

Release date: May 16, 2013

Proposal Due: 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 13, 2013

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation
SFY 2014 Ecosystem Restoration Grants

Request for Proposals

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VTDEC) is pleased to announce the state fiscal year (SFY) 2014 Request for Proposals (RFP) for grants under the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP). These grants are supported by capital construction funds contained in the fiscal year 2014 state budget. The ERP's goal in awarding these grants is to reduce surface water pollution from runoff containing nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) and sediment. The VTDEC anticipates this round to be the only opportunity to apply for FY14 ERP grants. However, VTDEC does anticipate releasing the SFY2015 RFP in January, 2014. All future funding cycles will keep to a January RFP release date.

While budgets for proposals are expected to vary widely, typical project budgets range between \$10,000 and \$75,000. Funding for projects is contingent upon availability of Ecosystem Restoration and Protection Capital Construction funds.

Proposals are due by 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 13, 2013.

Project Targeting

The intent of the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) grant funds is to reduce nutrient (phosphorus and nitrogen) and sediment loading into Vermont surface waters from "nonpoint sources." (Nonpoint sources are often referred to as polluted runoff from the landscape.) The funds are not intended to control discharges from point sources that have or need a regulatory permit. The ERP is interested in supporting, in this funding cycle, the implementation of projects identified in previous ERP-supported projects, and are aligned with priorities established in Tactical Basin Plans.

Project proposals should focus on one of the following target sectors:

- River-based: Project proposals that incorporate the science of fluvial geomorphology in river corridor management decisions to improve equilibrium (natural stability) conditions;
- Stormwater-based: Project proposals that mitigate the effects of stormwater runoff from developed land areas, including downtowns and backroads; promote Low Impact Development (LID) and Green Infrastructure practices;
- Surface Waters and Riparian Lands Restoration Focused: Project proposals that restore wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas (lands adjacent to streams, lakes, and wetlands) predominantly using native vegetation as a nonstructural approach to correct and prevent erosion;
- Agriculture/Land Stewardship-based: Project proposals that reduce environmental impacts to surface waters via best management practice implementation on agricultural and forest lands.

Eligibility Criteria

The source of the Ecosystem Restoration Program grant funds is state capital construction appropriations. **These funds are restricted to tangible capital construction investments, but may include the feasibility analysis, design, and engineering directly associated with a tangible capital construction investment.**

Eligible:

A proposed project is eligible for ERP funding, if it meets all of the following criteria:

- Reduces Nutrient and Sediment Pollution: Designed to improve or protect water quality from *runoff containing nutrient (phosphorus and nitrogen) and sediment pollution*;
- Addresses Unregulated Nonpoint Sources: Focused on activities, actions, or management practices to control runoff that are not specifically required by a regulatory permit;
- Targets High Priority Needs: Identified as *high priorities* for nutrient and sediment reduction in relevant Tactical Basin Plans, or, if possible, relevant state-endorsed project prioritization methodologies being integrated in the Tactical Basin Planning process:
 - For River Projects: river corridor planning;
 - For Stormwater Mitigation Projects: stormwater master planning; **recently released draft guidance on stormwater master planning is now available on the ERP website:**
<http://www.vtwaterquality.org/grants.htm>
 - For Vermont Better Back Road Projects: Back Road Inventories, stormwater master planning;
 - For Agricultural Projects: previously defined Critical Source Areas at farms.
- Is Consistent with the State’s Surface Water Management Strategy: Explicitly addresses stressor(s) described in the Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy;
- Focuses on Implementation;
- Is Considered Eligible for Capital Construction Funds: Focused on implementation of nonpoint source pollution reduction projects that have only a minor, if any, emphasis on education and outreach, monitoring, and long-term maintenance;
- Provides “stewardship assurances” -- assurances that the project will meet its functional life: Describes steps the applicant or other project partner will take to assure that the proposed project will be in place and operational long enough to meet, at a minimum, its expected functional or useful life. For example, the grant proposal should describe a commitment, if funded, to include within the project grant agreement: (a) the development and implementation of a stewardship agreement or maintenance contract over the design life of the project; (b) the entity responsible for carrying out that stewardship agreement or maintenance contract; and (c) an annual statement, submitted to ANR, that certifies compliance with the stewardship agreement or maintenance contract.

