

NEWS

GRANTS TO ACCELERATE WATERSHED PROTECTION

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC

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The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program's second-year of awards expands the pace of proactive watershed protection in the U.S. through conservation and improved stewardship of hundreds of thousands of acres of lands that provide drinking water, flood risk reduction, and an array of economic and environmental benefits. The sixteen awards total \$2.75 million and will benefit organizations and partnerships in 18 states. The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program was conceived by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water (EPA) and launched in late 2015. EPA co-funds the program with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U. S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment), which manages the partnership.

"This group of grant recipients reflects the remarkable creativity that local organizations show for protecting their drinking water sources and watersheds," said Carlton Owen, the Endowment's President and CEO. "Their efforts are voluntary, rooted in partnerships, and will benefit the economy, culture, and environment of their communities."

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program's goal is to "accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds." EPA and the Endowment each provide \$625,000 annually for grants in a program that is planned to run for at least six years. NRCS has provided an additional \$1.5 million over two years. In this second year, the program received 74 applications requesting more than \$17 million.

Grants focused on three categories: 1) short-term funding to leverage larger financing for targeted watershed protection; 2) funds to help build the capacity of local organizations for sustainable, long-term watershed protection; and 3) new techniques or approaches that advance the state of practice for watershed protection and that can be replicated across the country.

The sixteen funded proposals are:

Supporting Healthy Watersheds and Communities in Downeast Maine - \$150,000 over three years to the Downeast Conservation Network, a consortium of 11 organizations including land trusts, educational institutions, and applied conservation organizations, with the goal of conserving up to 15,000 acres and increasing public support for watershed protection through trainings and community workshops, coordination, better understanding of the economic value of healthy watersheds, and a shared regional vision for watershed protection.

Niagara River Watershed Headwater Protection Initiative, New York - \$300,000 over three years to the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper to increase their capacity to protect priority upper watershed lands and secure a source water protection fund. Using a “circuit rider” model, the program will engage more than 80 communities to accelerate protection and management measures on up to 433,000 acres of source water lands in the Niagara River Watershed and help ensure clean drinking water for 11 million people while supporting healthy communities and economies.

Demonstrating Stream Health Improvements from Healthy Watershed Actions in Maryland - \$40,000 to AKRF, an environmental consulting firm, which will work in collaboration with Versar and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, to examine the relationship between land protection and stream health improvements that have been achieved in Maryland from 1995-2015. The comprehensive Maryland Biological Stream Survey will be used to compare stream condition in both protected and unprotected watersheds.

Developing Programs for Easements and Forester Enrollment in Pennsylvania - \$175,000 over three years to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to develop two interrelated programs: a forest conservation easement program designed to conserve in perpetuity up to 100,000 working forest acres within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and a forest practitioner enrollment program for landowners who implement sustainable management practices that will improve forest health and water quality.

Increasing Capacity for Strategic Land Conservation in the Gulf Coast Region - \$140,000 over three years to The Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, a coalition of 25 land trusts working cooperatively in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. The plan is to secure sustainable financial support to build their Gulf Coast Land Conservation Assistance Fund, a program that helps land trusts develop land conservation projects. The Partnership’s initial goal with this award is to secure an additional \$1,000,000 for the Project Assistance Fund and their ultimate goal is to help protect up to 75,000 high-priority acres in the Gulf Region over the next several years.

Catawba-Wateree Clean Water Initiative, North Carolina and South Carolina – \$175,000 over three years to the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina to work with 18 water utilities, Duke Energy, and stakeholders from the mountain headwaters to the coastal plain to help conserve up to 12,000 acres of land prioritized as high impact for future water security and to create a sustainable source water protection fund for the Catawba-Wateree River Basin. The Catawba-Wateree is a source of drinking water, recreation, and energy for more than two million people.

Protecting South Carolina's Winyah Bay Watershed - \$150,000 over two years to American Rivers to create a source water protection fund and help protect healthy forests, floodplain wetlands, and wildlife habitats along the Great Pee Dee, Little Pee Dee, Black, and Waccamaw Rivers in the Winyah Bay watershed. These rivers are the primary drinking water supply for over 500,000 people including those in the Florence, Myrtle Beach, and the greater Grand Strand areas of South Carolina. The rivers are well known for outstanding recreational opportunities and contribute significantly to the regional economy by supporting industrial water users and ecotourism businesses.

