

NONPOINT SOURCE AND WETLANDS PROGRAM FOCUS WATERSHED REQUEST FOR INFORMATION



Lower Gallatin Stakeholders Meeting

Purpose

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is soliciting applications for the next Nonpoint Source Focus Watershed area. This geographical area will be eligible for approximately \$500k annually of Federal Clean Water Act §319 grant funding (*competitive procurement and non-federal match requirements still apply*) for three funding cycles (2026-2028) and additional technical assistance from DEQ staff. A focus watershed is a HUC10 area where the goal is to increase the capacity of local organizations, raise public awareness, and build momentum to generate significant and measurable progress toward reducing nonpoint source pollution. Focus watersheds may also implement water quality restoration within the larger HUC8 watershed.

Process

This Request for Information (RFI) is Step 1 in DEQ’s process of identifying a focus watershed. DEQ will use the results to identify the focus watershed for the above-referenced funding cycles. This is a RFI only and no financial awards, contracts, or work will result from this RFI.

Step 2: DEQ will issue the annual Call for Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction Application through the State of Montana’s public solicitation platform, eMACS. All interested applicants must register in eMACS to view the call, ask questions, and submit applications. The awarded applicants will be contacted with a Notice of Intent to Award and Request for Required Documents. Once all successful applicants are confirmed, DEQ will issue the contracts.

Anticipated Schedule

October 28, 2024	Focus Watershed Request for Information (RFI) period open
November 21, 2024	Optional Q&A conference on Microsoft Teams 11:00 – Noon
December 18, 2024	eMACS Q&A Board question submission ends
January 3, 2024	Focus Watershed RFI period closes - Complete applications due to eMACS by 5:00 pm.
January 15, 2025	Interagency Review Panel for Focus Watershed Selection
January 2025	Focus Watershed is announced
Spring 2025	Planning year for Focus Watershed.
Spring 2026 Spring 2027 Spring 2028	Focus Watershed funding available during annual \$319 Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Call for Applications

Eligible Applicants

The following entities may be eligible to receive funding:

- Nonprofit organizations having a tax-exempt declaration of 501(c)(3) from the Internal Revenue Service.
- Governmental entities. A governmental entity is a local, state, federal, or tribal organization that has been established and authorized by law.

Applicants must also meet the following minimum qualifications:

- **Have a current UEI number. Unique Entity Identifier.** Each project applicant is required to have a current UEI number. *The UEI number replaces the old DUNS number.* If your organization had a DUNS number, you should have received a notification from the federal government indicating that your DUNS number has been changed to a UEI number. If you did not receive this notification, or if you never had a DUNS number, you will need to go to the federal government’s

System for Award Management (SAM - <https://sam.gov/content/home>) to obtain your UEI number.

- Be registered with the federal System for Award Management (SAM). The SAM registration website is <https://sam.gov/SAM/>.
- Be registered with the Montana Secretary of State. All applicants must be registered with the Montana Secretary of State to do business in the state of Montana. Registration with the Secretary of State may be completed via the following website: <https://sosmt.gov/business/start-maintain-grow/>
- Have the necessary liability insurance.
- Comply with the Workers Compensation Act.
- Have sufficient technical and managerial resources available to facilitate completion of the project.

DEQ encourages a single organization to apply on behalf of multiple entities within a watershed to demonstrate support, momentum, and a community-wide commitment to restoration of water quality. The sponsor, supporting organizations, and other eligible entities working in the watershed are eligible for future focus watershed funding if selected.

Project Requirements within a Focus Watershed

If selected, a Focus Watershed has the opportunity to apply for allocated project funding under the Nonpoint Source Program's Project Application Call. This call supports two types of projects:

