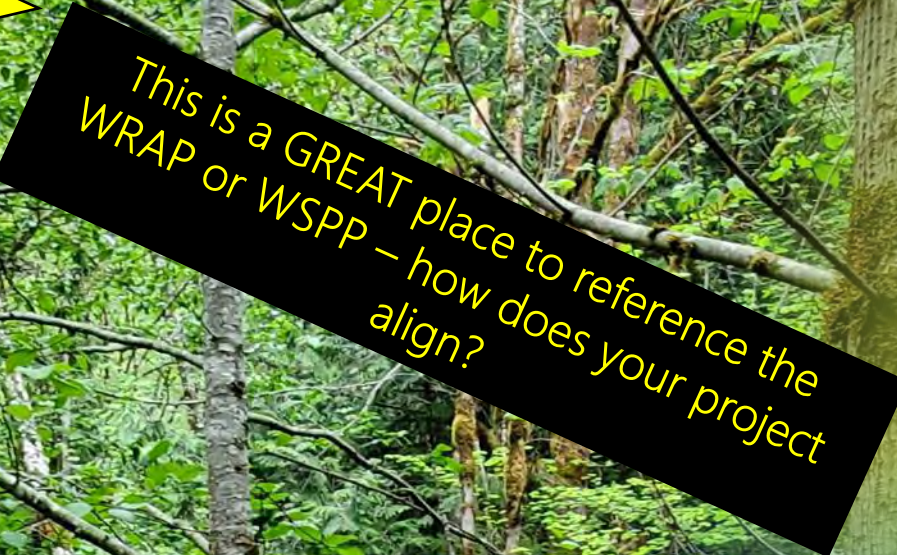
Narrative Question #5

What are the Primary Project Outcomes & Why is this Project Needed?

- Why is the project needed? Explain the problem and the solution!
- Write about your overall goal
 - *"to reduce sediment erosion rates in the XX stream/watershed by controlling invasives and reconnecting the floodplain and improve fish spawning habitat through stream bed restoration techniques, which will result in expanded habitat connectivity for the (xx species) and strengthen the ecosystem and community health through improved water quality and expanded carrying capacity."*
- Metrics should be included as an answer to Q9



TIP



This is a GREAT place to reference the WRAP or WSPP – how does your project align?





TIP

Remember – Planning projects are not eligible! If planning is involved, the main focus must be implementation!

Narrative Question #6

What are the Major
Project Activities?

- Do more than check boxes!
- Refer to Q7 for more information.
- Add any additional activities beyond those listed, if applicable
- Note if planning activities are necessary but emphasize that the main objective is implementation.

Narrative Question #7 – Project Actions

Implementation Actions	Implementation Action Timeframe
<p>Planning – 15% of budget</p>	<p>July 2026 – October 2026: Hiring of fuels reduction staff, coordination with the USFS, pre-construction biological surveys for threatened and endangered species following XX protocols.</p>
<p>Fuels Reduction/Thinning – 45% of budget</p> <div style="float: left; margin-right: 10px;"> </div> <div style="background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p>May be another great place tie project to Program Priorities and WRAP/WSPP.</p> </div>	<p>November 2026 – March 2027: X crews will be deployed to the NFS lands to thin XX tree species by X%. The focus will be on young trees with a DBH of X. Work will be completed using mechanical tools (i.e., harvesters/feller-bunchers) and hand tools (i.e., chainsaws/pruning shears) where appropriate (i.e. on slopes not safe for mechanical removal or in areas with sensitive biological resources. Wood will be piled for later burning. No herbicides are proposed as part of the thinning methodology.</p>
<p>Prescribed Burning – 30% of budget</p>	<p>April 2027 – December 2027: X crews will be deployed to conduct prescribed burns. The prescribed fires will be supervised by a certified burn boss utilized qualified personnel. Burning is proposed on X acres in the areas where thinning occurred. Patterned ignition will be used (e.g., strip head, backing, or ring fire) using drip torches. Monitoring of the fires and smoke dispersion will occur.</p>
<p>Monitoring – 10% of budget</p>	<p>January 2028 – May 2028: Data collection, review, analysis, and synthesis of past red spruce release projects and ongoing monitoring of existing red spruce restoration (release, planting, and aquatic restoration)</p>

Narrative Question #8 – Program Priorities

- Don't forget to explain **HOW** – how does your project address the HAFI Program Priorities
 - Example: Our project activities as outlined in Question 7 will result in expanded habitat connectivity for large game species such as Elk. Opening migration corridors using forest thinning and prescribed burning is well documented (add link to article). In addition, reducing readily available fuels within the XX Unit of NFS lands will strengthen the ecosystem by allowing understory growth to become established, leading to more biodiversity, and will contribute to community health by reducing the chance of catastrophic wildfires.