Collaborating to Protect Ohio's Healthy Central Lake Erie Basin Watersheds - \$200,000 over three years to the Chagrin River Watershed Partners to leverage \$11 million of land protection funds that are projected to help protect up to 425 miles of streams and 30,000 acres of land within Ohio’s Central Lake

Erie watershed in partnership with the Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative, West Creek Conservancy, and Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

Connecting Northeast Michigan's land and people for conservation success - \$180,000 over four years to Huron Pines to build the regional capacity and the sustainable funding structure needed to help protect up to 10,000 acres of prioritized lands and reconnect 50 high-quality trout stream miles in Northeast Michigan and the Lake Huron Basin. Project tasks will strengthen community readiness and stimulate economic investment for Northeast Michigan communities to result in long-term protection for the area's people and natural resources.

Land Protection in the Huron River Watershed through Innovative Conservation Funding and Planning, Michigan - \$180,000 over three years to the Huron River Watershed Council to advance land protection through innovative strategies to generate new land protection funds from local governments and to support watershed protection goals. Natural lands serve a host of benefits to local governments and their residents, including treatment of polluted runoff, recreation, and clean water. The partners will work with local governments to ensure the most ecologically beneficial natural lands are protected so they can continue to provide these benefits.

Blackfoot Glacier Healthy Headwaters Conservation Corridor, Montana - \$160,000 over three years to the Blackfoot Fish and Wildlife Department to facilitate conservation of up to 223,000 acres of lands critical for clean drinking water and wildlife important to the tribe's hunting and fishing culture. Funds will also be used to develop and implement natural resource management plans for long term land stewardship to boost rural economic benefits through increased tourism and preservation of traditional livelihoods.

Northern Rockies Watershed Conservation Project, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming - \$175,000 over two years to The Trust for Public Land to develop a Watershed Conservation decision-support tool and catalyze the conservation of up to 60,000 acres of priority watershed lands in the Northern Rocky Mountains using conservation easements.

Evaluating the economic value of landscape-scale forest restoration to advance the Forest Resilience Bond in Sierra Nevada watersheds, California - \$175,000 over two years to Blue Forest Conservation and the World Resources Institute to develop an economic case for utility investment in watershed restoration through the Forest Resilience Bond, a pay-for-success financing vehicle. Research will focus on the water quantity impacts of fuel reduction treatments in forested watersheds within California's Sierra Nevada.

Achieving landscape-scale conservation in the Feather River Watershed, California - \$200,000 over three years to the Feather River Land Trust to build the capacity to protect and steward an additional 75,000 priority acres in the Feather River watershed of northern California, a source of water for 60% of Californians. This will help protect the watershed's large intact meadow systems, rare species populations, and working ranches, while promoting ecotourism. A land transaction cost recovery model will be developed to generate funds for stewardship and legal endowments to ensure long term watershed protection.

Protecting Blue Creek & the Klamath River for Salmon, Wildlife, and People, California – \$210,000 to Western Rivers Conservancy to create the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest. Together these comprise 47,000 acres of coastal temperate rainforest within a top-priority

northern California watershed. The project completes conservation of Blue Creek, the most important source of cold water for the Klamath River, and a lifeline for salmon. Western Rivers Conservancy will develop a carbon offset project and assist the Yurok Tribe with new funding strategies, while helping ensure that salmon, which are crucial to the Yurok way of life, survive in the Klamath forever.

McKenzie Watershed Conservation Fund, Oregon - \$140,000 over two years to the Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB) to design, develop, and test a watershed conservation fund that aligns funding from multiple sources to protect and manage up to 15,000 acres of riparian forests in a healthy watershed which is the sole source of drinking water for 200,000 people. EWEB will also work with the North and South Santiam Watersheds to test transferability of this concept to neighboring basins. This effort is part of EWEB's new Pure Water Partners program that will be rolled out in 2017.

For more information: [Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program](#).

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The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – www.usendowment.org