

Grant Application and Instructions

About

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation's (TPWF) Buffer Lands Incentive Program (BLIP) provides financial assistance to private landowners who voluntarily encumber their real property with a permanent conservation easement. Specifically, the BLIP program will provide grants to private landowners through the easement holder to help defray the costs of voluntarily donating a conservation easement on their property. Priority will be given to projects that are adjacent to or that strategically benefit land owned or managed by the TPWD, but easements that enhance federal or other conserved lands will also be considered.

Grant awards will be made up to \$50,000 (with typical awards expected to range from \$10,000 to \$30,000) and are intended to cover between 50 and 100 percent of eligible costs. Half of grant funding will go towards conservation easement projects that support the habitat and lifecycle needs of grassland and shorebirds. Grassland and shorebird conservation efforts are critical as no other group of birds in North America has shown a greater or more consistent decline than those associated with grassland, shrub, and coastal habitats. The remaining funding will be used to facilitate easements adjacent to or strategic to other TPWD and protected lands with important conservation values, such as freshwater resources, T&E species, or other declining or priority habitat types.

Eligibility

Land Trust Alliance accredited land trusts and/or the TPWD are eligible to apply. All other qualified easement holders will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Priority will be given to projects that are adjacent to or that strategically benefit land owned or managed by the TPWD (including State Parks, State Natural Areas, Wildlife Management Areas, and Coastal Management Areas), but easements that enhance federal or other conserved lands will also be considered. Funds are intended to reduce the financial burden on private landowners who are voluntarily encumbering their property. The program will reimburse private landowners through the easement holder after successful closing.

While successful applicants will only be awarded a single grant per project, project sponsors are encouraged to apply for any project that benefits TPWD lands.

Grant Approval and Allocation Process

TPWF will have sole discretion on the amount of funding awarded to each project based on the below scoring criteria. Landowner financial need will not be considered.

When feasible and after an application has been submitted, TPWF staff and/or TPWD staff will join the land trust on a tour to evaluate the property. TPWF will review applications on a rolling basis with relevant staff from TPWD.

Scoring Criteria

Applications will be scored out of a total of 100 points based on the following criteria:

1) Vegetation Diversity, Habitat and Soil Health (20 total points)

- Describe the quantity and quality of native flora
- Describe the presence of under-represented or high priority habitat

2) Watershed Value (20 total points)

- Describe the project's ability to protect headwaters, springs, creeks, wetlands, riparian buffers and other sensitive watershed features

3) Native Wildlife Value (20 total points)

- Describe the presence and diversity of native species documented on the property, with an emphasis on species listed in the Texas Conservation Action Plan (i.e., declining or rare species of greatest conservation need)
- Describe the presence and diversity of native species documented on the associated TPWD holding or contiguous protected areas with comparable habitat types

4) Scale and Strategic Location (15 total points)

- Describe the project's connectivity with existing protected lands, both public and private
- Describe this project's ability to meaningfully contribute to ecosystem services beneficial to adjacent or strategic to existing TPWD land / other protected area
- Describe if this project conserves migration routes and/or terrestrial or aquatic corridors

5) Threat (15 points)

- How the area is experiencing or expected to experience rapid development or changing land use
- Describe any risk to the property, including the landowner's pressure to develop, subdivide, or sell

6) Conservation Easement Terms (10 points)

- Please include a Memorandum or Term Sheet describing the conservation easement, and how its terms will prohibit fragmentation, incompatible land uses, and encourage responsible stewardship
- Describe any easement terms that may not be seen as beneficial to the benefitted TPWD or other protected property (i.e. development envelopes within a TPWD boundary viewshed, mineral development, etc.)

While the rankings of categories 1-3 above weigh significantly in TPWF and TPWD's evaluation process, "buffer lands" cannot be solely valued for the quality and quantity of their natural resources and imperiled species. Equally critical is how conserving the tract will mitigate future impacts of potential development and reduce incompatible land uses that would significantly degrade the conservation value of the affected TPWD / protected property. Ultimately, one outcome of each successful project will be to protect significant landscapes, creating a buffer around already protected lands.

Application Components

Please submit electronic copies of the following materials in standard digital format (PDF, JPG, Microsoft Word/Excel) labeling each document clearly. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will be reviewed in the order received. TPWF will make best efforts to notify the applicant of any funding decision within 30 days from the date of application. To expedite this process, please limit your application materials to only essential information, taking no more than five written pages to answer all questions. You may submit via email or by using Box, Dropbox, WeShare, .zip files, etc.

Applicants are encouraged to have a pre-application discussion with TPWF and may contact us at:

Merrill Gregg
 Director of Investments and Special Programs
 mgregg@tpwf.org
 Phone: (214) 720-1478

- 1) Project Overview
 - A concise, written narrative of proposed project and benefits to TPWD / other protected lands.
- 2) Scoring Criteria Questions 1-6 (see above)
 - Succinct answers to each of the above Scoring Criteria, including evidence of your answer
- 3) Grant Applicant's Organizational & Financial Status
 - Copy of IRS Determination Letter
 - Evidence of current Land Trust Alliance accreditation
 - Most recent copy of Audited Financial Statements
 - Most recent copy of IRS Form 990
 - A statement attesting to the fact that there are no conflicts of interest between the land trust applicant and the private landowner, including the submission of this grant application
 - Organizational point of contact
- 4) Project Budget
 - Requested Grant Amount, using the attached Excel spreadsheet
 - Supporting documentation for eligible project costs associated with Grant request
- 5) Other Materials
 - A map that clearly demonstrates your project location in relation to TPWD lands as well as any other public or conserved lands; please include locations of any existing or future building envelopes on this map

- Up to one additional map evidencing significance of project to critical habitats, shorebirds, grassland birds, or other species/habitat types described in Texas Conservation Action Plan
- 2-5 photos

Award Requirements

At the time of grant award notification, an award agreement will be sent to the grant recipients. Grants awarded will not be paid until the project has closed and transaction expenses are incurred. Funds will be made available by TPWF following receipt of invoices and other required closing documentation as described below.

Grantees must submit the following within 60 days after project closing to receive payment:

- 1) Copy of document confirming easement is legally recorded
- 2) Updated Funding Spreadsheet with copies of expense receipts for transaction costs (including full amount, description of report/ document, complete vendor information, and receipts marked PAID)
- 3) Other information or documentation, as may be requested by TPWF

Should your application be approved, TPWF kindly asks that you acknowledge our involvement in your project in any press release or media communication.



Founded in 1991, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation's mission is to support Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to ensure that all Texans, today and in the future, can enjoy the wild things and wild places of Texas.