



Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) Grant Guidelines and FAQ

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About the WHIP Program

Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (FWP) Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) is a grant program for conducting conservation projects that improve, restore, enhance or rehabilitate wildlife habitat for species of conservation need.

WHIP projects should include;

- ecologically important wildlife habitat(s) and species of conservation need intended to benefit from habitat improvement practices;
- a plan to monitor habitat improvement projects and wildlife populations to evaluate project effectiveness and success;
- or a plan detailing how WHIP funds will support the activities and employees of the state tribal wildlife program(s);
- projects with multiple partners, additional funding sources, that provide public access, and work across multiple landownerships will be ranked higher, but these elements are not required.

Up to \$2M of Habitat Legacy Funds established in ([MCA 17-2-102](#)) will be available annually to support habitat conservation projects. Grants, which are paid in the form of reimbursed expenses, may be up to five years in duration.

Eligible activities include projects that address one or more of the following;

- improve, conserve, protect, and maintain terrestrial habitat;
- improve, conserve and maintain aquatic habitat;
- participate in water enhancement projects to benefit aquatic habitat and allow for other watershed enhancements that benefit fish, wildlife, and water conservation;
- improve and maintain range conditions, restoration of habitat, and drought resilience designed to create habitat uplift on private, public, and tribal lands;
- address and mitigate impacts that are detrimental to wildlife habitat and the environment and improve the condition of the land due to noxious weeds, soil disturbance, and loss of diverse habitat communities;
- mitigate conflicts and reduce potential for disease transmission between wildlife and domestic livestock; help fund activities and employees of the state tribal wildlife programs;
- create habitat uplift and net conservation gain for species of conservation need.

All WHIP program requirements are defined in the Kelly Flynn Montana Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Legacy Act ([MCA 87-5-800](#)) and FWP administrative rules ([ARM 12.9.16](#)).

How to Apply for a WHIP Grant

Application Submission

Entities interested in receiving a WHIP grant must complete and submit a grant application. All applications will go through a competitive review, ranking, and approval process with the WHIP Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is a 5-member group including a wildlife biologist, a member of an Indian Tribe, an agricultural or livestock producer or a representative of an agricultural or livestock producer organization, a member of a conservation organization and a representative of the Montana Weed Control Association. FWP completes the final review and determination of funding.

Application forms must be submitted electronically via the Montana Grants and Loans (WebGrants) website –

<https://funding.mt.gov>. Applicants new to WebGrants will need to register with WebGrants and choose Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as your agency of interest for grant programs.

Grant Deadline

See the [WHIP website](#) for the current year's funding opportunity deadline.

Questions about Applying for a WHIP Grant

FWP encourages contacting the WHIP Coordinator, Andrew Amidon, at 406-444-7291 or andrew.amidon@mt.gov for questions and guidance with your project design to ensure compliance with the program requirements.

WHIP Grant Requirements

WHIP Project Requirements

To qualify for a grant, a WHIP project must:

Address how projects would create habitat uplift or net conservation gain for species of conservation need; or restore, rehabilitate, improve, or manage land or waters as wildlife or aquatic habitat through habitat improvement and conservation.

In addition to the eligibility requirements, the proposal ranking process will consider and rank higher projects that:

- include funding commitments from multiple partners;
- involve effective collaboration across multiple land ownerships (public and private); and
- include public access.

Measurable Objectives

Measurable objective is defined as a specific, quantifiable, and time-bound standard used to evaluate the effectiveness of a project to restore, rehabilitate, enhance, improve, or manage land or waters as wildlife habitat, or to generate conservation gain for a species of conservation need.

Grantees are expected to lay out a plan describing how they will measure and evaluate project success and effectiveness. The application allows applicants to enter their project goals, measurable objectives, and how they intend to evaluate the success of the project given those goals and objectives. This should include methods, procedures, and techniques you will use to measure project effectiveness.

