

**Merrimack Conservation Partnership
(MCP) Land Transaction Grant Program**

December 2023 Land Conservation Grants

Request for Proposals

Overview

In December 2023, the Merrimack Conservation Partnership (MCP) will award its eleventh round of Land Conservation Grants, **which fund transaction-related expenses on land conservation projects** in the Merrimack Valley Watershed region of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The MCP has \$11,300 to re-grant this fall. The grants program is privately funded and administered by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests on behalf of the Merrimack Conservation Partnership.

The Merrimack Conservation Partnership is a regional conservation alliance formed to protect the southern portion of the greater Merrimack River watershed in New Hampshire and Massachusetts through accelerated land and water protection, advocacy, restoration, outreach and education. The Partnership works by supporting and fostering collaboration, coordination, and innovation among partner organizations to strengthen our individual and collective efforts toward achieving the shared goal of a clean, healthy Merrimack River.

In 2010, the Merrimack was identified by the US Forest Service as the most threatened watershed in the nation in terms of private forestland loss over the next 20 years. The two-state region of the Merrimack Watershed spans a total of 2.1 million acres and 3,275 square miles, of which 54% is in NH and 46% in Massachusetts. The Merrimack River starts in Franklin, NH and flows through eight of NH's largest cities. The river continues into Massachusetts to its mouth in Newburyport.

The Merrimack Conservation Partnership is once again offering its Land Conservation Grants program, which underwrites transaction costs—appraisals, surveys, title research, staff time, etc.—on conservation transactions that protect land identified in the Merrimack Valley Regional Conservation Plan.

Before applying for an MCP grant, please carefully review this RFP and the application materials. For more information on the Merrimack Valley Regional Conservation Plan, grant application materials, maps, a list of towns in the region, etc., visit the “Grants” section of www.merrimackconservationpartnership.org. If you need help determining whether your project is eligible for funding, please call Brian Hotz at (603) 224-9945 or email bhotz@forestsociety.org.

Grant Amounts/Match Requirements

Applicants may apply for grants for up to 2 projects, but no more than \$20,000 will be awarded to any one organization each year.

The MCP grants program has a cash match requirement. This means that all applicants must provide matching funds equaling a **minimum of 25% of the grant award** to cover eligible expenses. Cash match does not include any “in-kind” gifts.

The MCP grants program also strongly encourages applicants to report “non-cash” match in the form of donated land or easement value, volunteer labor, and other in-kind contributions. Non-cash match may consist of any funds or the value of materials and services donated in kind. The value of volunteer labor should be counted as non-cash match. For the 2023 grant year, unskilled volunteer labor is rated at \$18.58/hour and skilled volunteer labor is at fair market value.

Labor provided by employees of the applicant organization and/or partners (i.e. town or government employees, public agency employees, non-profit org. employees, etc.) may be credited at their wages as cash match and/or reimbursable expenses.

What Can Grants Be Used For?

- ✎ **Transaction-related expenses on land protection projects (fee or easement).** These expenses may include but are not limited to the procurement of surveys, appraisals and appraisal reviews, attorney’s services to the applicant related to the acquisition of easements, title searches, closing services, deed preparation and negotiation, baseline document preparation, easement and land recording, and other professional services.

Grant funds cannot be used to acquire direct real estate interests (fee or easement) in land. Grant funds also cannot be used to fund stewardship funds/endowments, property clean-up costs, or fundraising-related expenses.

Who Can Apply For and Receive Funding?

- ✎ Nonprofit tax exempt 501(c)(3) organizations that have land conservation as their primary function
- ✎ State agencies that have land conservation as a primary function
- ✎ Local governments (see list of eligible communities on the “Grants” page)

All other entities, including but not limited to units of federal government and individuals, cannot apply for or receive funding from this grant program.

How Will Projects Be Selected?