TIP

DO NOT select all the metrics – be intentional and clear!

Narrative Question #9 – Project Success

- This is your metric section.
- Look at the standard NFWF metrics as outlined in the RFP.
- Example: Habitat Management – BMP Implementation for Prescribed Burns – Acres Burned (your selected metric)
 - Project success will be determined by the acreage of prescribed burns. Our project will track the acres burned through aerial photography and GIS mapping activities. The work will occur only on public NFS lands. Burning will be in areas dominated by xx species. The areas selected for burning have been identified as a priority in the WRAP/WSPP or other USFS documentation. Prescribed burning will directly result in achieving the HAFI program priority of expanding habitat connectivity for elk who use this area as a migration corridor.

TIP

Tie your process successes back to the HAFI Program Priorities



Fewer, more meaningful partners are better than listing a lot of partners with less detail.

Narrative Question #10 - Partnerships

- WHO are your partners, and WHAT is their role in the project.
- HOW will these partners support your project.
- Detail if these are existing partners, or new partnerships that will be established.
- Look for opportunities for diverse partnerships.

Narrative Questions #11 & #12

TIP

Meaningful Engagement isn't a check box! It's a process. Make sure to show how you are planning on soliciting feedback from stakeholders and the community, and how you plan on integrating that feedback into your project.

#11: Who are the key individuals on the project team and HOW will they contribute to the project?

- This is an opportunity to show reviewers that you have the right team!
- Remember technical merit is a scoring category.
- Note which organization they are from – good to tie back to Question 10

#12: HOW will communities be engaged in project development and implementation?

- Explain how you will achieve MEANINGFUL engagement.
- Go over the methodologies (e.g., host X number of meetings throughout the planning and implementation phases, communities will be notified via direct phone calls, emails, posting on social media, etc.)

Narrative Questions #13 & #14

#13: How will this project improve forest health leading to increased timber productivity?



HOW will your project lead to healthier forests?



Pest & disease control, tree density management, fuel reduction leading to larger tree growth, etc.

