Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund

2020 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Applicant Webinar [Register Here]: Thursday, December 19th, 2019 at 2:00pm Eastern Standard Time

Full Proposal Due Date: Thursday, February 20th, 2020 by 11:59pm Eastern Standard Time

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is soliciting proposals within the Cumberland Plateau region that will help accelerate the restoration and enhancement of critical forest and freshwater habitats and associated wildlife species in the region. Funding is provided by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, International Paper’s Forestland Stewards Partnership, American Forest Foundation’s Southern Woods for At-Risk Wildlife Partnership, and Altria Group. Up to $1.5 million is expected to be available for grants this funding cycle.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Projects within the Cumberland Plateau in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia are eligible, with preference given to projects located within the identified focal areas (View Interactive Map). Focal areas were selected by analyzing upland and riparian forest and freshwater systems, and represent locations with the greatest potential for restoration and benefit to priority species. These focus areas are based on resource mapping, interviews with the practitioners in the field, and capacity to carry out the work.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund (Fund) seeks to support the implementation of the Forestland Stewards Partnership Business Plan, which includes strategic priorities and goals to enhance forest ecosystems for the benefit of wildlife species and freshwater systems, while promoting and supporting working forests. The Fund also seeks to support implementation of the Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan for those portions of the historical shortleaf pine range that fall within the Fund’s geographic focal areas and restoration and enhancement of aquatic habitat and species within high priority watersheds identified through the Southeastern Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy that are located within the Fund’s program area.

Preference will be given to projects that effectively implement one or more of the strategies below to improve shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak, riparian forest, soil health, water quality, and/or in-stream habitats and populations of associated wildlife species, such as northern bobwhite, prairie warbler, as well as fish, amphibians and other aquatic species:
1) **Establish Shortleaf Pine:** NFWF will invest in projects that create new shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak habitat, including site preparation and planting on public and private lands. Priority will be given to projects in areas adjacent or in close proximity to existing shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak stands under management, known habitat for associated threatened, endangered or at-risk species, and/or on protected lands likely to receive long-term management. Projects should:

- Describe all necessary site preparation for planting and summarize plans to promote long-term maintenance of restored forests (e.g., mechanical and/or chemical treatments, prescribed burning, etc.).

2) **Enhance and Maintain Existing Shortleaf Pine Ecosystems:** NFWF will invest in projects that maintain, expand, and promote the appropriate management of existing shortleaf pine forest systems on public and private lands, with emphasis on shortleaf pine and shortleaf-oak ecosystems, through the use of prescribed fire and other management treatments, including, but not limited to the following:

   **Prescribed Burning**
   - Increase prescribed burning capacity, coordination and collaboration through fire teams, prescribed burn associations, or other strategies.
   - Provide technical assistance, training and/or other incentives to increase prescribed burning on private lands, including, but not limited to assisting USDA Area Office staff in writing burn plans and implementing financial assistance contracts through NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other Farm Bill programs.
   - Increase prescribed burning and management on public lands.
   - Pursue innovations and address specific barriers or roadblocks to prescribed burning, including strategies that may be transferred across the shortleaf pine range.

   **Other Silvicultural Treatments**
   Where prescribed fire is not sufficient or practical for achieving shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak ecosystem restoration, the following additional strategies may be considered. Applicants must demonstrate how these strategies contribute towards long-term sustainable shortleaf ecosystem management, including how they will enable future prescribed burning as a management practice.

   - Thinning to improve forest structure and stand health, and promote understory growth.
   - Herbicide treatments to promote release of established seedlings and young trees, control competition, and remove invasive species.
   - Planting native understory species, where appropriate, to improve wildlife habitat and support the application of prescribed fire.

3) **Restore and Enhance Riparian Forests and Watershed Health to Support Aquatic Species:** NFWF will invest in projects that restore riparian forests, implement forestry and agricultural best management practices, and/or restore in-stream habitats to improve soil, forest, and watershed health, enhance freshwater habitat, and support at-risk aquatic species. Applicants seeking support for riparian or in-stream restoration projects should reference the [Southeast Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy](https://www.nfwf.gov/grants/conservation-strategy/southeast-aquatic-biodiversity-conservation-strategy) for additional information on priority watersheds within the Cumberland Plateau program boundary. A variety of practices are eligible including, but not limited to:
Restore and Enhance Riparian Forests

- Reforest riparian buffers with native riparian forest species.
- Implement forest management practices, such as thinning, that will improve wildlife habitat.
- Control invasive species, such as hemlock woolly adelgid, which threaten riparian forest health.