Primary Criteria

A.1. Eligible projects must be located in the Merrimack Valley Watershed region of

New Hampshire and Massachusetts. See **list of towns** (under the Grants tab at merrimackconservationpartnership.org) to determine whether your project is eligible for consideration.

A.2. The project must protect land that has been identified as within “Tier 1 Conservation Focus Areas (CFA)” and/or “Tier 2 Conservation Focus Areas (CFA)” and/or “Tier 3 Conservation Focus Areas (CFA)” in the Merrimack Conservation Plan or includes acreage within 1,000 feet of the main stem of the Merrimack River. To determine whether your project protects land in any of the CFAs, see maps in the “Conservation Plan” section of the “Resources” page at www.merrimackconservationpartnership.org. Geographic Information System (GIS) users will also find a shapefile of the Conservation Focus Areas there. All applicants are required to submit, with their application, a GIS shapefile of the proposed project or, if not available, supply other information from which a GIS shapefile can be created.

Applicants are advised that the GIS shapefiles will be used to calculate total acres in the Merrimack Valley Watershed protected by proposed projects which fall within “Tier 1 Conservation Focus Areas (CFA)” and/or “Tier 2 Conservation Focus Areas (CFA)” and/or “Tier 3 Conservation Focus Areas” (as identified in the Merrimack Conservation Plan) and/or within 1,000 feet of the main stem of the Merrimack River. Projects with a higher total number of acres and/or a higher percentage of acres in these priority areas will be more competitive than projects that protect a smaller number of acres and/or a smaller percentage of acres in these areas.

A.3. The project must *permanently* protect the land through acquisition of the fee interest or with a permanent conservation easement or conservation restriction **and only the intended holder of the fee interest or conservation easement or conservation restriction interest is eligible to apply.**

A.4. The project should be completed and all grant funds spent within 1.5 years from the date of the grant award. (*Expenses incurred before January 1, 2023 are not eligible for funding through this grant round.*)

A.5. Applicant must demonstrate the capacity and financial ability to execute the transaction and ensure perpetual stewardship of the protected property.

A.6 Applicant must meet a cash match requirement of 25% of the grant award.

Additional Considerations (not in order of priority)

B.1. Extent to which the project adds to existing protected land and/or provides linkage between protected lands.

B.2. Extent to which the project provides financial leverage of grant dollars invested, in terms of total value of land protected.

B.3. Type and degree of conversion threat to land.

B.4. Extent to which project provides public recreational access. *The provision of public pedestrian access is not required, but is encouraged, and will be considered in the grant review process.*

C. Grant Payments – MCP grants are paid on a reimbursement basis. Grantees must incur costs for work actually completed. At project completion, the grantee will submit a request for reimbursement along with a final budget reflecting eligible and non-eligible expenses, including cash match expenses, and attach any cashed checks and/or paid-in-full receipts. Staff salaries do not require cashed checks or receipts, but should be shown on the budget. Your itemized invoice should be accompanied by a cover letter stating that the project has been completed (i.e. the real estate transaction has closed) and must include the date of closing along with the book and page of the recorded deed and registry of recording. Expenses and items may not be reimbursed if they are not included in the original project proposal and budget. No partial reimbursements will be made.

Application Deadline

Completed applications must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on December 1, 2023. Completed applications may be submitted electronically to ccolton@forestsociety.org. Completed applications may also be sent by mail, and **must be postmarked no later than December 1, 2023.** Mail applications to: Connie Colton, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, 54 Portsmouth Street, Concord, NH 03301.

Successful grant applicants will be notified by **December 22, 2023.**

For questions regarding the grant program and the application process, please contact Brian Hotz at (603) 224-9945 ext. 316 or bhotz@forestsociety.org.

The Merrimack Conservation Partnership Grants program is privately funded and administered by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests on behalf of the Merrimack Conservation Partnership.

The Merrimack Conservation Partnership reserves the right to modify this and other application materials in future grant rounds, based on experience gained from administering the program, changes in funding, and/or legal requirements.