



FY2026 LARGE GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

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The [Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership](#) (RFHP) is proud to announce its Request for Proposals for FY2026 funding of fish habitat enhancement projects in reservoirs.

The RFHP is a nationwide partnership established to promote and facilitate the conservation of habitat for fish and other aquatic species in reservoirs and is one of 20 Federally recognized [National Fish Habitat Partnerships](#) in the U.S. It is the only one dedicated to manmade reservoirs, which are products of society's need for water and its many uses. Many habitat impairments come along with reservoirs, and RFHP seeks projects that address large-scale habitat issues, implement best practices, foster partnerships across the landscape, and enrich quality of life through fishing and reservoir improvement.

AVAILABLE FUNDING

RFHP anticipates approximately \$250,000 in Federal funding and \$500,000 from the Bass Pro Shops Outdoor Fund for "on-the-ground" projects in FY2026. Grants will be capped at \$75,000, but grants for lesser amounts will be considered.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Grant requests must have a match of 1:1 from non-Federal sources. All contributions (cash and/or in-kind contributions) must be expended during the project period. Eligible costs will be paid for work done no earlier than contract approval. Grant funds may NOT be used for certain work (see Eligibility section). Applicants are strongly urged to discuss project ideas with the Coordinator prior to submitting proposals if questions about eligibility exist.

BASS PRO SHOPS OUTDOOR FUND

Grant requests must have a match of 1:3 (25%) from any source. The decision on availability of these funds will not be finalized until mid-year 2025. Grant funds must be used for a project with recreational fishing implications.

The online submission form will ask for confirmation of the applicant's interest in both funding sources, with a choice of "Federal Funds only," "Bass Pro Shops only," or "Either." Note that if you select "Either," you must propose a 1:1 non-Federal match and follow other Federal funding requirements.

MATCH REQUIREMENTS

Bear in mind that the grant request must include match of funds, time, or other resources. RFHP anticipates funding 8-12 projects @ \$10,000-\$75,000 each. Given the amount of funding available at this time, RFHP grants should be considered as a partial funding source for projects with multiple funding sources and partners, and special consideration will be given to projects with more than the minimum match. All contributions (cash and/or in-kind) must be expended during the project period. Eligible costs will be paid for work done no earlier than contract approval. Special consideration will be given to projects with more than the minimum match.

RFHP AND NFHP CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

FY2026 project proposals must fall under at least one of the [NFHP National Conservation Priorities](#). In addition, the RFHP prioritizes [habitat impairments](#) and subsequent work based on a nationwide survey of fish habitat in reservoirs. Region-specific impairments should be addressed, with emphasis on ultimate causes of impairment such as sedimentation and eutrophication. Likewise, RFHP prioritizes work that benefits important sport fish, and a [region-specific list is available for your reference](#). Finally, RFHP emphasizes projects that not only improve fish habitat, but also enhance public access and knowledge of that habitat. Projects that engage the community through partnerships and outreach will receive special consideration.

Briefly, RFHP's priorities include:

- Protect, restore and enhance fish habitat in reservoir systems to support productive fisheries and healthy aquatic ecosystems including techniques to account for climate change effects on reservoir fisheries habitat;
- Continue to develop/refine the science behind reservoir habitat conservation/restoration, including development and communication of best management practices;
- Manage reservoir systems to provide, protect and enrich quality of life for the American people;
- Develop and foster partnerships that implement landscape-scale approaches to the conservation of fish habitat in reservoir systems;
- Develop and sustain institutional arrangements and sources of funding to support the long-term conservation of fish habitat in reservoir systems;
- Support education and outreach initiatives that advance public awareness and understanding of the value of healthy reservoir systems.

Complete details of RFHP's strategy and priorities can be found here: <https://www.friendsofreservoirs.com/about-us/partnership/governance-documents/strategic-plan-2/>.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Eligible applicants include state and Federal governmental agencies; non-governmental organizations (e.g., sportsman's groups, community associations, watershed user groups, cooperatives, civic groups), municipalities, universities, schools, state and tribal governments. Projects must be on public reservoirs. Projects on reservoirs with no or limited public access are not eligible. Applicants must demonstrate an ability to utilize System for Award Management (SAM), Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP), and Grant Solutions.

Project Duration: Project objectives must be met within the project timeline. Projects with a timeline of two years or less are encouraged but large-scale projects may require a longer timeline. Funding for FY2026 projects will not be appropriated until after January 2026 and will likely not be available to project leaders until March 2026 or later. Actual project start date will be the date funding documents are signed. We suggest April 1, 2026 as a reasonable start date and June 30, 2028 as a project end date.