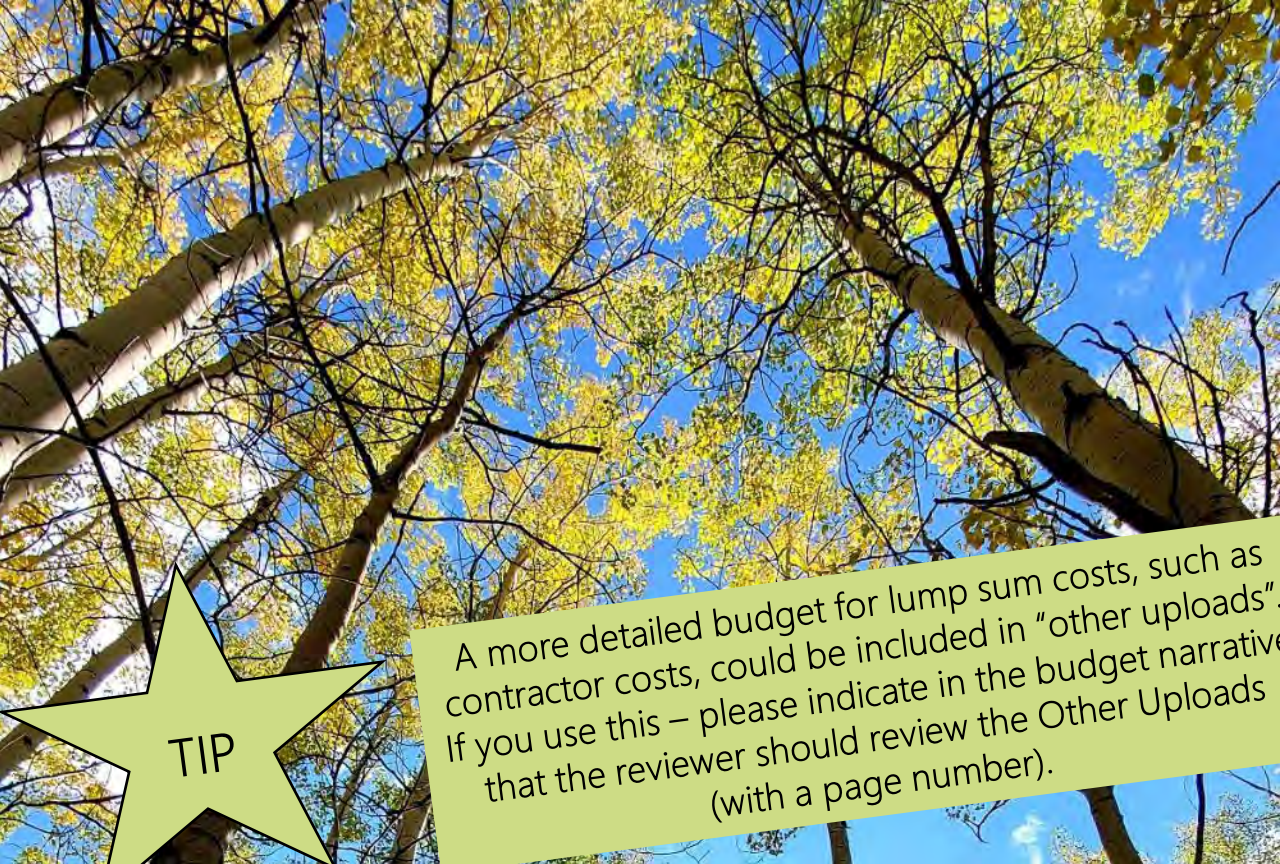
#14: What are the plans for sustaining the project outcomes beyond the grant period?



Explain the long-lasting ecological benefits of the project.



HOW will the outcomes be maintained or how will they contribute to future restoration goals



TIP

A more detailed budget for lump sum costs, such as contractor costs, could be included in "other uploads". If you use this – please indicate in the budget narrative that the reviewer should review the Other Uploads (with a page number).

Budget Narrative - Tips

- You NEED to fill out the budget narrative section with details!
- If you're using a contractor – don't just put a lump-sum dollar value – EXPLAIN what the money will go toward.
- The budget will translate into your expenditure table in EasyGrants if awarded
 - Personnel Category:
 - Account for raises (put same person year 1 and year 2 with different salaries)
 - Don't lump people together if using crews unless they have the same payrate & fringe.
 - Travel & Expenses:
 - Lump together where possible – don't account for every pen you will buy or every flight you will take.
 - Where you lump – explain in the narrative your breakdown (i.e., planning on traveling to the site 10 times @ 100 miles roundtrip = 1,000 miles.)
 - Rent equipment where possible – buying equipment over \$10K will result in additional paperwork to track depreciation.

HAFI Resources



- On the NFWF HAFI Website:
 - NFWF Webinar Recording & Slides
 - Narrative Template
 - Request for Proposals
 - EasyGrants Tipsheet
 - SWCA Compliance Recording
- Schedule a Proposal Lab Session
 - With NFWF or with us Field Liaisons



<https://outlook.office.com/book/HAFIProposalLabCalendar@nfwf.org/?ismsaljsauthenabed=true>



<https://outlook.office.com/book/HAFIFieldLiaisonProposalLab@ectinc.com/?ismsaljsauthenabed>

Common Registrant Questions

- What are the most competitive project types?
- Are projects in later stages of development more competitive?
- Is the Program regionally focused?
- Are higher acreage projects more appealing?
- Can WRAP/WSPP adjacent lands still receive funding if ecologically influenced?
- Can funds be used for biological and/or cultural resource surveys?
- How do we fit our project within a 2-year timeline, especially if we need to do environmental compliance?



Thank You!

Live Q&A

NFWF: Sydney Godbey (Sydney.Godbey@nfwf.org); Ericka Popovich (Ericka.Popovich@nfwf.org); Zoey Apelt (Zoey.Apelt@nfwf.org)

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