



PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM IN NEW MEXICO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



An enthusiastic ranch manager with the Partners Program sign in southeastern New Mexico. *Photo: USFWS*

1) Can I apply to the Partners Program?

Most of our Partners (Cooperators) are private, non-Federal, landowners. This includes individual private landowners, local and county agencies, municipalities, Native American Tribes, private/non-profit organizations, corporations, schools, and others. However, anyone interested in restoring and protecting wildlife habitat on private or tribal lands can get involved in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program).

2) Are my lands eligible for restoration under this program?

Any privately-owned land is potentially eligible for restoration. "Privately-owned" for the purposes of the Partners Program includes any land not owned by the Federal or State government.

3) Who does the restoration?

There are three options for completing restoration:

- 1) the landowner restores the land and is reimbursed directly for some or all expenses;
- 2) the landowner hires a contractor to complete the work and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) reimburses the landowner for payments made to the contractor; or
- 3) Service employees can assist with on-the-ground work. (e.g., tree planting).

4) What is the cost share rate for the Cooperator?

The percentage is flexible. Nationwide, the cost share rate is 50 percent, but in New Mexico it is often closer to 25 percent. In-kind services, such as labor, equipment use, and materials, can qualify as cost share, as well as landowner funds. The Partners Program works with other

Federal, State, and local agencies, and private/non-profit organizations, whenever possible to leverage funding and in-kind assistance. Frequently, these partnerships result in more restoration activities and more acres or miles improved per project.

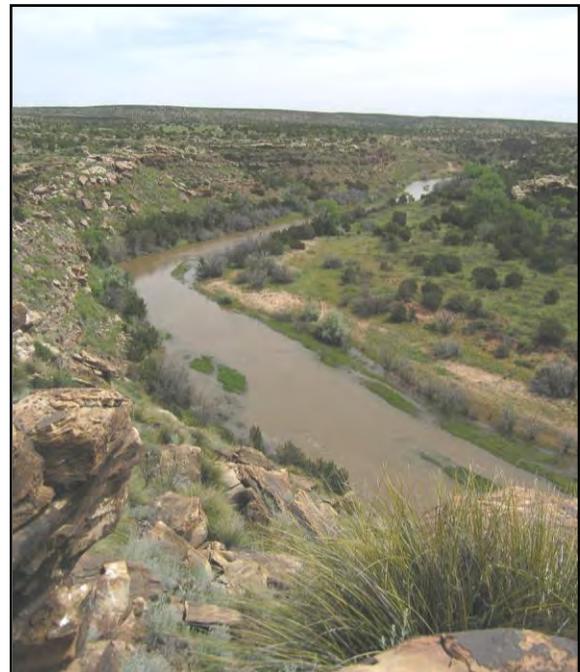
5) How much funding can be requested for a project?

Up to \$24,900 can be requested for each Partners project. It is possible to receive more than this amount for outstanding projects, as approved by the Regional Coordinator for the Partners Program.

6) What is a Private Lands Agreement?

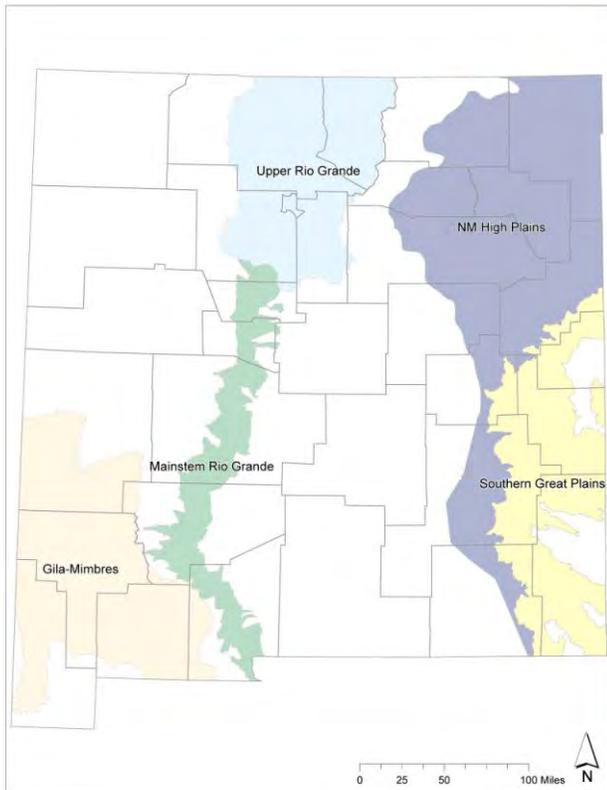
Before beginning a habitat restoration project, the Service and the individual landowner (Cooperator) must sign a Private Lands Agreement (PLA). This PLA states that the landowner will not return the project area to its former use, or alter or remove any project components (e.g., native vegetation, fences) for the specified term of the PLA. The term of the PLA is 10 years. If the Cooperator wants to cancel the PLA, then he or she must reimburse the Service, on a pro-rated basis, for the Service funds expended on the project.