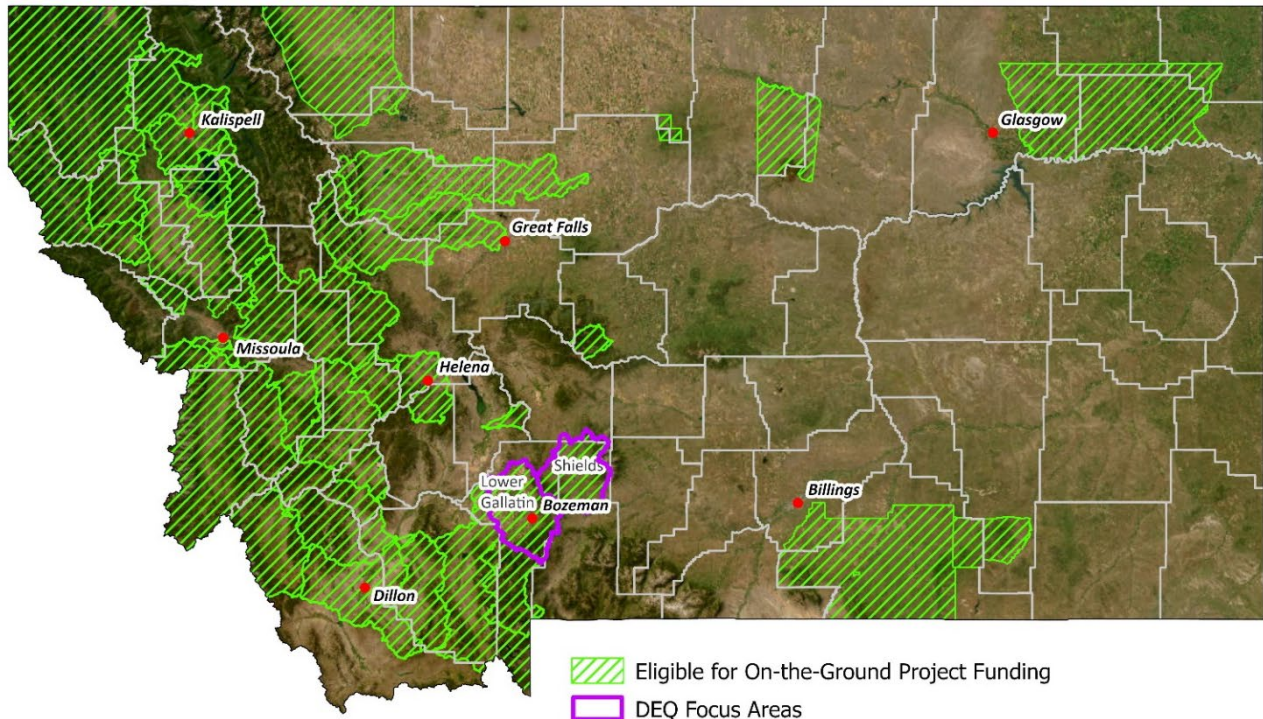
- On-the-ground projects
- Capacity building and education and outreach projects

On-the-ground projects may include related tasks such as planning, design, permitting, construction, effectiveness evaluation, education outreach, and project administration.

Eligibility

Projects within a selected Focus Watershed must meet all eligibility criteria listed below to qualify for funding.

- Projects must implement activities or practices identified in a DEQ-accepted Watershed Restoration Plan **or an EPA-approved Tribal Nonpoint Source Plan**. If you do not have a DEQ-accepted Watershed Restoration Plan or an EPA-approved Tribal Nonpoint Source Plan by the application deadline, you must submit a draft prior to applying for funding. DEQ staff will review the draft and estimate the likelihood of it being ready prior to funding availability. See DEQ's interactive [Watershed Plan Viewer](#) map for information on existing Watershed Restoration Plans. All the land-owning Montana Tribes currently have an EPA-approved Nonpoint Source Plan (per personal communication from EPA, Region 8). The map below reflects areas where these plans currently exist but does not identify the specific recommendations found in each plan.



- All projects must reduce or prevent nonpoint source pollution by restoring and protecting natural processes and conditions.
- Projects must address impairments identified on [Montana’s 2020 List of Impaired Waters](#). In some instances, projects on streams that are not listed as impaired may be acceptable. These projects must reduce pollutant loading to an impaired downstream receiving water OR protect existing uses from becoming impaired. This requirement applies to both non-tribal and Tribal lands. The State of Montana does not have authority to make impairment determinations on Tribal lands. Therefore, to be eligible, a project on Tribal lands would need to reduce or prevent nonpoint source pollution in a stream or lake that flows into or is connected to a stream or lake off Tribal lands in which DEQ has identified an impairment. **HEALTHY WATERSHED EXCEPTION:** In most instances, on-the-ground projects must address identified impairments. However, in some instances, funding may be used for projects that protect watersheds that are currently healthy.
- All projects must implement actions consistent with recommendations in the [2017 Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan](#)
- Applicants must complete Project Application forms under a current Call to potentially be awarded project funding. See the past [2024 On-the-Ground Project Application Form](#) for reference.

