



Natural Resources Conservation Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program helps units of federal, state, local and federally recognized tribal governments (project sponsors) protect and restore watersheds.

OVERVIEW

The **WFPO program** provides technical and financial assistance to States, local governments and Tribal organizations to help plan and implement authorized watershed projects for the purpose of:

- Flood Prevention
- Watershed Protection
- Public Recreation
- Public Fish and Wildlife
- Agricultural Water Management
- Municipal and Industrial Water Supply
- Water Quality Management

WFPO Project Criteria

- Public sponsorship
- Watershed Projects $\leq 250,000$ acres
- Agricultural benefits, including rural communities, must be $\geq 20\%$ of the total benefits for the project.

Locally Led Watershed Solutions

Watershed conservation projects are planned and carried out jointly by local, state, and federal agencies with the support of community landowners and citizens in the watershed.

Communities identify resource problems to be addressed, practices to be installed, and carry out major portions of a watershed plan, such as obtaining easements, rights of ways, permits and local cost-share funding. **All Watershed Program projects must have a [local sponsor](#)** that can act as the fiscal agent, provide project management and oversight throughout the different phases of construction, implementation, and project lifespan. [Learn more](#) about sponsor eligibility...

Project sponsors initiate a request for assistance thru their local NRCS office to develop a preliminary feasibility study (PIFR) which helps communities consider sustainable climate resilient solutions to address watershed resource concerns. After a feasibility study is

conducted, a watershed plan is chosen, reviewed, approved and authorized. Once authorized, projects sponsors gain access to NRCS's financial and technical resources to help implement their plan. ***An approved watershed plan must be in place prior to initiation of any corrective land treatment or structural solutions.*** Project sponsors then help landowners carry out the authorized watershed conservation

WFPO Program Resources

- [NRCS State Watershed Program Managers](#)
Contact your local NRCS Watershed Program manager for assistance:
- [Watershed Programs - Sponsor Eligibility](#)
Roles and responsibilities for Watershed Programs Sponsors.
- [Watershed Program Resources for Contractors](#)
- [National Watershed Program Manual and Handbook](#)
The National Watershed Program Manual provides policy, guidance and suggestions for working through the various stages of watershed projects, from working with potential sponsors to providing project rehabilitation assistance...
- [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#)
The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – signed by President Biden in November 2021 – is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.

Additional Documents

- [WFPO Sponsor Request for Assistance \(29.32 KB\)](#)
- [Watershed Programs Sponsor Guide \(581.54 KB\)](#)
- [NRCS WFPO Fact Sheet 2021 \(529.12 KB\)](#)

Ready to get started?

Contact your local service center to start your application.

Find Your Local Service Center

USDA Service Centers are locations where you can connect with Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Rural Development employees for your business needs. Enter your state and county [below](#) to find your local service center and agency offices. If this locator does not work in your browser, please visit offices.usda.gov.

Watershed Programs - Sponsor Eligibility

Roles and responsibilities for Watershed Programs Sponsors.

Workflow

A step-by-step guide for eligible sponsors from submitting a request for assistance thru implementation.

[Full screen](#)

SPONSORSHIP BEGINS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Locally-led government agencies, organizations, and conservation districts understand the needs of their communities. Participation from the grassroot level on up are vital to help communities establish a resilient watershed plan that ensures a future for their towns, surrounding rural areas and other important landscapes. All Watershed Programs require a local sponsor who initiates a **Request for Assistance** (templates provided below) to their local NRCS office.

Below, are the sponsor requirements for both REHAB and WFPO watershed programs. *Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Sponsor Eligibility can be found [here](#).*

Eligibility

Watershed and Flood Prevention (WFPO) and Watershed Rehab (REHAB) projects are sponsored by one or more local organizations. In essence, the sponsor acts as the fiscal agent and is responsible for initiating, supervising and maintaining the entire project as planned. For WFPO and REHAB, one sponsor MUST be able to perform at least one of the following areas of responsibility mandated by the individual state's NRCS State Conservationist (STC):

Eminent Domain

At least one Sponsor (SLO) must have the power of eminent domain. Eminent Domain is the process of acquiring real property, water, mineral, and other land rights needed for a specific project as outlined in 16 U.S.C. Section 1004 (4). Where the primary purpose of a project involves land treatment long-term contracts, the power to execute an eminent domain is not required.

Permits and Licenses

The Sponsor must be able to acquire needed permits, and licenses in accordance with local, State, and Federal laws.

Authority to Levy Taxes

This authority requirement establishes one Sponsor as the fiscal agent of the project. Meaning, they are responsible for the 'cost share' and financing the operation and maintenance expenses

for the life of the project. Possessing the authority to levy taxes, i.e. local government agency, enables the Sponsor to finance the project as necessary with localized funding thru taxation. This authority provides financial support for the project throughout its lifetime.

Land Treatment above Reservoirs

Once a reservoir is built – the land surrounding the project is considered, and must be, part of the conservation plan. A Sponsor must be willing and able to obtain agreements from all landowners, impacted as part of a Watershed Program funded project ([16 U.S.C. Section 1004 \(5\)](#)), requiring implementation of soil conservation practices. All soil conservation practices must meet current [NRCS Field Office Technical Guide \(FOTG\)](#) criteria on at least 50 percent of the lands within the drainage area above each retention reservoir.

Watershed Projects that include land treatment practices must, at a minimum, have a Sponsor with formal soil and water conservation responsibilities inscribed in its bylaws (Articles of Organization) as required by State Law (Secretary of State).

Locally-Led Public Participation

A Sponsor must be able to create and produce effective engagement campaigns, and supporting outreach materials that encourage public participation in the watershed planning process.

Financial - Fiscal Responsibility

A Sponsor must have the ability to act as the watershed project's fiscal agent; meaning, they will need to provide commitments for funding, demonstrate a history of project management that underscores best management practice and oversight of contracts, construction, installation, operation and maintenance of a similar project.

Watershed Management

A Sponsor must provide watershed management oversight such as permitting, zoning, land use regulations, easements, or upstream watershed protection.

Municipal and Industrial (M&I) Water

A Sponsor must provide evidence that any proposed water supply (municipal or industrial (M&I)) will meet the anticipated water supply needs in quantity or quality; provide all technical services to implement M&I water supply; provide adequate assurances prior to construction that USDA will be reimbursed for at least 50% of the cost of M&I storage for the current water supply demand and 100% of all of the M&I water supply storage for any future demands.

Operation and Maintenance

A sponsor must have the power and authority to ensure the installation, operation, and maintenance of the watershed project performs as planned (16 U.S.C. Section 1004 (3)).

Storm and Sanitary Sewers

The Sponsor is solely responsible for all new storm and sanitary sewers or changes to or relocation of existing sewers or facilities. This requirement applies only to urban or built-up areas within the approved watershed project plan.

Historically, sponsorship involves local government agencies or tribal authorities who have the ability to create revenue to maintain the structure/project over its lifetime and ensure the continued protection and safety of the community it serves.

For more information, contact your local [USDA NRCS Watershed Program Manager](#).

Additional resources for Sponsors can be found on our [Sponsor Resources](#) page.

Pre-Award Sponsor Resources

If you are entering into an agreement with NRCS to complete work, and will be reimbursed for your expenses, you must submit the following required forms. Below, you'll find [information and required documents](#) for both the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) and Watershed Rehabilitation (REHAB) Programs. *Sponsor requirements for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) can be found here.* For additional help and guidance, connect with your local NRCS Watershed Program Manager.

[Grants and Agreements Pre-Award Sponsor Requirements Presentation](#) - May 18, 2022 (pdf) [Training Webinar](#) (YouTube)