

# 2025 Biodiversity Conservation Grant

## A Grant Writer's Guide

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## About the Grant

With support from Toyota Motor North America, the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) is pleased to offer the 2025 Biodiversity Conservation Grant: Enhancing Pollinator Habitats. The \$200,000 in grant funding will go toward shovel-ready pollinator habitat enhancement projects on America's public lands.

## Who Can Apply

### Eligibility

- Open to non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations, state or federal government agencies, federally recognized tribes and local governments, and educational institutions.\*
- Projects must be on public lands.
- Private, for-profit firms and individuals are **not eligible** to apply.
- Grantees are **not eligible** for the same grant in the next consecutive year.
- Grant funding **may not** be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities, or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- Grantees must meet the funding criteria outlined below.
- Please visit NEEF's grant [FAQ page](#) for more eligibility information.

\* *An organization can submit more than one Letter of Intent (LOI).*

### Definition of public lands

Any federal, state, local, county, or regional land or waterway held in the public trust and/or spaces that are accessible to the public. Examples of public lands can include (but are not limited to) national forests, national parks and monuments, national wildlife refuges, and state/local lands that are accessible to the public, such as state/city/non-profit parks and forests, community gardens, and urban green spaces. Public lands that require fees to access are eligible.

## Grant Review Criteria

### Strong applications must:

1. Directly impact pollinator species on at least **500 acres** of public land, meaning a habitat improvement step is made on each acre. Impacted acreage must have a direct conservation activity proposed on it, including but not limited to invasive species removal, planting, seed drilling, prescribed burn, etc. See more in the FAQ section.

2. Directly support the creation, restoration, remediation, improvement, and/or protection of habitats for important pollinator species such as butterflies, bees, bats, and more.
  - a. It should be evidenced by key performance indicators such as the number of pollinator species supported, number of imperiled species supported, number of native plant species planted (especially number of milkweed/Monarch butterfly-supporting plants).
3. Include compelling community outreach and engagement activities that educate and empower the public to help enhance pollinator habitats and intentionally involve volunteers in the community to help instill a stewardship ethic.
  - a. It should be evidenced by key performance indicators such as the number of people engaged in volunteerism, number of people engaged in outreach/recreation, number of landowners engaged, number of people from underrepresented, under-resourced, and historically excluded communities engaged, and number of Toyota employees engaged (not a requirement).
4. Be shovel-ready, or ready to implement the proposed project within three months of the award date.

**Criteria also considered:**

1. **Varied and science-based conservation strategies:** The project features three or more habitat restoration strategies that show a good working knowledge of the varied efforts needed to restore a piece of land, such as invasive species removal, native planting, prescribed burns, etc. The project does not have to carry the 500 acres to a final product of a pristine habitat, but efforts should be more varied than a single restoration strategy.
2. **Reliability and expertise:** The grantee has demonstrated the ability to carry out a project of this nature and listed staff members who have the expertise required to execute the plans.
3. **Diversity of the project partners to support the project:** The grantee lists numerous project partners that are either lending conservation expertise or expanding engagement from diverse aspects of the community, including youth. Some grantees opt to work with project partners that have additional plots of land that would be co-managed under the proposed project to increase the project acreage scope.
4. **Opportunities for Toyota manufacturing personnel:** While **not a requirement** for selection, Toyota Motor North America, the grant funding partner, is interested in volunteering opportunities with selected grantees if locations align. These cities are: Huntsville, AL; Chandler, AZ; Long Beach, CA; Alpharetta, GA; Evansville, IN; Georgetown, KY; Ann Arbor, MI; Troy, MO; Tupelo, MS; Greensboro, NC; Henderson, NV; Jackson, TN; Plano, TX; San Antonio, TX; and Buffalo, WV.

5. **Sustainability:** Grantees are asked to provide a plan for how activities and improvements will be maintained and sustained after the grant period has ended and, if applicable, how the grantee will share lessons learned or further the impact of the project on adjacent lands. This might be through landowner information sessions, published works, conference presentations, or ongoing data collection.

Read more about the required KPIs and outcome measures on the [metrics infosheet](#).