Eligible but will be Considered Lower Priority:

This list identifies the type of project that may help to achieve some water quality improvement, but will likely not meet Vermont’s highest priority sediment and nutrient pollution reduction needs. These projects will be considered eligible, but will be evaluated as meeting lower priority objectives:

- Lower Priority Category of Projects: An activity or action that is identified in the Tactical Basin Plan or other relevant planning document but is not considered high priority in reducing nutrient and sediment pollution;
- Improvements to Stream Crossings: The sheer magnitude of undersized roadway culverts, the Vermont stream alteration permit now requiring sizing of structures based on river equilibrium (or natural stability) conditions, and the localized impacts relative to other competing needs require VTDEC to make this category of need a lower priority for ERP funding;
- Hard Stabilization of Streambanks and Shorelands: An action that seeks to stabilize an eroding streambed or bank using standard structural channelization practices (rather than the non-structural approaches that use native vegetation) is a lower priority, since such an action most likely does not address the underlying reasons for the instability;
- Land Protection: A project that principally involves riparian land conservation that does not include a river corridor easement;
- Alternative Funding Available: A project that has access to other sources of capital funding.

Ineligible:

Although the following list represents a project that may be important and even necessary in the collective effort to achieve the state's water quality goals, it may be either required as part of a regulatory permitting program or deemed not "capital construction fund-eligible" and *cannot be considered* for ERP funding. A project that is ineligible for ERP funding if it meets one of these criteria:

- **Regulation for the Discharge Exists:** Addresses discharges that are or could be regulated as point source discharges (e.g., stormwater permits of municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4);
- **Resource Already Protected:** Involves protection projects that target land already protected by regulation (such as a Class II or I wetland);
- **Capital Construction Funds-Ineligible:** Primarily focuses on one or more of the following:
 - **Education and Outreach-Based:** A major part of the proposed project is to provide broad-based education/outreach, such as outreach to municipalities to adopt water quality friendly zoning;
 - **Monitoring:** Monitoring that is not directly required for planning or implementation of the capital project;
 - **Long-term Maintenance:** Conducting long-term operation and maintenance activities (such as, controlling invasive species or replanting a previously funded vegetated buffer restoration project). The only exception is for minor operation and maintenance activities necessary during a reasonable post-construction period to complete the project.

The Ecosystem Restoration Grant Program and the Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy

Proposed projects must be consistent with the program goals specified in the Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy (<http://www.vtwaterquality.org/swms.html>) and meet all of the eligibility criteria listed below. Two years ago, the VTDEC began to transition to a process of using tactical basin planning as the principle means of identifying and prioritizing nutrient and sediment load reduction projects for Ecosystem Restoration Grant funding. The VTDEC will continue with that process of aligning the ERP Grant Program with tactical basin planning. This process enables the program to better target state funding to those projects identified and prioritized through that process:

<http://www.vtwaterquality.org/planning.htm>.

Funding Categories

VTDEC is continuing to use the following three broad categories for Ecosystem Restoration projects:

- **Phase I: Project Feasibility Analysis.** This phase involves site assessments, data analysis, project prioritization, infrastructure mapping, and project planning and design; **(targeting 15% of available funding)**;
- **Phase II: Project Implementation.** This phase accomplishes ecosystem restoration through the construction or implementation of a high priority project identified in: (a) a tactical basin plan, river corridor plan, TMDL implementation plan, or a stormwater master plan; (b) a previous phase developed under a prior Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) grant; or (c) an equivalent plan; **(targeting approximately 70% of available funding)**;
- **Land Conservation/Easement Acquisition Funding Category.** This category ensures permanent protection of critical natural resource functions where no existing protections (including regulations) exist. Projects may include river corridor protection in areas suspected to be sources of phosphorus and sediment loading to re-establish equilibrium (or natural stability) conditions and lakeshore protection to enhance shoreland and littoral zone function; **(targeting approximately 15% of available funding)**.

Proposal Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used to determine funding. Proposals will be evaluated using eligibility criteria, "basic" and "technical" criteria, and a flood resilience/clean water incentive. (The scoring, based on percentage points, for each criterion is indicated in parentheses):

Eligibility Criteria. Failure to meet eligibility criteria will result in an automatic denial of the proposal:

- **Eligibility Criteria (Yes/No).** As a pre-requisite for ERP grant funding, a proposed project:
 - Must meet all seven (7) eligibility requirements described above;
 - Must not be ineligible under the three (3) ineligibility criteria described above.
- **Consensus (Yes/No).** The VTDEC Basin Coordinator must achieve consensus with any relevant VTDEC staff that the proposed project is a priority for ERP capital construction funding.
- **Application is Complete (Yes/No).** The applicant must include in its submission:
 - A table of performance measures;
 - An itemized budget.