Eligible Activities: Types of eligible activities for Federal funding may include 1) time spent for project planning, directing project activities, site assessments, travel to and from project, and project oversight, 2) equipment, 3) earthwork and materials, 4) short-term monitoring/evaluation, 5) outreach to advance conservation, and f) easements with an operations and maintenance plan. Projects should meet the RFHP 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. Salaries of full-time employees may be part of the grant request as long as they are for only

time spent directly on planning, administration and/or “on the ground” work on the project. Grant funds may **NOT** be used to support overhead, political advocacy, deficit reduction activities, projects that have already been completed, or for activities that constitute legally required mitigation for the adverse effects of an activity regulated or otherwise governed by state or Federal law. Applicants are strongly urged to discuss project ideas with the Coordinator prior to submitting proposals if questions about eligibility exist. Generally, these eligibility guidelines apply to any grant coordinated by RFHP, even if they are not Federally sourced.

Projects that develop and/or evaluate reservoir fisheries habitat restoration techniques are encouraged. Proposed projects can be focused on habitat issues in the reservoir proper and/or in watersheds above the reservoir and/or tailwaters below. We suggest that you review the Reservoir Partnership’s Best Management Practices manual “Reservoir Habitat Management” that can be found at <https://www.friendsofreservoirs.com/science/best-management-practices-manual/> for assistance in project planning.

All proposed projects must meet the following criteria:

1. Financial match - match may be in the form of in-kind support or cash and must be spent during the project period.
2. Identifies biological, ecological, or other benefits of the project.
3. Provides measurable project goals and objectives
4. Describe the capabilities and experience of project sponsor to successfully implement the project.
5. Monitoring and evaluation measures must be included as part of the project. We suggest that these measures focus on the habitat restoration work accomplished rather than fish response to the restoration because that is of a longer duration and more difficult to measure.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

Final projects will be selected for funding following review by the Regional Working Groups. Members of each Regional Working Group (geographically aligned with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Association regions) will review and score project proposals based on the criteria listed below:

- Aquatic habitat restoration principles and priorities
- Clarity and feasibility of objectives and methods
- Impact on quality of life and community
- Leveraging of partnerships and additional funding

Each of the Regional Working Groups will submit their prioritized list of projects to the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership Executive Committee for final approval. Applicants will be made aware of their proposal’s ranking shortly thereafter, but final approval of projects is based on funding availability. Given that funding is from Federal sources, environmental compliance documents (Federal Assistance Biological Assistance/ ESA Evaluation Form, NEPA Exclusion and National Historic Preservation Act Form) are required. Successful applicants will be advised on how to fill out these documents. The RFHP Coordinator is available to assist in this process.

Previously Funded Projects: To maximize our ability to fund new high-quality proposals while also supporting the high-quality habitat restoration work that is ongoing on previously funded projects, we will continue to accept proposals from previously funded proposals **but** will only accept proposals at 50% of the original funding request. A 3rd proposal with similar objectives will only be accepted at 25% of the original proposal funding request. Hopefully the pool of local project partners has grown to offset a reduced level of funding from RFHP. However, if objectives of the new proposal are significantly different than those of previously funded projects (different project on the same reservoir), the proposal will be treated as a new project.

[Applications are due by 11:59pm Central time on February 10, 2025.](#)

All applications for the RFHP are submitted through RFHP’s online application portal at <https://www.friendsofreservoirs.com/grants/submit-a-project/large-grant/>. A guide for completing the form is provided [here](#), and all applicants are encouraged to contact the Coordinator if they have any questions about the process. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

For questions relative to project development and submission contact: Doug Nygren, Coordinator, Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership; 316-213-1975; doug.nygren@gmail.com

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Projects will be scored according to criteria in three categories:

- Aquatic Habitat Restoration/Protection
- Quality of Life
- Partnerships, Fund Leveraging, and Promotion

CATEGORY I: AQUATIC HABITAT RESTORATION/PROTECTION (155 POSSIBLE POINTS)

PRIORITY REGIONAL RESERVOIR HABITAT IMPAIRMENTS

RFHP completed a nationwide reservoir habitat impairment assessment in 2013. Impairments were prioritized by region of the country (see map and table in Appendix B). Proposals will score more points if addressing the higher regional habitat impairments (table in Appendix B).

