Wetland Mitigation Banking Program

New Grantee Guide

2021 Edition
Dear Grantee,

Congratulations on your Wetland Mitigation Banking Program award! Now that your entity has received an award, the hard part begins—getting your mitigation bank up and running! Rest assured, we at NRCS are here to help.

WMBP is co-administered by NRCS State office staff and USDA FPAC Business Center grants and agreements staff. Through the life of your project, you will interact with both groups in order to successfully carry out your project, and to successfully be paid for doing so. Federal grant administration can be daunting (especially for the uninitiated), so we developed this guide to help you navigate your responsibilities. The [Wetland Mitigation Banking Program](#) website is a good source for program updates. If you ever have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Kari Cohen
Projects Branch Chief
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Signing your Agreement and Starting WMBP Projects

After NRCS announces the slate of WMBP awardees, a Grants Management Specialist (GMS) will contact each awardee and send over the draft Notification of Award (NOA) for signature. This may take up to a month or more depending on grants and agreements workload. At a minimum, your award package will include an NRCS-ADS-093 (Notice of Grant and Agreement Award) form, Statement of Work (taken from the project proposal), and General Terms and Conditions. USDA staff may contact awardees early in the process if additional project or budget information is required to develop the NOA.

Please review the award package for accuracy. Contact the GMS immediately if you have questions or find any errors in your package. Once satisfied with the documents, please sign and send the NRCS-ADS-093 form back to the GMS. The GMS will then work internally at NRCS to finalize the package, execute the agreement and send you a copy signed by USDA.

IMPORTANT NOTE—WMBP awards are not fully executed until NRCS leadership signs the NRCS-ADS-093 and sends the fully signed document back to the awardee. Do not begin work until you receive a fully executed agreement. NRCS is unable to reimburse for project charges accrued before the date on the fully executed agreement. We encourage awardees to review the award package and send the signed ADS-093 back to the GMS as quickly as possible to avoid any delays in starting your project.

If it appears as though the agency will be delayed in completing the WMBP grant agreements, NRCS may offer grantees the option of requesting a pre-award letter, which authorizes project expenditures for a given period of time prior to completion of the grant agreement. NRCS will contact awardees if pre-award letters are authorized in any given year.

Again—without a fully executed grant agreement, do not begin work on your project. When in doubt, please ask!
Official Grant Project Contacts

Program Contact

NRCS assigns a State-level program contact to each WMBP project.

The following are the roles and responsibilities of NRCS program contacts:

- Project oversight
  - Review and approval of semi-annual progress reports.
  - Review and approval of financial reports and payment requests.
  - Approval for project modifications.
- Additional NRCS staff may be called on to engage in a WMBP project. The program contact serves to connect project staff with other NRCS staff.
- Project evaluation—at the conclusion of a project, project contacts complete a project close-out evaluation and make recommendations for any future actions.

NRCS will provide technical oversight of design components and review of mitigation plans. Where necessary, NRCS will conduct site visits to evaluate the merits of the proposed site(s) prior to site mitigation plan preparation.

Administrative Contact

The NRCS Grants & Agreements staff assigns an administrative point of contact to monitor your project for administrative compliance. The assigned administrative contact is listed on the NRCS-ADS-093 form in block 8.

The administrative contact will administer amendments, budget changes, extensions, changes in scope of work, etc.

Grants & Agreements staff (though not necessarily the assigned staff member) review WMBP Requests of Advancement or Reimbursements (SF-270s, see next section) and work with the WMBP program contact and USDA financial management staff to process payments. Grants & Agreements staff also review all financial reports and progress reports, review required audits for compliance, and upon grant expiration initiate closeout procedures.
Requests for Advances and Reimbursements

NRCS WMBP payment requests are submitted by grantees each quarter on a reimbursable basis. In cases of hardship, grantees may request monthly reimbursements, but such a change must be requested by the grantee and approved by WMBP program staff.

Advances may also be requested in cases of hardship, at the request of the grantee and approval of program staff. For NRCS to process an advance:

- The recipient must have submitted all performance and financial reports that are due. Refer to the award Statement of Work for reporting requirements.
- Advance payment requests must be submitted at least 15 days prior to the start of the advance period.
- The recipient must have at least partially liquidated all previous advances.
- All previous pending payment requests have been paid. ezFedGrants will not allow submission of a subsequent payment if previously submitted ones have not been processed.