Basic Criteria (Total Percentage Points = 15%):

- **Coordination with Relevant Local Partners (Yes/No; (Percentage Points = 5%)).** The applicant has secured local support for the project. For implementation projects, the municipality and/or landowner(s) is committed, and has conceptually agreed to participate in the project;
- **Technical Capability (Yes/No; (Percentage Points = 5%)).** The applicant can accomplish the project independently with little VTDEC staff assistance, or if assistance is necessary (e.g., quality assurance support for geomorphic assessments as part of a river corridor planning project), the applicant has received concurrence that VTDEC staff can support the project within the proposed timeline;
- **Match (Yes/No; (Percentage Points = 5%)).** Incorporation of additional funding sources, cash, donations, in-kind contributions, or other resources in a way that substantially expands the project scope and environmental benefits.

Technical Criteria (Total Percentage Points = 70%):

- **Consistent with Tactical Basin Planning, Targeting High Priority Needs (Percentage Points = 60%).**
The project should be described as a high priority in a VTDEC tactical basin plan. If a current tactical basin plan does not yet exist, the project should point to a river corridor plan, the implementation phase of a project identification/development grant that VTDEC had previously funded, a stormwater master plan, or an equivalent planning tool. For projects in the White River (Basin 9) and So. Lake Champlain Basin (Basins 2, 4), applicants should consult the most recent tactical plan drafts.
- **Likelihood of Success (Percentage Points = 10%).** The necessary mechanisms for success and longevity of the project have been identified. The project includes steps to maximize the likelihood of success, such as treatment of all stressors contributing to the water quality problem, or incorporating mitigating actions into the design and implementation of the project. These mechanisms will be somewhat specific to the type of project, but generally include:
 - **For Stormwater Projects:** Site and project design allow for ease of access and maintenance, inspection, and monitoring; a maintenance plan and responsibility for maintenance have been established;
 - **For River Corridor Projects:** Minimized likelihood that the completed project will fail due to anticipated channel adjustments in the river reach or the watershed; ability to demonstrate that the project will not lead or contribute to channel instability and increased pollutant loading from upland, upstream or downstream reaches;
 - **For Wetlands and Lake Shoreland Projects:** Contributing stressors have been identified and mitigated to the extent practicable;
 - **For Roadway Projects:** Projects have been identified through comprehensive planning, as part of a Tactical Basin Plan, the Vermont Better Backroads Program, stormwater master planning, or equivalent;
 - **For Agriculture Projects:** Projects have exhausted other available funding mechanisms, including but not limited to programs available through the Agency of Agriculture (e.g., Conservation

Reserve Enhancement Program, Best Management Practices) and/or the Natural Resources Conservation Service (e.g., Environmental Quality Incentives Program).

Flood Resilience and Clean Water Incentive (Total Percentage Points = 15%):

Proposals for projects in municipalities that have taken the active step of adopting river corridor, floodplain and/or shoreland protection bylaws to reduce flood hazards will be evaluated using an additional weight of 15%. (This added weight is an incentive for municipalities to take steps proactively to improve local flood resilience and water quality, consistent with Act 110 (2010)).

VTDEC Considerations (Bonus Percentage Points =on a sliding scale up to 10%):

The VTDEC reserves the right to award additional bonus points to a project proposal in order to incorporate other important considerations, such as regional equity or urgency of need. Project proposals reflecting an “average” need would not receive any additional bonus percentage points.

Who May Apply

Vermont municipalities, local or regional governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, citizens groups, and state agencies are eligible to receive Ecosystem Restoration Program grants. Internally generated VTDEC proposals will also need to follow this process. Individuals, for-profit entities, and federal agencies are not eligible to receive funds directly, but may partner with an eligible project sponsor.