The Cooperator retains all legal rights to the property. The PLA describes the work to be done, lists the project goals, and lists the cost estimates for the Service and the Cooperator.



Pecos River vista from a cooperator's property near Santa Rosa, New Mexico. *Photo: USFWS*

If the Cooperator sells the property, the PLA goes with the land. The Cooperator has the option to cancel the PLA and reimburse the Service, on a prorated basis, for the funds originally provided.



7) What is a Cooperative Agreement?

Before beginning a habitat restoration project, the Service and the land manager or entity that is not an individual landowner (Recipient) will sign a Cooperative Agreement (CA). Examples of a Recipient are: private landowners doing work as a business, Tribes, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and local or county governments. The CA states that the Recipient will not return the project area to its former use, or alter or remove any project components (e.g., native vegetation, fences) for the specified term of the CA. The term of the CA is 5 years. If the Recipient wants to cancel the CA, then he or she must reimburse the Service, on a pro-rated basis, for the Service funds expended on the project.

8) When do I receive the money for the project?

Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects are reimbursable projects. This means that the Cooperator or Recipient is reimbursed for the costs they incur while implementing an approved project. For example, the Cooperator/Recipient pays up front for materials, labor, and other project expenses and is then reimbursed by the Service. These funds are electronically deposited into an account authorized by the Cooperator/Recipient. The Cooperator/Recipient may perform the restoration and be

reimbursed directly for acceptable expenses or they can hire a contractor and the Service will reimburse the Cooperator/Recipient for those expenses. The Service does not pay the contractor directly.

9) How does the Service decide which projects are of highest priority?

Five geographical areas within the State have been identified based on habitat and fish and wildlife species needs to receive priority ranking for well-qualified projects. These Focus Areas are displayed on the map, as the:

- Gila-Mimbres;
- Upper Rio Grande;
- Mainstem Rio Grande;
- New Mexico High Plains; and
- Southern Great Plains.

For the entire State, the Service focuses on projects in ecosystems and watersheds where conservation efforts will provide the greatest benefit for Federal trust species, such as migratory birds, declining species, and Federal- and State-listed threatened, endangered, and candidate species. The Service also gives special consideration to projects that:

- 1) are on permanently protected private lands;
- 2) are identified as high priority by State fish and wildlife agencies, Tribes, and other partners;
- 3) are located near National Wildlife Refuges;
- 4) reduce habitat fragmentation;
- 5) conserve or restore natural communities that the State Natural Heritage Programs or Heritage Data Bases have designated as globally or nationally imperiled;
- 6) are self-sustaining systems that are not dependent on artificial structures; and/or
- 7) help to educate the public on ecosystems and their species.

When other considerations are equal, priority may be given to projects that:

- 1) involve greater non-Service partnerships and/or cost-share contribution;
- 2) and/or are most cost effective (e.g., low cost/acre).



Installing fence markers to reduce bird collisions with fences near Milnesand, New Mexico.
Photo: USFWS

10) If my land is not in a Focus Area should I still apply?

YES, we will always consider all well-qualified habitat restoration projects throughout the State, especially projects that have exceptional benefits for Federal trust species.

11) Is my land suitable for habitat restoration or improvement?

Almost any land, whether it has been cropped, grazed, mined, or cleared, can be restored or improved. Bioengineering techniques can restore streams and arroyo channels that are unstable. Some habitat can be protected simply by fencing to exclude human and/or livestock impacts and allow for natural restoration. Non-native plant species can be removed and native vegetation can be planted. A walk around the property with a Service biologist is the best way to determine a site's restoration potential.



Getting the work done – extracting a Russian olive from a riparian area along the Rio Grande. Photo: USFWS

12) What techniques can be used to restore or improve fish and wildlife habitat on my land?

Projects are designed to restore native habitat to as near a natural state as possible. Methods used in freshwater wetland restoration include creating shallow water areas where wetland plants can grow. Stream restoration may include fencing areas to protect streams and adjacent habitat, providing alternative water sources for livestock, and thus allowing natural revegetation of streamside habitat. Sometimes non-native vegetation is removed and native vegetation planted to speed restoration. For some projects, stream restoration involves the use of bioengineering techniques to stabilize the stream by creating the proper stream dimension, pattern, and profile. Planting native seeds or plants, and/or changing land management practices may be necessary to restore native grasslands or woodlands in upland areas. Thinning trees may be needed to restore forest health and reduce the chances of catastrophic wildfires. Prescribed burns (planned, controlled, and managed fires) can be used to improve grassland and forest health. Removal of plants

(native and non-native) that have encroached upon or displaced the native plants normally found on a site can also benefit wildlife.