The period covered by an advance payment request is normally 30 to 60 days; requests for an advance covering more than a 60-day period will not normally be approved. Following the advance period, a budget expense table must be submitted within 30 days showing actual expenditures incurred/deliverables incurred so the advance can be liquidated.

Both advance and reimbursement requests are submitted using the SF-270 form through ezFedGrants, an online grants and agreements management system used by USDA. Appendix A and B give instructions on how to complete the form and give an example form. Each request must be accompanied by summary sheet of costs showing amounts for each cost category. All WMBP project funds must be expended within 90 days after the award expiration date (note that costs must be incurred before the award period of performance ends). Refer to the NRCS General Terms and Conditions (attached to your grant agreement) for additional information regarding payments.

If instructed/ permitted by your NRCS point of contact, you may elect to submit your invoice by e-mail. Please note that submitting invoices may result in processing delays.

If you are having issues submitting an invoice in ezFedGrants, contact the ezFedGrants help desk: ezfedgrants@usda.gov.

If you have questions on how to fill in an SF-270 claim form, email your assigned WMBP program contact.

NRCS generally completes payment requests within 30 days of receipt. Grants & Agreements staff process all requests before sending them to WMBP program staff for certification and payment approval. Once a payment is approved, payment is generally processed within 3-4 days.
Supporting Documentation for Payment Requests

All payment requests should be accompanied by a summary sheet of costs showing amounts for each cost category, using the format below:

**Budget Expense Table, Cost Share/Match (this table is required if the agreement has Non-Federal Match)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Category from the SF424A</th>
<th>Approved Budget</th>
<th>Amount Previously Provided</th>
<th>Amount Currently Provided</th>
<th>Remaining to be Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contractual</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Direct Charges</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Charges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:** Include notes as applicable.

Documentation of Grant and Matching Fund Expenditures

WMBP Grantees must maintain detailed, auditable documentation of all grant and matching fund expenditures throughout the life of the grant, and for three years following the grant agreement’s end date. This documentation must be available whenever requested by USDA. This includes program income generated through the sale of credits, which must be applied to the project during the period of performance and which may be used as match.
Reporting Requirements

Grantees are responsible for submitting regular progress and financial reports, as outlined in the general terms and conditions attached to your grant agreement. When reporting is not submitted on time, NRCS may require additional oversight, such as more detailed financial reports, additional project monitoring, or the withholding of payments until delinquent reports are submitted. An overview of grantee reporting requirements is below.

Project Progress Reports
Following execution of the grant agreement, grantees submit progress reports every six months. These semi-annual reports record progress toward completing deliverables, challenges or delays, goals (met and unmet), and any other pertinent information (analysis, explanation of cost overruns). Include information about the progress of restoration efforts, number of restored acres and availability/purchase of credits to and by producers.

Progress reports are submitted to ezFedGrants every six months, with the first report due seven months after the project start date. ezFedGrants notifies grantees when a report is due. Your NRCS point of contact may also request submission of your report via e-mail, on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix E contains the semi-annual progress report template that may be used by awardees but use of the template is not required.

Financial Reports
Grantees must submit regularly to ezFedGrants a Federal Financial Report (SF-425). Instructions for completing a SF-425 are found in Appendix D. The reporting schedule for SF-425s will be included in your grant agreement package.
**Final Reports**

The final programmatic report submitted by WMBP grantees should encompass the entire project, including successes, challenges, and overall achievements. Final reports must not include any Personal Identifiable Information (PII--such as names of landowners, addresses, financial information, etc.).

Following are some guidelines grantees should consider when developing final reports:

- Final reports should include an introduction that describes how the project went overall. This should include an explanation of any barriers that prevented the objectives from being met.
- The report should list each objective and provide a description of how/if it was met. Please provide quantitative information when available (e.g. acres restored, credits made available, credits purchased.)

All final reports are reviewed by the program contact and other appropriate NRCS technical experts within two months of receipt. Incomplete or insufficient final reports will be returned to the grantee for additional information.
Agreement Modifications

Grantees sometimes find it necessary to request modifications to their grant agreement. A formal modification requires execution of an agreement amendment. Examples of modifications include:

• No-Cost Extensions - Grantees may request a no-cost extension to allow additional time beyond the established expiration date. Extensions may be provided to ensure completion of the approved project deliverables. No additional funding is added to the award to allow for completing the project during the extension. The fact that funds remain at the expiration of the grant is not in itself sufficient justification for a no-cost extension. 12 months is the maximum length of an extension and only in exceptional cases will more than one extension be considered. **Be aware: Extensions cannot be granted if requested after the agreement termination date.**

• Budget Changes - In general, WMBP grantees are allowed a certain degree of latitude to re-budget within and between major budget categories (found on the SF-424A budget form). Budget changes may be made at the recipient's discretion as it impacts less than 10% of the total project funding (NRCS + matching funds). For budget changes less than 10%, please email the NRCS program contact for notification of the change. In addition, budget changes should be noted in semi-annual progress reports.