Please note: a single entity or organization may submit ***no more than two proposals*** (each containing no more than one project) in response to this request. ***Letters of support are not necessary.***

Contents of Proposals

Proposals are to be no more than three (3) pages in length (not including a budget and map) and must address each of the following:

- **Project Description and Technical Criteria:** Briefly describe the project, including: project goals, tasks to be performed, and the environmental concerns or needs that will be addressed. Project description should address the elements of the technical criteria, described above. Specifically, the project should:
 - Identify the target sector (river-based, stormwater-based, surface water/riparian restoration-focused, or agriculture/land stewardship-based);
 - Identify funding category (Phase I: project feasibility analysis, Phase II: implementation, or land conservation/easement acquisition category);
 - Explain how the proposed project will address or avoid a water quality problem related to excessive sediment and/or nutrient loading;
 - Indicate how the project proposal is consistent with the priorities described in a VTDEC tactical basin plan, or, any other relevant and equivalent planning tool;
 - Describe how the project meets the “likelihood of success” criteria described above under “technical criteria;” and,
 - Identify key staff who will be involved in the project and their respective roles and/or functions.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Whether the project applicant meets each of the seven (7) eligibility criteria, confirms that the project is not ineligible under the three (3) ineligibility criteria, has discussed the project with a VTDEC Watershed Coordinator, and submits an application that contains a table of performance measures, an itemized budget, a certificate of insurance, and copy of its procurement procedures.
- **Basic Criteria:** The proposal describes the local support for the project, the degree to which the applicant can accomplish the project independent of VTDEC involvement, and whether a match is provided. The budget should show the match;

- **A Table of Performance Measures, Timeline to Complete Measures, and Payment per Deliverable:** Please provide a table of task-based performance measures and associated project deliverables, anticipated time line for completing each of the performance measures and the overall project, and payment per deliverable. **Please note that PARTIAL PAYMENTS FOR EACH PERFORMANCE MEASURE ARE NO LONGER allowed.**
- **An itemized budget:** Please provide an itemized budget, including project costs, estimates for personnel (including hourly rates), overhead, other direct costs and subcontractor costs, and any matching funds (not required but encouraged). All sources and amounts of financial match should be listed in the budget. See *Performance Measures Table and Itemized Budget* under SFY 2014 Ecosystem Restoration Grants at the following website for example: <http://www.vtwaterquality.org/grants.htm>.
- **Flood Resilience and Clean Water Incentive:** Describe whether the municipality, for which the project is located, has taken or is taking to bolster flood resilience and improve water quality, such as adopting river corridor, floodplain, and/or shoreland protection bylaws that are equivalent to the State's model flood and fluvial erosion hazard bylaws ;
- **Map:** Provide a map of the project location and/or illustrative photos. Maps and photos do not count toward the three-page limit.

Issuance of a Press Release upon Grant Award

Please note that the grant recipients will be expected to issue a news announcement to local media while the project is in progress or upon completion. The news release should describe the project and sources of funding and include a VTDEC logo where appropriate.

Added Guidance on Completing the Grant Application and Information Needed in Processing Award

Please refer to the ERP website for model performance measures table and itemized budget:

<http://www.vtwaterquality.org/grants.htm>

VTDEC's Project Review Committee will review proposals and select projects for full or partial funding. Applicants of selected projects will then be asked to finalize performance-based work plans for approval.

Prior to the execution of a grant award, please know that grant recipients will be required to provide the following documents:

- A copy of its procurement procedures (a model procurement procedure is also on the ERP website);
- A certificate of insurance to show that the minimum coverage is in effect. Grant recipients shall name the State of Vermont and its officers and employees as an additional insured:
 - Workers Compensation (In accordance with the laws of the State of Vermont);
 - General Liability and Property Damage (\$1,000,000 per occurrence);
 - Automotive Liability (\$1,000,000 combined single limit).

Proposal Submission

External and VTDEC internal applicants must contact the VTDEC Watershed Coordinators for the applicable river basin during the preparation of proposals. The Watershed Coordinators will be able to link applicants to the appropriate technical assistance and guidance for developing projects that best meet the priorities and review criteria of the Ecosystem Restoration Grants Program. A map of Vermont river basins with links to contact information for the Watershed Coordinators in each basin is available at: http://www.vtwaterquality.org/planning/htm/pl_basins.htm

Proposals should be submitted in electronic format (Portable Document Format (PDF) preferred), clearly marked, and emailed to Heather Bullett (heather.bullett@state.vt.us). The **deadline to receive submissions is 4:30 pm on Thursday, June 13, 2013.**

For additional information or questions regarding the proposal process, please contact Heather Bullett at 802-490-6112 or Kari Dolan at: 802-490-6113 or kari.dolan@state.vt.us.