Improve Conservation Practices on Agricultural Lands

- Increase adoption of cover crops, reduced tillage, and diversified crop rotations in cropping operations.
- Promote responsible incorporation of crop residue, manures, and other sources of organic matter into soil management systems.
- Establish and enhance farmer-led education and outreach programs to drive increased adoption of soil health practices.
- Install fencing and alternative watering systems to exclude livestock from streams.

For projects implementing conservation practices on agricultural lands, applicants should seek first to utilize existing federal, state, and local cost-share and incentive programs to finance implementation of practices, with NFWF funding for practice implementation used to strategically fill gaps in existing funding programs. Where NFWF funding is sought to cover all or a portion of costs for practice implementation, applicants must describe why other public programs are insufficient or otherwise inappropriate for financing proposed practice implementation.

Restore Aquatic Connectivity and Improve In-Stream Habitat Conditions

- Remove or retrofit stream barriers (low-head dams) and stream crossings (culverts, concrete fords), and/or other in-stream restoration practices to improve aquatic habitat within focal watersheds (View Map). Note: Preference will be given to proposals that remove or retrofit high priority barriers or crossings within watersheds where barrier/crossing surveys and/or assessments are being developed or have been completed with an emphasis on lower cost/high gain methods in locations known to fragment habitat for priority species.

4) Expand and Coordinate Technical Assistance and Outreach: NFWF will invest in projects that implement targeted outreach and assistance to measurably increase private landowners engaged in habitat stewardship practices. Proposals must estimate the amount of acres and/or miles to be restored or enhanced as a result of proposed technical assistance and outreach activities. Areas of interest include:

- Increase outreach and technical assistance delivery success: Support increased landowner outreach and technical assistance. Proposals should describe the current technical assistance capacity and explain plans for prioritizing, targeting and leveraging additional capacity. This should include how existing financial assistance programs will be utilized and how the increased technical assistance capacity will be coordinated among existing providers. Strategies may include:
  - Hiring additional staff or contractors, based on demonstrated need, including capacity to provide technical assistance to landowners, assist NRCS with developing forest management plans, burn plans, and/or conservation plans, and implement existing and new financial assistance contracts to deliver conservation practices, including Farm Bill programs and NRCS initiatives such as Working Land for Wildlife’s Eastern hellbender project within NRCS priority watersheds.
  - Developing landscape-based partnerships to implement innovative methods to expand on-the-ground restoration and protection activities on private lands, such as utilizing social
marketing and preferences data to identify and better understand landowner motivations and barriers to sustainable forest management, implementation of agricultural best management practices, and/or riparian or in-stream habitat restoration.

- Targeting outreach to landowners and working with NRCS and other partners to prioritize, plan and deliver financial assistance, such as EQIP, Working Lands for Wildlife and other programs to improve habitat and support at-risk species.

- **Advancing new market-based and/or incentive programs:** Pilot innovative, market-based solutions and incentive programs that stimulate landowner participation in shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak ecosystem recovery, agricultural best management practices, riparian forest restoration, and/or in-stream habitat restoration efforts to promote the achievement of shortleaf pine ecosystem, riparian forest, soil health, and/or in-stream ideal habitat conditions. Projects should effectively align with other existing private landowner initiatives or programs, such as US Fish & Wildlife Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program and USDA’s Working Lands for Wildlife, as appropriate.

- **Increasing participation in third-party forest certification:** Increase participation in third-party forest certification programs to encourage sustainable forest management practices for shortleaf pine ecosystem and associated wildlife.

5) **Conservation Easements:** Limited funding is available to facilitate targeted conservation easement projects that protect existing, high quality shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak and/or riparian forest habitat, or key sites targeted for shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak ecosystem and/or riparian forest restoration that are part of larger forest restoration proposals. Preference will be given to projects that protect working forests. Requests for conservation easement funding should not exceed 20% of the total proposal request and should be for transaction costs, such as surveys, appraisal, environmental report, etc. In limited instances, highly leveraged projects will be considered for acquisition costs. Please contact Jon Scott (jonathan.scott@nfwf.org) to discuss specific land conservation projects.

**PROJECT METRICS AND OUTCOMES**

The Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund seeks to support the following conservation outcomes as outlined in the Forestland Stewards Partnership Business Plan. Projecting the goals of the 2013-2017 business plan, the following goals have been established for 2020. A new business plan is scheduled for development in 2021.

