



## WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE

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## Western Native Trout Initiative FY2026 NFHP Project Funding Opportunity

November 22, 2024

The Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) and our partners are proud to announce our Request for Project Proposals for federal FY2026 National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) program funding. As one of 20 federally recognized National Fish Habitat Partnerships, WNTI is a collaborative effort between 12 western states, three federal agencies, sovereign tribes, private businesses and individuals, non-governmental conservation groups, and other organizations that seek to cooperatively conserve (protect, restore, enhance, and recover) 21 western native trout and char species and sub-species across their historic range. WNTI works to achieve this vision by funding locally based efforts that raise awareness for the importance of native trout and focus limited financial and human resources toward the highest-impact, locally-led, on-the-ground projects.

While WNTI is supported by different entities and partners, project funding through this RFP is made available to grantees annually through the NFHP program.

America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act was passed by Congress and signed by the President on October 30, 2020. Importantly, the legislation made significant changes to project requirements to be eligible for NFHP funding. The ACE Act places an emphasis on restoration efforts that will improve recreational fishing opportunities and public use of the resource. Improvements in public access as a component of projects are also encouraged. Some specific requirements include:

- Requested NFHP grant funds must be matched 1:1 with non-federal funds, with an exception for Indian Tribes. Non-federal match can include cash and/or in-kind labor, materials, or equipment if there are no federal ties to those funds. State agency funds can be used for the non-federal match if labor and/or materials are not being used at match for another federal grant. State agency funds that are used to match other federal grants would not be eligible as match. Match must occur during the project period of performance.
- All NFHP funded projects must include an outreach/education component.
- Monitoring and evaluation measures must be included as part of the project application but should not make up a significant portion of the funding request.
- The ACE Act allows a state, local government, or other non-federal entity to receive NFHP funds for the acquisition of real property from willing

sellers if the acquisition ensures public access for fish and wildlife-dependent recreation or contributes a scientifically based, direct enhancement to the health of fish and fish populations as determined by the NFHP Board. All real property acquisition projects funded with NFHP funds must be approved by the state agency in the state in which the project is occurring.

**Eligible Projects:** For the present funding cycle, all funds awarded by WNTI are for projects that support the fundamentals of western native trout habitat conservation (protect, restore, enhance and recover). Projects considered for funding may include science-based voluntary and non-regulatory habitat conservation activities to benefit the 21 species of western trout and char addressed by WNTI. Types of eligible activities may include riparian or instream habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection projects; or assessment projects that meet specific WNTI criteria described in more detail in the RFP documentation. NFHP funds can only be used for on-the-ground habitat projects and related design and monitoring activities; funds may not be used for research, or solely to support personnel and staff salaries or benefits. Funded projects must be completed within 18-24 months of receipt of contract agreement in 2026. Multiyear projects MUST be broken into distinct phases by year for tasks, accomplishments, and budget.

**NFHP National Conservation Priorities:** FY2026 project proposals must fall under at least one of the NFHP National Conservation Priorities. More detail about priorities and example strategies that fall under each NFHP Priority can be found [here](#).

- 1) Conserve waters and habitats where all processes and functions are operating within their expected range or natural variation.
- 2) Conserve hydrologic conditions for fish.
- 3) Conserve physical and living habitats and features that support viable and sustainable species and/or populations in impacted or at-risk systems.
- 4) Reconnect fragmented fish habitats.
- 5) Conserve water quality for fish.
- 6) Support the structure and function of Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs).
- 7) Enhance recreational, commercial, subsistence, and traditional fishing opportunities when conducting projects that conserve fish habitat.

**WNTI's Priorities:** As a National Fish Habitat Partnership, WNTI's #1 priority is the protection and restoration of habitat for western native trout and char species. Under this broad priority, we consider actions that achieve the following to be our highest priority:

A. Actions that provide long-term protection of intact and healthy aquatic ecosystems that support priority populations.

B. Restoration projects. Priorities are (in this order):

1. Actions that protect or enhance multiple populations.
2. Actions that provide immediate benefits to enhancing the viability of priority populations (e.g., restoring habitat connectivity where populations are isolated or threatened).
3. Actions that support conservation of unique and rare functioning habitat, habitat diversity, life histories and genetic attributes.

4. Actions that provide critical information needed for assessing success and making adaptive management decisions.

**WNTI's FY2026 Species of Emphasis:** Up to 75% of WNTI's NFHP funding could go toward the Species of Emphasis listed below for the years indicated. Projects submitted for funding must also support WNTI's priorities listed above to benefit these species.

- NFHP project funding awarded in calendar years 2025-2027: Gila Trout, Bull Trout, Golden Trout as a species group (California Golden Trout, Little Kern Golden Trout).

Proposals for NFHP funding for WNTI's other focal species will still be considered but will need to meet a high standard in terms of project quality and impact to one or more of our 21 focal species in their historic ranges order to be funded.

**Available Funding:** WNTI anticipates receiving between \$150,000 and \$250,000 in NFHP funds for FY2026 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 for the last eight years the pool of applicants has exceeded the available pool of funding.** Typical funding per project is in the range of \$25K-\$50K. Successful proposals must demonstrate a minimum 1:1 non-federal match, which may include cash, time, materials, or other services. State agency funds can be used for the non-federal match if labor and/or materials are not being used as match for another federal grant. State agency funds that are used to match other federal grants would not be eligible as match. Once the requested NFHP grant funds are matched with non-federal funds/in-kind, an unlimited amount of federal contributions to the project are allowed. WNTI gives special consideration 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 Initiative's key priorities and strategic objectives.

**Timeline:** Funding for FY2026 projects will likely not be appropriated by Congress until after January 2026 and will likely not be available to project leaders until May 2026 or later. Actual project period of performance start date will be the date grant agreement funding documents are signed. WNTI funded projects are likely to be contracted in summer 2026 with a likely completion date of September 30, 2028. Match requirements and project objectives must be met within the project timeline once the grant agreement is executed.

**Note regarding federal funds:** NFHP funds are federal funds, administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 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.gov), Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP), Grants Solutions grant management system, and provide interim and annual reports to the USFWS and WNTI. NFHP funds are processed through a grant agreement completed through the USFWS Regional Offices or local Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO). Grants are paid on a reimbursable basis. Please see [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Fish Habitat Partnership Program \(NFHP\) Application & Award Requirements October 2021](#) for more information. All federal funding requires environmental compliance documents (Federal Assistance Biological Assistance/ Endangered Species Act Evaluation Form, National Environmental Policy Act

Exclusion and National Historic Preservation Act Form) to be approved prior to execution of a grant agreement. WNTI also requires the timely provision of copies of final reports with before/after project photos to WNTI.

**Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. Mountain time on Friday January 31, 2025.**

**All applications for the RFP are submitted through WNTI's online application portal.** All documentation with specific guidance for completing the application and a link to the online portal is available on the [WNTI website](#). Late or incomplete applications will be not accepted.

Questions: Contact WNTI Coordinator

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