



Funding Opportunity for FY2026 Coastal Habitat Restoration Projects



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Introduction



Simen Kaalstad

ACFHP Director | Habitat Coordinator
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission



Jessica Coakley

ACFHP Chair
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Background



- ACFHP is requesting project applications to restore and conserve habitat necessary to support coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fish species along the U.S. Atlantic Coast.
- Federal funding available through the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) program will be used to support the top ranked proposals.



Background



- A total of approximately \$200,000 in funding is available to support 2-4 projects; however, exceptional projects may be funded for the full amount.
- Typical funding requests range from \$50k - \$100k; No minimum.
- **Deadline:** February 14, 2025
- Successful applicants will work with USFWS to establish individual project agreements.



ACE Act Reauthorization



- ACE Act passed through Congress in December 2024
 - ✓ House (Dec. 3, 2024)
 - ✓ Senate (Dec. 18, 2024)
 - ✓ Signed by President Biden on December 23, 2024
- All 20 regional Fish Habitat Partnerships are now currently operating under ACE Act Reauthorization (i.e., ACE Act 2.0)
 - Reauthorized through 2030
- Changes include more flexible funding timelines and non-federal match requirements

ACE Act Reauthorization



- **Funding Timeline:** Removed “following fiscal year” language to provide flexible funding timeline driven by the NFHP Board.
 - Section 205 (Fish habitat conservation projects)
 - “Recommendations by Board: not later than July 1 of each year, the Board shall submit to the Secretary a priority list of fish habitat conservation projects that includes a description, including estimated costs, of each project that the Board recommends that the Secretary approve and fund under this chapter” ~~for the following fiscal year~~
- Timing still dependent on DOI approval of FY26 federal budget; Funds expected to be available for successful applicants **Summer 2026.**

ACE Act Reauthorization



- **Non-Federal Match Requirements:** The 1:1 non-federal match requirement is now at the Partnership level (not individual project level)
 - Section 205 (Fish habitat conservation projects)
 - “The non-Federal share of the total cost of all fish habitat conservation projects carried out by a Partnership each year shall be at least 50 percent.”
- 1:1 non-federal match no longer mandatory for each individual project.
 - Match from a strongly supported project with >1:1 can offset a smaller project with <1:1.

Eligible Projects



ACFHP PRIORITY HABITATS



Riverine Bottom



Submerged
Aquatic
Vegetation



Marine &
Estuarine
Shellfish Beds



Tidal
Vegetation



Coral and
Live/Hard
Bottom

- Funds can be used for:
 - ✓ on-the-ground habitat conservation and restoration projects (including associated design, monitoring, and outreach activities).
 - ✓ land acquisition

Eligible Projects



ACFHP PRIORITY HABITATS



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- **Ineligible:**

- ✗ projects required as part of a regulatory action.

- ✗ operation or maintenance of facilities.

- ✗ research projects that do not include on-the-ground habitat restoration.

Previously Funded Projects



Great Meadows Salt Marsh Restoration, Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge

Stratford, CT



- **Project Lead:** Audubon Connecticut
- **Problem:** Once over 1,400 acres, the Great Meadows salt marsh was reduced to less than half its size due to development, land use changes, invasive plants, and sea level rise.
- **Restoration:** The project restored 39 acres of salt marsh and coastal habitats, planted over 155,000 native coastal plants and shrubs, created grassy mounds for saltmarsh sparrows, and enhanced habitat for estuarine fish and macroinvertebrates, including Atlantic silverside, winter flounder, and horseshoe crabs.

Previously Funded Projects



Baskahegan Lake and Crooked Brook Flowage Fish Passage Project

Danforth, ME



- **Project Lead:** Atlantic Salmon Federation
- **Problem:** The Crooked Brook Dam is a complete barrier to fish passage, preventing access to critical habitat for sea-run fish.
- **Restoration:** ASF completed the construction of a pool and weir fishway in September 2024, restoring fish passage for Atlantic salmon, alewives, blueback herring, sea-lamprey, and American eel.

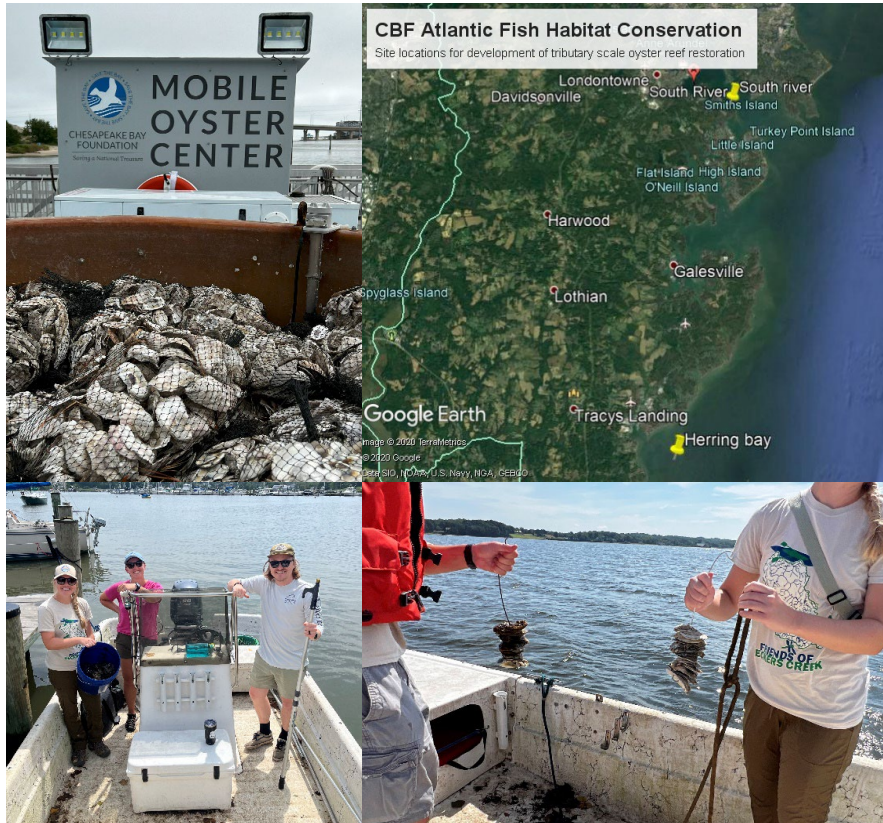
The project reconnected a total of 137 river miles and 8,960 acres of ponds and lakes in the upper Mattawamkeag, a major sub watershed of the Penobscot River.