## Grant Timeline

- LOI opens: February 1, 2025
- LOI deadline: March 1, 2025
- Finalists invited to submit applications: April 1, 2025
- Applications due: May 1, 2025
- Grants awarded: June 2025
- Grant period: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026
- Reporting deadlines:
  - December 31, 2025
  - July 15, 2026

## Recommendations to Improve Your Project Proposal

### 1. Acreage considerations and partnerships

NEEF understands that a 500-acre habitat restoration project will take longer than one year. Also, while we do not have a formal cash match requirement, we understand that restoration work will typically cost more than \$50,000-\$75,000 in grant funding. In both scenarios, including a partnership or a cash contribution from your organization can help you increase the amount of acres included in your proposal's scope. Your acreage that is directly impacted by the project is one of the highest priorities of this grant; therefore, expanding your acreage scope is a great strategy to improve your project proposal. There are several ways to do this.

For example, your organization is seeking funding for two conservation projects on your nature preserve. One is a 250-acre prairie that is two years into a restoration and the other is a 150-acre farmland area that you recently acquired to transform into a prairie. This 400-acre proposal is ineligible as a standalone proposal because it does not meet the acreage minimum.

However, your organization is responsible for maintenance of an additional 200 acres of prairie and wetland habitat on the nature preserve. By including direct maintenance activities on those 200 acres as an in-kind item on your budget, you can consider those acres as part of your project scope meaning you can submit a 600-acre project proposal.

Keep in mind that, in this scenario, the proposal is still ineligible if a) those maintenance activities are funded by an external grant or by a separate corporate sponsor instead of your organization's annual budget, or b) there will be no direct conservation-related activities on those 200 acres during the expected grant period.

If your organization does not have active restoration work on over 500 acres, NEEF encourages you to seek partnerships with similar organizations in your area to co-apply. In this scenario, your project could look like the Urban Prairies Project (UPP), a [2023 grantee](#) in the Denver, Colorado area.

The UPP is a collaborative project where Butterfly Pavilion coordinates a volunteer force and restoration support for several different municipalities in the suburbs of Denver. UPP volunteers and related conservation work cover more than 3,000 acres each year with direct conservation activities. This project did require a more complicated estimation of acreage impacted by the grant in order to remove any external grants or funding from other corporations or foundations.

Projects are still eligible even with external funding from those sources, but we ask that you calculate the percentage of funds and then use that percentage to cut your total project acreage by that amount. We use a percentage calculation instead of requiring organizations to mark where each dollar specifically goes since the most common destination is a general project budget.

You may also opt to leverage partnerships in a more traditional sense, where funding is used on multiple properties managed by multiple entities, as long as the project sites are managed under a single conservation plan for the same set of pollinator species. This requires the plots to be close enough to have the same conservation challenges and opportunities, typically within manageable driving distance.

## **2. Intentional Community Engagement**

NEEF's mission is to make the environment more accessible, relevant, and connected to people's daily lives. Our country's natural resources need to be stewarded and protected, but educating and involving the public along the way is a critical way to continue the legacy of conservation with future generations and ensure our impacts go beyond public lands alone. As you craft your proposal, remember to incorporate a variety of community engagement methods with diverse audiences into a variety of touchpoints on your project timeline.

Our grant reviewers would like to see a variety of community engagement methods in your proposal. Examples may include direct community involvement such as classes, nature hikes, or volunteer events. Indirectly, you can leverage interpretive signage or print materials in your visitor center.

NEEF's [Public Land Engagement Guides](#) provide practical tips and tools for incorporating accessibility, health and wellness, and environmental education into your work. Consider the ways your organization is already working with the public and how that can supplement your proposal, whether through expansion of those programs or a simple integration of project-related topics into your existing classes and tours. You should find touchpoints throughout the year to involve the public and volunteers.

The diversity of your audience is also important. Not everyone shares equal access to your public land, whether related to transportation, lack of trust in a particular community due to past or current inequities, or lack of a feeling of belonging on your lands. NEEF's [Accessibility Guide](#) has a section on creating inclusive events that can help you bridge this divide.

