

Grant Opportunity: Riverscape Restoration in the Western United States and Northern Mexico

March 2023



The Biophilia Foundation is seeking proposals for projects to improve the resilience of watersheds in arid and semi-arid regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

Two types of grants are available:

- Implementation: Grants of \$50,000 to \$100,000 are available for projects that implement low-tech, process-based, and/or beaver-based restoration of upland streams and rivers.
- Policy: Grants up to \$25,000 are available for efforts to reduce regulatory and policy barriers that hinder process-based restoration.

The Biophilia Foundation also welcomes enquiries regarding capacity building for riverscape restoration, research (primarily carbon sequestration, climate change adaptation, and other riparian ecosystem services), innovative finance, and improving the availability of information available to landowners and land managers.

Background

Rivers and streams are the lifeblood of ecosystems in the arid and semi-arid regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Healthy watersheds have more abundant vegetation; are more resilient to extreme conditions caused by climate change such as drought, floods, and wildfire; provide better habitat for wildlife; and provision more ecosystem services for people. Yet land use changes over the last three hundred years have led to deforestation, grassland conversion, beaver eradication, logjam removal, and other practices that changed hydrological function.

When applied *en masse*, low-tech structures such as beaver dam analogs (BDA), post-assisted log structures (PALS), and rock detention structures (RDS) used on ephemeral, intermittent, and small ('wadable') perennial waterways can reverse the effects of degradation. By slowing down water and enabling soil infiltration, these structures allow more water to be stored in soil and released over time, which can lead to greater water availability in soils and more consistent flow in channels. In-stream structures can be coupled with other cost-effective techniques, such as tree planting, exclosure fencing, beaver reintroduction, beaver conflict mitigation, and changes to grazing regimes, in response to local needs.

In response to the opportunity presented by these techniques, the Biophilia Foundation has created a Riverscape Restoration Initiative to address several needs:

- There is extensive degradation of riverscapes across the West.
- Regulation to protect watersheds can act as a barrier to restoration by mandating extensive and often expensive compliance measures.
- Philanthropic and government funding are insufficient to restore riverscapes at the necessary scale. New sources of revenue, such as impact investing, carbon credits, water markets, and other payments for ecosystem services programs are needed to scale these practices.
- While numerous ecosystem services have been documented, few have been quantified reliably. More data are needed to evaluate the benefits of the practices.
- Despite growing interest from restoration practitioners, there is too little awareness of these practices among landowners and land managers for government agencies.

The target geography for these grants includes arid or semi-arid regions of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Nuevo León.

Funding Opportunities

Grants provided through this initiative will include the categories described below. Eligible entities can apply for funding from one or more categories.

1. Implementation Grants

Implementation grants of \$50,000 to \$100,000 are available for riparian restoration projects using low-tech, process-based restoration (LTPBR) techniques, such as RDS, BDA, PALS, grass plugs, etc., and supporting practices, such as tree planting and exclosures. Priority will be given to larger projects (50+ structures), geographic areas where LTPBR is not widely practiced, and upper watersheds where numerous small, low-tech structures have the most impact.

Where financially beneficial, the Biophilia Foundation supports integration of carbon finance and/or other payments for ecosystem services into restoration projects.

Implementation grants will be evaluated based on ecological and social criteria, including appropriateness of LTPBR to the context, biodiversity and ecological value, project scale, risks to adjacent or downstream landowners or water users, landowner understanding of risks, presence of a network or alliance of landowners (or a region with few landowners), partnerships, and financial viability. Projects that utilize blended funding, such as government funds, philanthropic resources, carbon credits, or other payments for ecosystem services are preferred.

Only projects in the target geography will be considered for implementation grants.

Funded projects may apply for funding for one or two years. Multi-year projects are possible depending on scale and scope.

2. Policy Grants

Policy grants of up to \$25,000 are available for efforts to reduce regulatory barriers that make restoration difficult and/or expensive for practitioners. Examples include but are not limited to inclusion of LTBPR in state water plans, advocacy for programmatic or categorical exclusions across a broad geographic area, advocacy for consistent regulatory interpretations across jurisdictions, listing of LTPBR techniques in government program guidance (e.g., NRCS), or inclusion of practices in federal agency allotment management plans. Policy grants may also be used to educate policymakers about LTPBR through field visits.

Policy grants may be awarded to organizations working at the state or regional level in the target geography or to national or binational efforts that impact the target geography.

Organizations submitting policy proposals must be experienced in policy work and have existing staff in place. All policy efforts must be undertaken by 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations in compliance with IRS regulations. Organizations interested in policy work in Mexico should contact us in advance to discuss the proposal.

Other: Capacity Building, Research, Finance, and Outreach

In addition to the grants currently available, the Biophilia Foundation welcomes enquiries regarding funding for other elements of riverscape restoration, including:

- Capacity building efforts to assist with the development of watershed plans, place-based networks, or preparation of proposals for federal or state grants.
- Research to address data gaps on the benefits and risks of riparian restoration. Our primary interest areas are carbon sequestration, climate change adaptation, and other ecosystem services.
- Innovative finance for riparian restoration, including carbon credits and other payments for ecosystem services.
- Outreach to landowners and land managers to improve the availability of information available and make implementation achievable.

Eligibility

Proposals may be submitted by registered nonprofit organizations, civil society organizations, and Native American tribes in the geographic area described above. Proposals may be for implementation grants, policy grants, or both, and proposals may be submitted by a single entity or partnerships of multiple entities.

Enquiries regarding capacity building, research, finance, and outreach may be directed to Jennifer Gooden at jennifer@biophiliafoundation.org.

Proposals

Please include the following in the proposal. A 5- to 10-page proposal is usually sufficient to address the questions for implementation grants, and 3 to 5 pages for a policy proposal. Proposers may include attachments, such as watershed management plans, to support the proposal.

1. Cover sheet with name and location of project, name and contact information for primary contact person, and 2-4 sentence summary of the proposal
2. Description of problem(s) to be addressed and the factors that led to the problem(s)
3. Planned activities, including timeline and budget
4. Explanation of how the planned activities will address the problem
5. Expected outcomes for the environment, wildlife, and people
6. Risks associated with the project
7. List of stakeholders directly and indirectly affected by the project and how they have been or will be included in planning and decision making
8. Explanation of how the project works within culture, history, and values of the region
9. The proposers' qualifications

Proposals will be reviewed bimonthly beginning mid-April 2023.

Questions?

For more information, please contact Jennifer Gooden at jennifer@biophiliafoundation.org.