Previously Funded Projects



Comprehensive South River Sanctuary-Scale Oyster Restoration

Annapolis, MD



- **Project Lead:** Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- **Problem:** Low profile, sediment-challenged reefs provide poor settlement habitat for oyster larvae and reduced reef complexity, reducing fish habitat availability and productivity for several federally managed and ACFHP priority species
- **Restoration:** Quantified the ecosystem function of oyster habitat before and after oyster restoration in a protected oyster sanctuary within the South River, a tidal tributary of Chesapeake Bay. The project restored, augmented, and expanded existing oyster reef sanctuaries from 1.5 -> 5 acres.



Q & A



ACFHP FY26 PROJECT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

Q&A

For a project that needs more than \$100,000, do you recommend applying for the full amount needed or should we cap it at \$100,000?

- No, requesting over \$100,000 is permitted if it is within a reasonable and justifiable margin. Projects requesting the full amount would need to be able to demonstrate thorough objectives with significant outcomes and a sound budget justification. If you're going to request the full amount of appx. \$200,000 it would be better to have an expected budget total that is slightly over than slightly under that amount.

Are project dates still limited to 18 months, and can we select any month to begin in?

- Currently, the process from proposal to funding takes about 18 months, but the FY27 funding process will be streamlined to under a year due to the recent changes in the ACE Act reauthorization.
- Final funding decisions depend on the federal budget approval, which creates some uncertainty. Projects cannot be guaranteed funding until after the federal budget is passed, specific projects are approved, and funds are allocated to FHPs (i.e., ACFHP).
- While partners may request reimbursement for pre-award costs for work started up to six months before a grant is awarded, approval is not guaranteed, especially for work begun before the fiscal year start. Given the typical timeline, Congress often passes budgets late (e.g., December-February), and grant awards follow months later (e.g., March-April). This means starting work before funding approval can be risky unless alternate funding sources are available.
- Projects are expected to be completed within a 2-year timeframe; however, delays and other setbacks are expected and may extend the total duration of the project.

Is there a limit to what percentage of the proposed budget is for indirect costs, or if those costs are allowed to be included at all in the budget?

- No, there is technically not a limit to % indirect cost as long as it is reasonable and clearly stated in the budget justification; however, lower indirect costs are typically preferred given the already-limited NFHP funding available for on-the-ground restoration projects.

Is there a template for the budget or should we use the standard 90-4 budget form?

- There is no specific template for the budget. Below is an example of the information required, at minimum, with regard to contributions from other organizations.

Partner name	Type	Activity of Partner	Budget Category	ACFHP Request	Non-federal contribution		Federal Contribution		Total Contribution
					In-kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash	
Total Contribution:									

- If there are various indirect costs associated with the ACFHP request, then a breakdown of those costs would be required in whichever format is most applicable (e.g., a separate table itemizing each component of the ACFHP request).
- Use of a standard [90-4 budget form](#) is also permitted, if applicable and/or preferred.

How might we might work with USFW -- do you want other branches of it to be involved in our projects?

- Partner organizations should engage with their regional or state USFWS representatives early to align projects with regional and [National Fish Habitat Partnership \(NFHP\) Conservation Priorities](#). ACFHP’s regional USFWS Coordinator for the northeast is Will Duncan (will_duncan@fws.gov) and Tripp Boltin (walter_boltin@fws.gov) in the southeast. USFWS staff can provide technical assistance, habitat data, and feedback on project design to maximize ecological benefits. Collaboration with other stakeholders, facilitated by USFWS, can strengthen proposals and leverage funding sources while regular communication ensures projects meet NFHP (and ACFHP) criteria.

Can the time of high school students be considered match? These students would not be receiving school or course credit for their work so perhaps their time could be equivalent to standard volunteer rates.

- Yes, recording high school students' time as standard volunteer hours would count as non-federal, in-kind match for the project.

The application itself does not require SAM.gov registration, the SF-424 form, a NEPA questionnaire, and other elements often associated with federal funding applications, but SAM.gov and the associated registrations will be required if NFHP funding is awarded?

- Correct. ACFHP reviews each application/project proposal and recommends the top ranked ones for funding through NFHP. Once the federal budget has been passed, we (ACFHP) receive a final list of approved projects from the NFHP Board - after that list has been received and the individual project agreements produced, we reach out to the applicants to begin the SAM.gov and associated registrations process in coordination with USFWS.
- Text from the [FY26 Funding Instructions](#):
 - o National Fish Habitat Partnership (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 and cannot cover pre-award costs. Environmental compliance documents must be provided to USFWS before any potentially impactful work related to the award can begin. If environmental compliance documents are not provided prior to the execution of the grant agreement, the award will be issued conditionally. In that case, the Recipient must not begin any potentially impactful work before the USFWS has notified them in writing that such work can begin. More detailed information from the USFWS about federal grant processes is available [here](#).