Reviewers also like to see organizations that are intentionally structuring their volunteer recruitment or community engagement to offset these inequities. Examples might include partnering with organizations like [Corazón Latino](#) that cater to historically marginalized groups, targeted volunteer recruitment in neighborhoods designated as a Justice40 disadvantaged community, or hiring a summer conservation crew that provides job training for youth from low-income communities.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **How many grants are awarded each year?**
  - In 2025, NEEF will award up to \$200,000 in Biodiversity Grant funding. The total number of grantees will depend on the amount requested by the top finalists, up to \$75,000 per grantee.
- **What does "shovel-ready" mean?**
  - Projects should be ready to implement within three months of the start date of this grant. If you are awaiting community input or landowner approval, we do not consider this to be shovel-ready.
- **What do you mean by "the project should directly impact pollinators?" How do I estimate impacted acreage, and what is considered eligible?**

Impacted acreage must have a **direct** conservation activity proposed, including but not limited to invasive species removal, planting, seed drilling, prescribed burn, etc. Ecosystem services to nearby plots should not be included in the tally. Funding should contribute to the overall restoration of each acre proposed in your total and should improve that plot for pollinator species, but we understand that it may not be marked "completed" in your goal of reaching pristine wildlife habitat. Habitat restoration is more than a one-year endeavor, and we regularly meet our grantees at a variety of moments along their restoration timeline.
- **Are volunteer efforts considered direct conservation activities?**

- This grant requires each acre to have a direct conservation activity take place on it for it to be considered “impacted.” Volunteers can be responsible for these activities—for example, a planned volunteer tree planting that covers 30 acres, a seasonal volunteer effort to remove invasive species mechanically over 100 acres each summer, or a targeted reseeding effort on two acres that requires manual dispersion by volunteers.
- **Do all 500 acres need to be contiguous?**
  - Projects may be on separate plots of land to meet the 500-acre minimum, but the plots should serve the same pollinator species and be managed under the same habitat management plan, ideally within a few miles of each other. In fact, it is encouraged to seek partners in your community with aligned habitat restoration goals to meet the acreage minimum.
- **Can we use the funds to expand on planned or active conservation projects?**
  - Acres of planned or active projects can be counted towards total acreage impacted. Please note that in your final total of acreage impacted, NEEF will evaluate the acreage made possible by funds from this grant and the organization’s general budget. We cannot count acres that are restored with other private funds or grants—this may negatively impact your project during evaluation. If funding from a variety of sources is used, including other private funds, we will ask you to calculate a percentage of the project funded by NEEF and unrestricted budget and apply that towards your initial project estimate of acres impacted.
- **When will I receive funding?**
  - Funding is paid in full at the start of the grant period. The grantee is asked to spend down funds throughout the grant period, with an interim report due after the first six months and a final report due 15 days after the grant period ends. The interim report is used to make NEEF aware of any changes to the proposed budget categories. A budget report is due with your final report, wherein you will need to show how much was spent from each category and if any changes were made. Receipts do not need to be submitted.
- **Should my proposed project be completed within the one-year grant period?**
  - NEEF encourages proposals from all stages of habitat restoration, and we understand it usually takes longer than one year to completely restore an area. The proposed project should have key moments within the grant period that show impact, which can be things like tree plantings, seeding, invasive species removal, and other conservation-related activities.
- **Is a native plant nursery program appropriate for this grant?**
  - No, because the project acreage eligibility is based on direct improvements to each specific acre. These projects are typically not compatible due to the high budget-per-acre nature of the work.



- **My organization partners with multiple agencies to maintain our public land site(s). Some of these agencies are private entities. Is this acceptable? Which agency should we list on the application (and subsequently obtain a partnership letter from)?**
  - It is very common for a public land site to be managed by multiple agencies. It is acceptable for your partner land site to be managed by both public and private partners so long as it is still open to the public and qualifies as a public land based on NEEF's definition. When prompted by the application, please include a partnership letter from the agency that you feel best represents your work and mission, and the one with which you work most frequently.
- **Who do I contact with additional questions?**
  - For all questions regarding the online application system, the requirements of the application itself, or the content or scope of your proposal, please contact [grantsadmin@neefusa.org](mailto:grantsadmin@neefusa.org).
  - Please visit NEEF's [Grant Glossary and FAQ Page](#) for additional information.

