



WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE

Project Selection Guidelines, Evaluation Criteria and Process

The WNTI Steering Committee will review and evaluate proposals based on the criteria and considerations listed below and will also consider project rankings from species conservation teams and input from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional NFHP Coordinators. **Project proponents must address these requirements, guidelines, and criteria in their project applications.**

Requirements

A. Project must be consistent with, and list, specific WNTI goals, objectives, (outlined in the [WNTI Strategic Plan](#)) and [WNTI's strategic priorities](#). WNTI Goals include:

1. Protect, enhance, or restore western native trout populations.
2. Protect intact watersheds, and enhance or restore habitats that have been impacted by human activities or catastrophic natural events.
3. Develop collaborative approaches and partnerships among agencies and stakeholders that emphasize cooperation and shared effort, and increased funding to implement high-priority projects for the protection, conservation and enhancement of western native trout.
4. Develop and implement effective communication, education and outreach programs as a tool to increase public awareness of WNTI and the NFHP effort and encourage partnerships that benefit western native trout.

B. Project must be consistent with, and list, which specific NFHP criteria (listed below) the project addresses. This minimum benchmark set of Fish Habitat Conservation Project prioritization criteria are intended to ensure core tenets of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan are considered by Fish Habitat Partnerships when ranking projects for funding. [Read the full NFHP Action Plan \(2nd ed.\) and its priority conservation strategies here.](#)

1. Direct linkages of project to specific Fish Habitat Partnership strategic plan/framework priorities and/or National Fish Habitat Partnership action plan (2nd edition)/priority conservation strategies.
2. Project alignment/compatibility with other conservation plans (e.g. State Wildlife Plans; Biological Opinions, Land Management Plans).
3. Project identification of specific habitat measures of success and performance targets that are observable and amenable to pre- and post-project monitoring and include social, economic and biological benefits such as enhanced recreational, commercial and subsistence fishing opportunities, increased public visitation, or innovative project designs that address specific fish conservation challenges.
4. Capabilities/experience of project proponents to complete what is proposed.
5. Well-defined budget linked to clear deliverables and outcomes.
6. Leveraging of match funds.
7. Project protects aquatic habitat or addresses the causes and processes behind aquatic habitat decline.
8. Project has an outreach/education component in the local community.

C. Project must benefit **at least one** of the following WNTI target native trout and char species or sub-species in their historic range: Apache Trout, Bonneville Cutthroat Trout, Bull Trout, California Golden Trout, Coastal Cutthroat Trout, Colorado River Cutthroat Trout, Gila Trout, Greenback Cutthroat Trout, Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, Little Kern Golden Trout, Paiute Cutthroat Trout, Interior Redband Trout, Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, Alaskan native Arctic Char, Arctic Grayling, Dolly Varden, resident Rainbow Trout , native naturally-occurring freshwater Kokanee, or native naturally-occurring Lake Trout. Visit our [website](#) for more information.

D. For the present funding cycle, all funds awarded by WNTI are for habitat-related and western native trout conservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement activities only. See the 2019 WNTI Project Funding Opportunity on our website for WNTI priorities for projects in 2017-2020. Projects considered for funding may include science-based voluntary and non-regulatory habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement activities to benefit 21 species of western trout and char addressed by WNTI. Types of eligible activities may include riparian or instream habitat, protection, enhancement, and restoration. Examples are: barrier removal or construction; rangewide population or watershed habitat assessments needed for prioritization and planning of habitat conservation and evaluation; assessment, collection, and information required for instream flow or lake water level quantification, protection and restoration; and habitat-related community outreach and education actions. NFHP funds can only be used for on-the-ground habitat projects and related design and monitoring activities; funds may not be used for acquisition in fee or easement, research, or solely to support personnel and staff salaries or benefits. Funded projects must be completed within 18-36 months of receipt of contract agreement. Multiyear projects **MUST** be broken into distinct phases by year for tasks, accomplishments, and budget. Please visit our [website](#) for examples of previously funded projects.

E. Project proposals must be supported by the state and/or federal fish and wildlife management agencies, or tribal governments within project-area jurisdictions. Projects on public or private land must have a **required** letter of support from the state fish and wildlife agency; projects on tribal lands do not require a state agency letter of support. Additional letters of support from federal or tribal fish and wildlife agencies are encouraged. The project application must include contact information for a ‘sponsoring professional’ from the relevant management agency.

F. If the project is located on private land, a support letter from the landowner is **required** (see application for landowner letter of support template).