- Increasing populations of northern bobwhite quail and prairie warbler, as well as fish, amphibians and other aquatic species, which are representative of healthy, sustainable shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak savanna forests and/or freshwater systems.
- Establishing 1,000 acres of shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak forest.
- Improving management of 10,000 acres of existing shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak habitat.
- Restoring or enhancing 1,000 acres of riparian forest for wildlife habitat and water quality.
- Protecting 500 acres of working upland forests and/or riparian forests through voluntary conservation easements.
- Improving management of 15 miles of stream and associated stream habitat.
- Engaging more than 500 private landowners in shortleaf pine/shortleaf pine-oak and riparian forest outreach, training and technical assistance activities that contribute to the objectives described above.
To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund has a list of metrics (Table 1) in Easygrants for grantees to choose from for reporting. We ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project (all possible program metrics are shown in the table below). Please contact Jon Scott (jonathan.scott@nfwf.org) if you have questions about which metrics best apply to your project.

Table 1: Project Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Easygrants Metric</th>
<th>Additional Guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Establish Shortleaf Pine</strong></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land restoration - Acres restored on private land</td>
<td>Acres of shortleaf pine established through plantings on private lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land restoration - Acres restored on public land</td>
<td>Acres of shortleaf pine established through plantings on public lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on private lands</td>
<td># of shortleaf pine seedlings planted on private lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on public lands</td>
<td># of shortleaf pine seedlings planted on public lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhance and Maintain Existing Shortleaf Pine Ecosystems</strong></td>
<td>CPF - BMP implementation for prescribed burns - Acres private land burned</td>
<td>Acres of prescribed burning completed on shortleaf pine habitat on private lands. Include site prep burning in this metric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - BMP implementation for prescribed burns - Acres public land burned</td>
<td>Acres of prescribed burning completed on shortleaf pine habitat on public lands. Include site prep burning in this metric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (private)</td>
<td>Acres of over-story treated, mid-story treated, native understory established, and/or non-native, invasive plant species treated within existing shortleaf pine habitat on private lands. Acres of prescribed fire should not be included in this total. An acre is to be reported on only one time, even if subjected to more than one treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPF - Shortleaf Pine - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (public)</td>
<td>Acres of over-story treated, mid-story treated, native understory established, and/or non-native, invasive plant species treated within existing shortleaf pine habitat on public lands. Acres of prescribed fire should not be included in this total. An acre is to be reported on only one time, even if subjected to more than one treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restore and Enhance Riparian Forests and</strong></td>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Riparian restoration - Acres restored</td>
<td>Acres of riparian forest established on private lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watershed Health to Support Aquatic Species</td>
<td>on private land</td>
<td>Acres of riparian forest established on public lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Riparian restoration - Acres restored on public land</td>
<td># of riparian tree seedlings planted on private lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on private lands</td>
<td>Acres of riparian forest under improved management on private lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Land, wetland restoration - # of trees planted on public lands</td>
<td>Acres of riparian forest improved through management on public lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (private)</td>
<td>Acres of agricultural best management practices installed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Riparian habitat vegetation - Improved management practices - Acres under imp mgt (public)</td>
<td>Miles of riparian habitat under improved management on private lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - BMP implementation for nutrient or sediment reduction - Acres with BMPs</td>
<td>Miles of riparian habitat under improved management on public lands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Improved management practices - Miles under improved mgmt (private)</td>
<td># of in-stream barriers removed or retrofitted to increase aquatic connectivity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Improved management practices - Miles under improved mgmt (public)</td>
<td># of landowners targeted by outreach activities. Examples include direct mailings and targeted media advertisements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Fish passage improvements - Miles of stream opened</td>
<td># of landowners anticipated to be reached through educational meetings, trainings and/or technical assistance. If the target value includes landowners reached through more than one activity, please break out in the notes section.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people targeted</td>
<td># of private landowners reached who have implemented conservation actions. Examples include developing a conservation plan, enrolling in a financial assistance program, implementing a conservation practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people reached</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF - Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people with changed behavior</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Expand and Coordinate Technical Assistance and Outreach**
### Conservation Easements

| CPF - Conservation easements - Acres protected under easement | Acres of shortleaf pine and/or riparian forest habitat protected by conservation easements. |

### ELIGIBILITY

#### Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, Indian tribes and educational institutions.
- Ineligible applicants include U.S. Federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals and international organizations. U.S. Federal agencies, businesses and unincorporated individuals are encouraged to partner with eligible applicants, but are not eligible to submit an application.

#### Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

### FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

The Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund anticipates awarding up to $1.5 million in grants in 2020. Grant awards will range from $50,000 to $250,000. This program has one annual application cycle and awards approximately six to eight grants per year. Projects should begin within six months of the award date and be completed within two years from the agreed start date. These grants require non-federal matching contributions valued at 50 percent of the total project costs (1:1 ratio).

**Work on Public Lands:** Work performed on Federal, state, and local public lands are eligible across the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund geography. Projects that focus on public lands are strongly encouraged to include work on private lands as part of the broader project scope. Please contact Jon Scott at jonathan.scott@nfwf.org to discuss potential work on public lands prior to submitting an application.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

#### Program Goals and Priorities

- Project contributes to the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund’s overall acreage, habitat and species goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics that will be tracked and measured to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities outlined in the Request for Proposals.

#### Conservation Plan and Context

- Describe how the project advances the Forestland Stewards Partnership Business Plan. Proposals also should highlight how efforts will expand new or existing restoration and
conservation initiatives, such as the Shortleaf Pine Initiative and Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan, and the Southeast Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation Strategy to maximize large-scale ecosystem function.

**Budget** – Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s Budget Instructions cost categories. Federally-funded projects must be in compliance with OMB Uniform Guidance as applicable.

**Matching Contributions** – Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised and spent for the Project during the Period of Performance. Larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

**Other Important Species Benefits** – In addition to meeting key habitat needs for shortleaf pine/shortleaf-oak savanna ecosystem indicator species (northern bobwhite and prairie warbler), describe any significant benefits to other at-risk, threatened or endangered woodland/savanna dependent species, as well as aquatic species, referencing any species recovery plans or other conservation plans outlining species goals as appropriate.

**Technical Merit** – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation to ensure activities are technically-sound and feasible. Applications involving private lands should be shared with the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist for input and guidance before submission (View NRCS State Conservationist contacts).

**Cost-Effectiveness** – Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation may include, but is not limited to, an assessment of either or both direct and indirect costs in the proposed budget. The federal government has determined that a de minimis 10% indirect rate is an acceptable minimum for organizations without a NICRA, as such NFWF reserves the right to scrutinize ALL proposals with indirect rates above 10% for cost-effectiveness.

**Transferability** – Project has potential and plan to transfer lessons learned to other communities and/or to be integrated into government programs and policies.

**Communication** – Project includes a detailed plan to communicate information about the project to appropriate audiences.

**Funding Need** – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested, and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

**Monitoring** – Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during and after the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

**Long-term Sustainability** – Project will be maintained to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time. This should include how future funding will be secured to implement necessary long-term monitoring and maintenance activities.

**Past Success** – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.
**Partnership** – An appropriate partnership exists to implement the project and the project is supported by a strong local partnership that leverages additional funds and will sustain it after the life of the grant. Identify proposed partners, if known (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementing the project, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in the completion of the project.)

**OTHER**

**Procurement** – If the applicant chooses to specifically identify proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF’s express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and regulations.

**Publicity and Acknowledgement of Support** – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF’s financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project.

**Receiving Award Funds** – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Projects may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

**Compliance Requirements** – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As may be applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.

**Permits** – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements. Where projects involve work in the waters of the United States, NFWF strongly encourages applicants to conduct a permit pre-application meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers prior to submitting their proposal. In some cases, if a permit pre-application meeting has not been completed, NFWF may require successful applicants to complete such a meeting prior to grant award.

**Federal Funding** – The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.
TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the program page of the NFWF website for the most current dates and information Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund.

Applicant Webinar [Register Here]: Thursday, December 19th, 2019, 2:00pm Eastern Standard Time

Full Proposal Due Date: Thursday, February 20th, 2020, 11:59pm Eastern Standard Time

Review Period: February – June 2020

Awards Announced: July 2020

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Easygrants system.

1. Go to easygrants.nfwf.org to register in our Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.

2. Once on your homepage, click the “Apply for Funding” button and select this RFP’s “Funding Opportunity” from the list of options.

3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A PDF version of this RFP can be downloaded here.

A Tip Sheet is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be downloaded here.

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website’s Applicant Information page.

For more information or questions about this RFP, please contact:

Jon Scott
Southern Forest Program Director
(202) 595-2609
jonathan.scott@nfwf.org

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk
Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org
Voicemail: 202-595-2497
Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday-Friday.
Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.