Required Application Materials

- 1 the name, address, and telephone number of the project sponsor, project manager, and liaison (if different from the manager);
- 2 the title or name of the proposed project;
- 3 a description of the proposed project, including measurable objectives;
- 4 the total grant amount requested;
- 5 the location and size (area) of the proposed project and maps depicting the specific location of the project area, and ownership of participating lands;
- 6 a brief description of the history and background of the project;
- 7 a list of the species of conservation need expected to benefit from habitat improvement

- projects and a description of how those species are expected to benefit;
- 8 a description of the need and urgency of the proposed project, including details of how the project would do one or more of the following;
 - (i) improve, conserve, protect, or maintain terrestrial or aquatic habitats;
 - (ii) water enhancement projects to benefit aquatic habitat and allow for other watershed enhancements that benefit fish, wildlife, and water conservation;
 - (iii) improve, maintain, or restore range conditions and increase drought resilience;
 - (iv) address and mitigate detrimental impacts to wildlife habitat and the environment, and improve the condition of the land due to noxious weeds, soil disturbance, or loss of diverse habitat communities;
 - (v) mitigate conflicts and reduce the potential for disease transmission between wildlife and domestic livestock;
 - (vi) support activities and employees of the state tribal wildlife programs; or
 - (vii) create habitat uplift and net conservation gain for species of conservation need.
 - 9 a description of the measurable objectives of the project;
 - 10 a description of public access to participating lands within the project area if public access is provided as part of the proposal;
 - 11 any other information deemed relevant by the department, which is included in the project application;
 - 12 a funding plan as described in (2);
 - 13 a timeline and schedule for completion of the proposed project, including start dates and expected completion dates; and
 - 14 a statement that the project sponsor, if the grant receives approval, is willing to enter a contract with the department for utilization of grant funds and required documentation, reporting, and monitoring.
- (2) The funding plan must include the following:
- 1 The amount of funding contribution requested from the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, and the total amount of funding and in-kind contributions necessary to complete the project;
 - 2 A breakdown of cost components used to estimate the funding request;
 - 3 A timeline detailing expected funding needs for the duration of the project, including any advance payments that may be requested; and
 - 4 If multiple partners are involved in a proposed project:
 - (i) a list of partners and their respective-cash commitments;
 - (ii) leveraged funds and in-kind contributions; and
 - (iii) signed letters of commitment from each funding partner that identify their role in the partnership, the source and amount of funds committed, and other non-monetary contributions toward the proposed project.
- (3) Grant funds may not be used to acquire perpetual easements or lands in fee title.

Additional Information

- (1) Grant applicants should work with a local agency wildlife biologist, which may include an FWP biologist or other conservation professional, to help determine if the proposal involves **priority habitat** for one or more **species of conservation need** that is directly threatened by habitat related issues. **Priority habitat** is defined as ecological settings or ecosystems that provide unique, high-value habitat that is important to one or more species of conservation need. **Species of conservation need** is defined as a species that is considered at-risk due to declining population trends, threats to their habitats, restricted distribution, or other factors; or other species that are recognized by the state of Montana for their ecological, economic, or recreational values.
- Priority habitat examples include but are not limited to key elk and deer seasonal ranges, bighorn sheep seasonal ranges, prairie habitat for grassland bird species of concern, sage-grouse core habitat, native habitats for upland game birds, pronghorn seasonal range and migration corridors, habitat for pollinators, riparian and wetland areas, critical fisheries habitat etc.
 - Grant applicants are encouraged to refer to existing habitat conservation plans, land management plans, species conservation plans, and other documents published by state, federal, or other entities that specify habitat work for species of conservation need. Examples include Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan, FWP’s Elk Management Plan, or National Forest Management Plans. Please document which plans you reference in your proposal.
 - Make sure to include any collaborative work with FWP in the narrative section of the application.
1. Contribution Statements
 - a. Each partner that is contributing funds and/or in-kind contributions must sign a WHIP Partner Contribution Statement. One document with all statements is preferred.
 2. Letters of Support
 - a. Letters of support are optional but can make a compelling case for funding, including letters from 1) any participating WHIP partners, or 2) other pertinent parties.
- Grant applicants need to contact each landowner within the WHIP their proposed project area to determine type of public access that is allowed or will be allowed as a result of conservation projects. The amount of public access within the project area is an important criterion for ranking WHIP applications and can vary based on type of access, seasonality, and permission required to gain access.
 - A WHIP grant period typically starts July 1st and ends on June 30th of the last year of the grant project. Grant dollars are available for reimbursement only after agreements are signed, which may take up to two months after grant approval.