Arroyo rock structures installed to halt erosion, improve water infiltration, and minimize downstream siltation.

Photo: Quivira Coalition

13) Will the Service help me build a stock pond on my property?

The Service will consider funding stock pond construction if it is specifically designed to benefit Federal trust species. Stock ponds generally are designed to maximize the amount of open water while minimizing the growth of cattails and other aquatic plants. Such ponds provide limited habitat for wetland wildlife.

14) Will the Service help me build a wildlife pond on my property?

The Partners Program will assist with technical advice and will consider funding shallow, open-water wetland restorations that restore wetland wildlife habitat functions lost within a floodplain adjacent to a river or stream due to man-induced impacts. These projects must be cost effective, supported by ground water, and require little or no maintenance. In general, the Partners Program does not provide funding for the creation of ponds in upland areas.

15) What other issues must I consider or permits do I need when deciding to restore or enhance fish and/or wildlife habitat on my land?

A Partners biologist can help you determine what type of permits and clearances might be required for your potential project. If you receive funding from the Partners Program, you must obtain all required Federal, State, or local permits prior to beginning work on the project. The following are examples of habitat restoration work that require additional permits or authorizations.

- Work in almost any wetland or stream channel, even an intermittent one, may require a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a Section 401 water quality certification from the State.

- In New Mexico, Partners projects that involve ground disturbance require an archaeology survey and clearance by the State Historic Preservation Office.



Petroglyph in Catron County, New Mexico. Photo: USFWS

16) When will the work be started?

You must receive a final copy of your Private Lands Agreement or Cooperative Agreement, signed by both you, the landowner (Cooperator/Recipient), **and** by the Service **before** you can begin work on the project. If you incur any project-related expenses before you have an agreement signed by the Service, you cannot be reimbursed for those expenses by the Service. As described in the previous question and answer, you also must obtain any other necessary permits before beginning your project.

Note: Prior to receiving an agreement, the Cooperator/Recipient must submit a W-9 tax form for identification purposes, and set up a means of electronic, direct deposit of funds. (The Service provides a form for this.) The Cooperator must also register for a DUNS (Data Universal Numbering System) number for U.S.



Assessing stream and riparian condition prior to designing restoration plan. Photo: USFWS

government contractors and grantees, and sometimes with the CCR (Central Contracting Registry). Our staff will provide guidance to you for all necessary forms and procedures.

17) When must work start and be completed?

Cooperators/Recipients are required to begin the project within 6 months of obtaining their signed agreement and complete the project within 18-24 months (as defined in the agreement) from the date of the Service's signature on the agreement. The time can be extended for up to one year for justifiable delays by modifying the agreement.

18) What kind of maintenance is required?

Most habitat improvement projects are designed to require little maintenance. This may include: fence

repairs, in-stream structure repairs, management of livestock and human use of the project, and control of non-native plant species. The project maintenance is the responsibility of the Cooperator/Recipient for the term of the agreement.

19) If I sign an agreement, do I have to allow public access to my land?

No. Restoring habitat with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program does not mean that you have to allow public access on your land. Service employees occasionally need access to the project area to check on its progress and monitor its success. We will contact you to arrange these visits.

20) How do I apply to the Partners Program? Is there a deadline to submit project proposals?

Contact the Partners Program staff for proposal guidance, see the contact information below.

Project proposals may be submitted throughout the year. The Partners Program generally receives funding once each year. We make funding decisions when complete proposals are received and evaluated, based on available funding at that time. We are available to answer questions, discuss potential projects, provide technical assistance, visit your property, and help develop a complete project design for funding consideration. If you need additional information or have any questions, please contact us as shown below.

21) Do I have to pay taxes on funds received through my agreement with USFWS Partners Program?

Generally our agreements are considered pass through funding which does not require taxes to be paid. However, we advise that each landowner discuss this with a qualified tax consultant.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 2105 Osuna Road NE
 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87113
 Phone: (505) 346-2525 and extension
 FAX: (505) 346-2542

State Coordinator - Vacant

Nancy Baczek (Acting State Coordinator): ext. 4711
Maceo Martinet: ext. 4752
Angel Montoya (Las Cruces Office): (575) 525-4350
Santiago L. Misquez, (Socorro Office): (575) 835-1710
 Middle Rio Grande Partnership: NRCS/NMDGF/PFW

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:

http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/NewMexico/FW_home.cfm

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