## Samples of Success

### **Returning the Regal Fritillary Butterfly to New York (Fund for the City of New York; New York, NY), 2024**

This project aims to enhance the grasslands of Freshkills Park in Staten Island, New York City, over one year, with the goal of reintroducing the regal fritillary butterfly, which has seen its habitat decline significantly and requires focused conservation efforts to ensure its survival. Freshkills Park is recognized as potentially the only suitable area in New York for regal fritillaries, offering a blend of protected grasslands and accessible public viewing locations.

Program staff will modify the existing 1000-acre habitat to support the re-introduction of regal fritillaries by planting preferred host plants like native violets and nectaring plants like eastern milkweed. The community will be engaged through a new K-12 and college-level curriculum on regal fritillary butterflies coupled with extensive volunteer involvement in planting and invasive species removal.

Volunteers will lead planting and invasive species removal efforts, potentially earning coursework credits in biodiversity monitoring. The project aims to foster stewardship of natural areas and raise awareness about the vital role of pollinators in human society and biodiversity conservation, particularly in a community park that was once the world's largest landfill.

### **Why this project was accepted:**

- High count of impacted acres.
- Benefits specific pollinator species classified as endangered.
- Key volunteer engagement through recruiting from communities that are designated as economically disadvantaged by the Justice40 economic screening tool.

### **From the River to the Ridges: Improving Pollinator Habitat Along the Salmon River (Salmon Valley Stewardship; Salmon, ID), 2024**

The goal of this project is to engage the community in critical monarch habitat expansion along 20 miles of the Salmon River corridor. The project site falls within the Salmon River Breaks Project Area, an 11,000-acre tract that has been treated with prescribed burns, mechanical thinning, and noxious weed removal for the last 13 years.

Salmon Valley Stewardship (SVS) volunteers will make and plant seedballs, which are essential to reseeding the rocky, steep terrain and shallow soils of the river valley, in addition to hand-pulling invasive plants and planting milkweed and other native pollinator-friendly plants along the 20-mile corridor. This work will directly improve 1,625 acres of pollinator habitat—about twice the area of Central Park in New York City.

In addition, the project provides a unique service-learning opportunity with the Salmon High School natural resources class, who will travel to the project sites and spend time with SVS staff learning about plant and pollinator identification and helping with habitat restoration through seedball application. Funding will also support four college internship positions and reach approximately 150 individuals through education and outreach opportunities.

### **Why this project was accepted:**

- High count of impacted acres.
- Long history of partnership with the Bureau of Land Management.
- Varied and scientifically sound restoration strategies.
- Clearly communicated key moments for youth education.

### **Enhancing Pollinator Habitats in Louisville's Urban Core (Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Louisville, Kentucky), 2023**

Olmsted Parks Conservancy works to combat invasive species, human impact, encroachment, and other challenges that jeopardize vital habitats within the city, with a particular focus on historically disinvested neighborhoods.

Funding from the 2023 Biodiversity Conservation Grant was used to enhance over 1,000 park acres and directly improve approximately 50 habitat acres across the Louisville parks system, including Chickasaw Park, where volunteers installed a “Butterfly and Bee” pollinator meadow to honor the park’s most famous user: Muhammad Ali, who trained there in his youth.

A network of specially trained park stewards, as well as hundreds of local students, corporate volunteers, and park neighbors, hosted several community engagement activities, including guided hikes, educational tours, two BioBlitz events, and community science data collection with Kentucky State University and the University of Louisville.

**Why this project was accepted:**

- Key focus on improvements to historically disinvested neighborhoods.
- Engagement opportunities for local Toyota Motor North America manufacturing plant employees and their families.
- Varied and scientifically sound restoration strategies including demonstration gardens to educate the public and provide habitat for pollinators.

**Additional Grant Writing Resources**

- [Understanding NEEF’s Grant Application Process](#)
- NEEF’s [Grant Glossary and General FAQ Page](#)
- [20 Tips for Grant Writing Success: USDA Fact Sheet](#)
- [10 Grant Writing Tips for a Strong Application: Farm Credit of the Virginias ACA Knowledge Center](#)

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**Phase 1 of the 2025 Biodiversity Conservation Grant application process opens February 1, 2025!**