Example: a grantee with a $450,000 project ($225k from NRCS, $225k in matching funds) wants to move $15,000 from the personnel budget category to supplies. This change can be made without an agreement amendment and can be enacted after the grantee emails its NRCS program contact.

For budget changes that impact more than 10% of project funds, a modification form must be submitted.

• Change in Scope of Work - Please coordinate any changes in project scope of work or deliverables with the NRCS program contact assigned to the project. Changes ultimately must be enacted through an agreement amendment.

• Change in Project director/Key Personnel – A change in key personnel requires notification. For permanent changes to project personnel that are on the agreement, or for an extended absence (3 straight months or 25% reduction in project time) a request form should be completed and submitted for approval.

All modification requests must be submitted no less than 30 days before the grantee would like to see the modification take effect. All modifications must include the appropriate form and any relevant supporting documentation. Forms can be found on the WMBP website. Submit forms to your assigned NRCS program contact.
Award Termination

In rare circumstances, awardees or NRCS may seek to terminate a WMBP award. It is always NRCS’s preference that a project continue to its conclusion and NRCS staff are committed to working with awardees to avoid agreement terminations. When a termination is called for, it will be carried out in accordance with 2 CFR 200.339.
Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources

The wetlands and other natural resources that are part of a mitigation bank developed with NRCS funding must be protected by a conservation easement. The awardee is responsible for enforcing all easements.

Projects performed pursuant to this opportunity may be subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). If applicable, NRCS must work with awardees to complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. In addition, prior to any ground-disturbing activities related to NRCS funding, the awardee must work with NRCS staff to complete an environmental evaluation (CPA-52) related to those activities. Awardees may be required to prepare or pay for preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), should any environmental review find that an EA or EIS is required.

In addition, a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 106 review and consultation by an NRCS State or area office with consulting parties (such as the pertinent State Historic Preservation Officer and federally recognized Indian Tribes) may be required prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact cultural resources. NHPA Section 106, its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), and other related authorities, require Federal agencies to determine if a project has the potential to cause an effect to historic properties and, if so, if they are adverse and how the effects may be addressed. The NHPA review and compliance in accordance with section 106 of NHPA and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800 must be completed by NRCS and applicants may be required to pay for any cultural resource surveys needed for NRCS to assess project effects. More information on the awardee’s role in the NHPA Section 106 process can be found on the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website at https://www.achp.gov/digital-library-section-106-landing/section-106-applicant-toolkit.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service under the section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is also required for projects that may affect listed or proposed species or destroy or modify critical habitat. The ESA consultation in accordance with section 7 of the ESA and implementing regulations at 50 CFR Part 402 must be completed by NRCS prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact species or habitat protected under the ESA. More information on the section 7 consultation process can be found at https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/consultations-overview.html.

If you are NOT contacted by the relevant state office(s) to complete all required reviews and would like to begin your project, please reach out to a NRCS State Office Biologist for assistance. If you need help contacting the appropriate person, send us an email at wmbp@usda.gov.
Public Affairs

WMBP grantees should make every effort to coordinate with NRCS staff and USDA external affairs staff on announcements and any press related to the USDA grants. NRCS can provide official logos and photos, program descriptions and other relevant agency information.

At a minimum, the NRCS and the WMBP program should be credited on all public presentations and media, including conference/meeting posters, presentations, news releases or other public information about your project. You may consider using the following statement below, if appropriate:

"This work is supported by the Wetland Mitigation Banking Program at USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service."

Please submit to your assigned NRCS program contacts and program staff any news releases, videos, photos and other media about WMBP projects through the wmbp@usda.gov email box.
Program Contacts

WMBP Inbox: wmbp@usda.gov

ezFedGrants help desk: ezfedgrants@usda.gov

WMBP website:
Appendices

The latest versions of the documents listed below are found on the WMBP Website.

Appendix A. Instructions for completing a SF 270 payment request form

Appendix B. SF 270 Sample

Appendix C. SF 270 Supporting Documentation explanation

Appendix D. SF 425 Sample and Instructions

Appendix E. Semi-Annual Report Template
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.