

WATERSHED PROGRAMS - SPONSOR GUIDE



SPONSORSHIP BEGINS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Locally-led government agencies, organizations, and conservation districts understand the needs of their communities. Participation from the grassroots 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.

Eligibility

Watershed projects must include one or more eligible sponsor. An eligible sponsor must be able to perform at least one of the following functions mandated by the individual state's NRCS State Conservationist (STC):

1. Power of 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.

2. Permitting and Licensing

The Sponsor must acquire needed permits and licenses in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.

3. 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.

4. Provide 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).

5. Locally-Led 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.

6. 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.

7. Watershed Management

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

8. 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.

9. Operation and Maintenance (O&M)

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 \(3\)](#)).

10. 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.

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

There are hundreds of examples across the country, that illustrate how sponsors have partnered with USDA-NRCS Watershed Programs to implement and maintain watershed projects. A good example is Wise County, Texas. Wise County Soil and Water Conservation District partnered with Wise County Commissioners Court, the Wise County Water Control and Improvement District, the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and users of the Tarrant Regional Water District to construct, operate, and maintain flood control structures in the county. Ongoing efforts with all partners, have assisted landowners in applying climate resilient conservation practices to enhance quality and quantity of water for the surrounding communities.

The USDA is an equal opportunity employer, provider, and lender.