G. Projects must have a monitoring component.

General Criteria and Considerations used by the WNTI Steering Committee to evaluate project proposals

Eligibility Screening Points

- Project is eligible for NFHP funding
- Project is consistent with the goals identified in the WNTI strategic plan
- Project addresses at least one WNTI species
- Project includes an adequate/reasonable/effective monitoring plan
- Project (or current phase of project) has a high probability of being completed within 18-36 months of receipt of contract agreement OR has clearly defined phases. If a multiyear project, a breakdown of tasks, accomplishments, and budget by year in distinct phases must be provided.
- Fish and wildlife management agencies with project-area jurisdiction are supportive of this project

Resource Impacts/Deliverables (protection, restoration, enhancement projects)

- Project addresses a WNTI goal
- Project is likely to provide long-term benefits for WNTI priority species and/or habitats
- Project addresses a priority need/limiting factor as identified in completed management plans or assessments
- Project conveys large conservation benefit to priority target species
- Urgency: project window is short, or immediate action is required to forestall degradation or deterioration of the resource
- Project directly benefits multiple native species, assemblages/communities, and non-fish stream- and riparian-dependent species
- Project addresses a root cause of degradation, rather than symptoms
- Project restores natural processes and is self-sustaining

OR

Resource Impacts/Deliverables (assessment project)

- Project addresses a WNTI goal
- Project is likely to provide long-term benefits for WNTI priority species and/or habitats
- Project addresses a priority need/limiting factor as identified in completed management plans or assessments.
- Project conveys large conservation benefit to priority target species
- Urgency: project window is short, or immediate action is required to forestall degradation or deterioration of the resource
- Assessment results in an 'actionable' and prioritized restoration or conservation plan/report
- Scale of assessment informs management decisions across species or ranges (vs. population)

Technical Merit

- Project demonstrates sound technical and scientific merit and is supported by established scientific studies or principles
- Project objectives are realistic, measurable, and achievable; methods are clearly defined and appropriate to meet stated objectives
- Environmental and regulatory compliance requirements already met or not required
- Mechanism in place to evaluate, monitor and disseminate the results of the project, including lessons learned and best practices used. WNTI supports monitoring of projects over time, however monitoring is the responsibility of the project proponents and is not funded by NFHP dollars.

Partnership Involvement

- Project has multiple and diverse partners working in collaboration, including important local/regional partners
- Project budget includes at least a 1:1 ration of matched resources (cash or in kind)
- Budget items and partnership contributions are clearly defined and considered reasonable
- Project is part of a larger collaborative conservation effort
- Project builds upon previously or currently funded WNTI/NFHP projects

Outreach and Education Component

- Project includes an education and/or outreach component
- Project increases the public awareness of a native trout species, its traits and its habitat
- Project has great potential to foster/generate a conservation ethic through citizen/youth involvement

Application Quality

- Proposal is well written and clearly conveys sufficient information to evaluate project

- Proposal is complete and follows the template provided

Other Administrative Considerations

- Have NEPA, 404 or other required state and federal permits been acquired? Projects with completed environmental compliance will score higher in the ranking criteria.
- Who are the various partners that will participate in the administration and implementation of the project? Is the partner list diverse?
- Does the Application provide adequate information to assess whether the applicant or implementing partners have the experience and capacity to successfully achieve the goals and objectives as described in the proposal?
- Are the responsible parties for reporting requirements and the successful completion of this proposal clearly identified? Who is a point of contact should the Committee have questions regarding this project?

The Western Native Trout Initiative will not consider:

1. Late requests or incomplete applications.
2. Requests for projects or programs already completed.
3. Refunding items purchased before the project is approved or awarded.
4. Participating in or funding of any political campaign on behalf of any issues, organizations or candidates.
5. Projects without a monitoring component.
6. Requests for funding for the purchase of private land or water rights, leases or easements, general organizational operating revenue, or solely for staff salaries and benefits.

Deadline: Applications are due **by 5:00 p.m. Mountain time on Friday October 26, 2018.**

Timeline: The WNTI Steering Committee reviews project applications in November 2018, and submits a ranked list of projects to the National Fish Habitat Board and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in January 2019. Final funding approvals are received in spring. Funds are expected to become available early to mid-summer, following grant approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Note regarding federal funds: NFHP funds are federal funds, administered on WNTI's behalf through a federal agency. All organizations that receive NFHP funding are required to complete all requirements for federal grants, including registration on the federal System for Award Management (SAM.org) and Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP), and provide annual reports to the USFWS. NFHP funds are processed through the USFWS Regional Offices or local FWCO office. Grants are paid on a reimbursable basis. A project agreement will be completed with successful applicants through USFWS regional and/or local staff. WNTI also requires the timely provision of copies of progress and completion reports with before/after project photos to WNTI.

Available Funding: WNTI anticipates receiving between \$150,000 and \$230,000 in NFHP funds for FY 2019 projects. The exact amount of funding available to the partnership varies annually and is not known at this time. **This is a very competitive process and we anticipate the pool of applicants will exceed the available pool of funding.** Typical funding per project is in the range of \$10K-\$50K. Successful proposals must demonstrate a minimum 1:1 match, which may include cash, time, materials, or other services and greater match is encouraged. Special consideration will be given to projects with more than the minimum match. Applications will be reviewed and ranked by the WNTI Steering Committee based on their ability to meet the partnership's key priorities and strategic objectives.