WHIP Grant Application Scoring

Applications that are complete and meet basic requirements will be scored using the criteria below.

1. Proposal demonstrates an effective collaboration across multiple land ownerships and includes multiple contributing partners. Projects that provide additional funding, in-kind contributions, and/or greater amounts of outside-cost-sharing will be scored higher. (0-15pts)
2. Proposal identifies priority habitats, ecologically important habitats, and/or species of conservation need expected to benefit from conservation project. (0-20pts)
3. The project would support the recovery of degraded habitats through improvement, restoration, or enhancement efforts, or otherwise provide habitat uplift to or conservation gain to species of conservation need. (0-20pts)

4. Project area provides public access/recreational opportunities. The fewer opportunities that support public access and the greater the restrictions on individual lands, the lower the score. (0-15pts)
5. Projects impacting larger areas and providing benefits over longer time scales will be given greater consideration than those with smaller, short-term impacts. (0-10pts)
6. The proposal contains measurable objectives to evaluate efforts and success. (0-10pts)
7. Proposal provides a detailed description of activities and a funding plan/budget for the project and/or any employees that grant dollars will fund. (0-10pts)
8. The proposal provides a monitoring plan that will assist in evaluating desired outcomes, assess impacts, and gauge overall project results. (0-10pts)
9. The grant application, including proposal information, funding and monitoring plans are clear, well-organized and reflect a high likelihood of success for all aspects of the proposed project. (0-10pts).

Grant Approval Process

After grant applications have been submitted, they are reviewed for completeness by FWP staff and then scored by the WHIP Advisory Council. Incomplete applications may not be considered for funding. FWP will hold grant hearings with the WHIP Advisory Council to review each complete grant application. Grant applicants may be required to present their proposed project to the Council. The Advisory Council makes funding recommendations to FWP.

Grant Award and Implementation

Grant awardees will be required to:

1. sign an agreement with FWP that is subject to administrative requirements.
2. submit annual performance reports and a final accomplishment report.

Reimbursement Payments

Project sponsors need to submit reimbursement claims and expenditure documentation regularly through WebGrants. All requests for reimbursement must be supported by original invoices, receipts, proof of expenses, or proof of conservation activity verified by the department personnel that the work has been satisfactorily completed. Receipts or vendor invoices with proof of payment will serve as documentation that bills have been paid, prior to reimbursement from FWP. For personnel or administrative expenditure documentation, project sponsors must include sufficient records of personnel salaries and wages that accurately reflect the work performed using grant dollars. This is achieved through the grantee's internal timekeeping and payroll system.

After a grant is awarded, at the request of the grantee, the department may make an advance distribution of funds up to 50% of the total grant amount. Advance payment requests must include an estimated cost breakdown and timeline, or other detailed explanation of the request and plans for expenditure. Advance payment may be allocated at annual intervals or as one lump sum.

Reimbursement of additional grant expenses before verification of the advance funds being fully expended is received will be at the discretion of the department.

WHIP Terminology

- (2) **“Conservation gain”** means the anticipated improvement in population, trend, or distribution for a species of conservation need.
- (3) **“Habitat uplift”** means restoring habitats from a degraded or less optimal condition to a more desirable condition,

especially a condition with greater ecological function.

- (4) **“Measurable objective”** means a specific, quantifiable, and time-bound standard used to evaluate the effectiveness of a project to restore, rehabilitate, enhance, improve, or manage land or waters as wildlife habitat, or to generate conservation gain for species of conservation need.
- (5) **“Priority habitat”** means ecological settings or ecosystems that provide unique, high-value habitat that is important to one or more species of conservation need.
- (6) **“Project area”** means the land or water comprising the proposed habitat improvement, enhancement, restoration, or conservation project, and where the anticipated benefits are located, such as a watershed, ecological unit, or other defined area.
- (7) **“Project sponsor”** means a state, federal, tribal, government agency; a municipal or county agency, including conservation districts, weed control districts, irrigation districts, and grazing associations; a non-profit organization or other organization, or an individual, either public or private, administering a project.
- (8) **“Public access”** means that the public has the opportunity to participate in hunting, fishing, or other wildlife-related recreational activities on lands included in the project area.
- (9) **“Species of conservation need”** means a species that is considered at-risk due to declining population trends, threats to their habitats, restricted distribution, or other factors; or other species that are recognized by the state of Montana for their ecological, economic, or recreational values.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Refer to the Kelly Flynn Montana Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Legacy Act ([MCA 87-5-800](#)) and FWP administrative rules ([ARM 12.9.16](#)) for all program rules and requirements.