Ineligible Activities (applicable to on-the-ground project funding only)

The following activities are NOT eligible for on-the-ground project funding:

- Development of a Watershed Restoration Plan or similar type of plan.
- Activities required as a condition of a point source (MDPES) discharge permit.
- Watershed characterization studies.
- Pollutant source identification.
- Water quality monitoring, except for monitoring the effectiveness of funded projects.
- Statewide education outreach campaigns.
- Projects whose primary purpose is to protect infrastructure from stream channel migration.
- Use of non-native plant species in restoration projects.
- Riprap, except in instances where it is necessary to protect a new bridge or culvert designed to restore aquatic organism passage or improve natural stream processes.
- Projects designed to address violations of state and federal law (e.g., projects that stem from a 310 violation or an Army Corps violation).
- Projects that result in a net loss of wetlands or wetland function.

All projects that include implementation of on-the-ground practices must meet minimum design standards (see below), minimum monitoring requirements, and must enter into a signed agreement with the landowner prior to beginning construction. Additionally, DEQ encourages up to \$5,000 for education outreach efforts to raise awareness about the project and generate additional local efforts to reduce nonpoint source pollution. See the 2024 [On-the-Ground Application Form](#) for minimum requirements and details.

The proposed solution must meet the following minimum design standards:

- Projects must restore and maintain natural conditions and processes.
- Only native, site-appropriate plant species may be used for revegetation.
- Projects involving riparian or wetland buffer creation must have a minimum buffer width of 35 feet, as measured from the ordinary high-water mark. If the buffer must be less than 35 feet in some places to accommodate bridges, water gaps or other infrastructure, the buffer should be made proportionately wider in other areas.
- Projects must allow for the continued existence and future colonization of beaver.
- Revegetation efforts must include browse protection where necessary.
- Projects addressing stream flow through improved water use efficiency must include reasonable assurance that unused water will remain in the stream (e.g., through a change of use to instream flow, or a signed commitment from the water right holder).
- Projects must not result in a net loss of wetlands or wetland function.
- Projects involving grazing management (e.g., riparian fencing, creation of riparian pastures) must include a grazing management plan as a deliverable.

Application Competitiveness

- Demonstrated momentum within a watershed towards reduction of NPS pollution
 - The extent to which planned projects can restore and maintain natural conditions and processes
 - The degree to which planned projects are ready for implementation and can help support water quality goals and NPS pollution reduction in the watershed
 - Ability of local organizations, stakeholders and community leaders to support the amount of focus watershed resources
- Planned process for providing disadvantaged communities access to the benefits of focus watershed funding
- Capacity of organizations to maintain efforts and continue NPS pollution prevention and reduction momentum within the watershed

All applications will be reviewed by an Interagency Review Panel. Additional review and information may be sought from partner agencies. A scoring sheet using the above criteria will be used to rank applications and are shown on the application form. However, the final decisions are at the discretion of the DEQ internal review team based on program priorities. Future grant awards are contingent upon the annual §319 grant awards from EPA and a successful application to the Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction grant program.

Unanticipated Changes

Information in this Call may be subject to change based on unforeseen changes to DEQ funding or priorities. If changes become necessary, DEQ will notify potential applicants and post any changes on eMACS.

Contact Us

Post questions to the Q&A Board associated with this Request for Applications in eMACS. Within the Q&A Board, you will be able to view all other posted questions and answers.

For eMACS registration questions, contact:

1. emacs@mt.gov or the eMACS Help Desk at 406-444-2575 for submittal assistance
2. Jaegger Customer Support 1-800-233-1121 for registration and/or login/access assistance
 - a. Select option 1 for English
 - b. Select option 1 again for Supplier (Vendor)
 - c. Select option 2 for Supplier Support at sciquest.com (URL)
 - d. As soon as you get a representative, explain to them that you are a State of Montana supplier having issues with the vendor portal.