- Clearly state the impairment(s) that the project is focusing on and state how project will address the impairment(s). Direct effects of work on a cause of habitat impairment will score higher than indirect effects. Addressing the causes of fish habitat impairment (e.g., sedimentation) will score higher than addressing symptoms of that ultimate cause.
- Cite a management plan that identifies the impairment (if available and include a link if published on the web) Note: contact the management agency to see if a written plan addressing habitat impairments exists and state clearly in the proposal whether or not you are addressing habitat issues identified in a management plan.

CLARITY AND FEASIBILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

Objectives must be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable within the grant period, and realistic.

- Clearly state the objective(s) of the project. Objectives should include how the project will address the impairment and what deliverables will be used to determine if the objectives are met. See Appendix C for assistance in developing high-quality objectives. Examples of objectives include:
 - To triple the area covered by artificial structure in three coves of Lake ABC by June 30, 2026
 - To install at least five nutrient retention wetlands in the watershed of Lake DEF by June 30, 2027
 - To increase angler catch rates of crappie above 1.5 fish/angler-hour during ice fishing season, in treated areas, by June 30, 2027

Deliverables are the tangible things that the project will produce to enable the objectives to be achieved. Be sure that project deliverables align with the objectives stated.

- Examples of deliverables include:
 - Siltation/turbidity and excessive nutrients
 - Amount (area or length) of riparian area stabilized;
 - Amount of sedimentation reduced (rate, tons/ac etc.);
 - Number of sediment retention structures installed or % base load treated;
 - Number of watershed BMP's implemented (sewer pump-outs, farming practice improvements, pet waste policies, removal of impervious surfaces etc.);
 - Amount (area) of wetlands created, protected or restored for nutrient removal;
 - Amount of nutrients removed (could include deactivation with alum or physical removal by excavation).
 - Degraded shorelines and/or loss of sensitive habitats
 - Amount (length or linear ft²) of shoreline wetlands or submergent/emergent vegetation protected, created or restored;
 - Amount (length or linear ft²) of shoreline habitat protected, created or restored;

- Amount (area) of cove habitat protected, created or restored.
 - Structural habitat
 - Amount of structure added;
 - Number and size of brush piles, rock piles, etc.
 - Number of native plants planted along with number and size of structures built to protect plants from herbivory;
 - Acres of nuisance/invasive plants treated/removed
 - Changes in water quality parameters;
 - Changes in fish sampling catch rates in affected area,
 - Changes in rates of recruitment, or population size structure;
 - Changes in angler catch rates, harvest rates, and measures of directed fishing effort;
 - Measures of recreational use or economic benefit.
 - Water Regime
 - Negotiations held with water management agencies;
 - Fisheries-favorable water level management plan/water release schedule secured;
 - Water rights secured;
 - Fish loss barriers installed.
 - Connectivity
 - Acres of cove/backwater habitat reconnected to main body of reservoir;
 - Miles of stream/river reconnected to body of reservoir;
 - Barriers to upstream migration removed.
- Describe the type and duration of monitoring/evaluation following completion of the restoration efforts. Given the preferred project duration (2-3 years), some aspects of project monitoring may be beyond the scope of project funding but will be the responsibility of project partners. **Project monitoring and evaluation is a major component of the proposal scoring process and should be an integral part of proposal development.**
 - Include duration of monitoring program;
 - Include a brief description of what, if any, baseline information is available.
 - Scoring will be based on:
 - assessing the biological, ecological, or other results of the habitat protection, restoration, or enhancement activities
 - reflect appropriate changes to the fish habitat conservation project if the assessment substantiates that the fish habitat conservation project objectives are not being met;
 - identify improvements to existing fish populations, recreational fishing opportunities, and the overall economic benefits for the local community of the fish habitat conservation project.
 - Will project deliverables impact potential climate impacts on reservoir habitat conditions?
 - Examples of deliverables include water level management adaptations to offset increasing drought conditions, littoral habitat restoration methods aimed at “chasing the shoreline” as water recedes, native aquatic plant restoration.

CATEGORY II: QUALITY OF LIFE (50 PTS)

The RFHP is committed to advancing the quality of life for all species. We believe that reservoirs in conjunction with their downstream and watershed components – what we term the *reservoir system* – can, through considered and strategic conservation, provide for the needs of both human and aquatic communities. Water that is stored in reservoirs and regulated by dams provides a number of essential benefits to society, including water supply (agricultural and domestic), navigation, hydroelectric power production, flood risk reduction, outdoor recreation, sport fishing, tourism, fish and wildlife habitat, and an aesthetically pleasing setting. Water from reservoirs is used to improve crop yields, provide drinking water, generate renewable and environmentally clean energy, and offer drought and flood mitigation. These reservoir services help sustain our economy and our civilization.