If you have further questions, please contact the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program Coordinator at 406-444-7291 or andrew.amidon@mt.gov.

QUESTION: How does FWP distribute grant funds?

ANSWER: All grant funds will be requested by and paid directly to the Project Sponsor. FWP will make payments upon receipt of a claim through the grant management system that has proper documentation, including a statement of work completed and associated copies of paid invoice receipts.

QUESTION: Who can apply for a WHIP Grant?

ANSWER: Project sponsors may include state, tribal, and federal agencies, as well as conservation districts, irrigation districts, grazing associations, weed control districts, and other entities the department considers appropriate for wildlife habitat improvement projects, and nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under section 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3), may apply for project funding.

QUESTION: Can individual public or private landowners apply for WHIP funding?

ANSWER: Individual public or private landowners may apply for WHIP funding. However, grant applications will be ranked and evaluated by the WHIP Advisory Council and make funding

recommendations to FWP. FWP will make final decisions on which projects will be funded.

QUESTION: Does contributing partners mean the landowners that will be benefitting from this grant or specifically the entity who will be administering the grant?

ANSWER: A contributing partner is any entity that intends to provide cash or in-kind work toward the grant project. It is important that grant expenditures be restricted to ecologically important wildlife habitats as required by program statute. The grant application format requires each contributing partner to complete a contribution statement that details their contributions to the project. This provides the Advisory Council and FWP with a tangible accounting of cash that is being offered up. This does require knowing in advance the contributing partners and their commitments toward the grant project.

QUESTION: Can WHIP funds be used to fund grant administration?

ANSWER: Grant funds may be used to fund employees or contractors that will conduct work on habitat improvement projects and perform one or more of the activities listed in 8 (i)-(vii) on page 4 of this document.

QUESTION: What about in-kind contributions?

ANSWER: Materials or labor that a partner is providing within the project area that helps accomplish the overall goal of wildlife habitat restoration is considered an in-kind contribution. These items can be used to describe the overall effectiveness and commitment of the partnership, which would be important for ranking grant applications and awarding funding. These contributions can be documented in the WHIP Project Funding Plan of the WHIP application.

QUESTION: If we are conducting work over multiple years, do we need to show a breakdown by year?

ANSWER: In the application, project timelines and scope of work need to be documented, showing when anticipated goals and objectives will be met on an annual basis.

QUESTION: What factors should I consider when planning a multi-year project?

ANSWER: There are many factors that could limit accomplishments on a multi-year conservation/ habitat improvement project. Factors include the availability of materials and labor, contractor schedules, staff changes, drought conditions, and unpredictable weather. These potential setbacks should be considered when planning yearly objectives and treatments.

QUESTION: If a project experiences setbacks that lead to less work being accomplished than was planned, can the grant be extended?

ANSWER: FWP recommends working collaboratively and creatively with project partners to overcome setbacks and get as much work accomplished as possible during the grant period. However, the department may approve or deny requests for extension based on a determination of the grantee's ability to complete the work within the additional time frame or other factors the department deems relevant.

QUESTION: Can we reapply for a WHIP grant?

ANSWER: A project sponsor and partners can reapply for another WHIP grant once their current grant period has ended. Reapplications will follow the standard application submittal, approval, and award process. Reapplications should build on the objectives and accomplishments of the previous grant such as expanding the project area, focusing projects in new areas, incorporating additional methods, including additional partners, and managing problem areas.

Additional Resources

- [Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan](#)
- [Montana State Wildlife Action Plan](#)
- [Wildlife Management](#)
- [Montana Natural Heritage Program](#)
- [Wildlife Friendly Fencing Guide](#)
- [Montana Weed Control Association website](#)
- [Revegetation Guidelines: Considering Invasive and Noxious Weeds](#)