- Would the habitat project in question help the RFHP achieve its objectives to provide, protect and enrich quality of life for all Americans?
 - Maintain or restore water quality in reservoir systems;

- Promote enhanced access, environmental amenities and nature experiences and opportunities on and adjacent to reservoir to enhance public awareness of the value of reservoirs;
- Promote conservation of fish and aquatic resources to boaters and other water-based recreationists;
- Support recreational industries and related economic activities that advance watershed health and contribute to conservation of fisheries and aquatic habitats in reservoir systems.
- See Appendix C for examples of criteria for quality objectives.
- Would the project restore/enhance habitat that would directly support an economically important or high-use fishery (as documented in past studies or the published literature) or other types of fisheries within the project area? Provide any socio-economic data [dollar value of the fishery and/or the recreational value (in dollars) of the reservoir to the local/regional/state area] that are available. Creel data (angler use) or visitor data (traffic counters), if available, should be included. **List the targeted sport fishes that the project is intended to affect in order of priority**
- Would project outcomes lead to improvements in water quality for human health, recreational use, or ecological health of the reservoir system? Be specific in how this project directly or indirectly will positively affect water quality.
- Would the project outcomes help to mitigate the effects of climate change, i.e, increased water temperature, decreased water storage due to more frequent and more intense drought.

Check out <https://www.friendsofreservoirs.com/science/best-management-practices-manual/chapter-13-climate-change/> for additional information on climate impacts on reservoir habitat.

CATEGORY III: PARTNERSHIPS, FUND LEVERAGING, AND PROMOTION (90 PTS)

As a national entity, we can fill a unique niche. Operating across all States, and functioning as a system-based rather than geographic-rooted Fish Habitat Partnership of the NFHAP, we are well positioned to:

- Identify national and regional reservoir conservation priorities and support the reservoir priorities of other partnerships;
- Network and connect people, ideas, and technologies to enhance the science and practice of reservoir and fisheries management;
- Collect, refine, and process information for reservoir and fisheries management;
- Tap new sources of funding for strategic reservoir protection, restoration and enhancement;
- Work collaboratively with all participating partners to support the continued development of reservoir habitat protection/restoration programs, including (1) the incorporation of reservoir conservation issues and priorities into those plans and (2) the identification of Regional Priority Reservoir Habitat Impairments;
- Guide and influence public opinion and public policy on the importance of *healthy reservoir systems* to quality of life, national security, and human welfare.

Where our role ends, however, is with the implementation of on-the-ground fish habitat conservation at the reservoir level. Our mission is to catalyze and enable strategic fish habitat conservation by addressing priority reservoir habitat impairments. To make this happen, we adopt a “bottom-up” approach; we select and implement conservation projects by supporting local, hands-on efforts to protect, restore and enhance key fish habitats.

- Would the habitat project in question help the RFHP achieve its objectives to establish partnerships between management agencies and reservoir stakeholders; leverage outside sources of funding; and advance public awareness and understanding of the value of healthy reservoir systems?
 - Expand the partnership base of Friends of Reservoirs to include additional States, relevant Federal and tribal agencies, non-profit and NGO’s, recreational industries and industry associations, reservoir and power generation authorities, reservoir homeowner associations, municipalities and local businesses, local watershed associations and conservation groups, irrigators, and others affected by reservoirs.
 - Promote or add to the information on the “Science” page on www.friendsofreservoirs.com as a tool for reservoir management agencies to prioritize habitat management efforts.
 - Support and participate in watershed planning initiatives to promote implementation of best management practices for conservation of fisheries and fish habitat in reservoir systems.

- List all partners involved in the project
 - Include type of partner, i.e., state, Federal, non-governmental agency (NGO), municipality, user-groups (bass clubs, conservation organization, lake associations), private company.
 - To be considered a partner they must appear in the budget table and provide either cash or in-kind contributions to the project.
 - Identify the degree of involvement that the state fish and wildlife management agency has with the project (**letter of support from state fish and wildlife agency must accompany the proposal**).
- Develop a budget and include funds leveraged from all partners (list all partners and the amount of cash and/or in-kind contribution from each partner separately in the budget table. Cash and in-kind contributions must be identified as “Federal” or “Federal funds”).