



Department of the Interior

Fish and Wildlife Service

Implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Initial Spend Plan

President Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law on November 15, 2021, making this once-in-a-generation investment in the Nation's infrastructure and economic competitiveness a reality. This Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will rebuild America's roads, bridges and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities that have too often been left behind. The legislation will help ease inflationary pressures and strengthen supply chains by making long overdue improvements for our nation's ports, airports, rail, and roads. It will drive the creation of good-paying union jobs and grow the economy sustainably. The Department of the Interior will receive \$30.6 billion over five years in direct funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Of that, the Fish and Wildlife Service was directly appropriated \$455 million over five years for programs related to the President's America the Beautiful initiative. These funds will help address climate change and restore ecosystems to provide long lasting benefits to the American people and make America more resilient.

The reporting requirements within the Bipartisan infrastructure Law (PL-117-58) state:

Sec. 601. Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior shall submit to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations a detailed spend plan for the funds provided to the Department of the Interior in this title in this Act for fiscal year 2022, and for each fiscal year through 2026, as part of the annual budget submission of the President under section 1105(a) of title 31, United States Code, the Secretary of the Interior shall submit a detailed spend plan for the funds provided to the Department of the Interior in this title in this Act for that fiscal year.

The following spend plan details how the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) plans to execute these investments adhering to the Administration's implementation priorities. The Department has articulated these priorities as:

- investing public dollars efficiently, working to avoid waste, and focusing on measurable outcomes for the American people;
- increasing the competitiveness of the United States economy, including through implementing the Act's Made-in-America requirements and bolstering United States manufacturing and supply chains;



- improving job opportunities for millions of Americans by focusing on high labor standards for these jobs, including prevailing wages and the free and fair chance to join a union;
- investing public dollars equitably, including through the Justice40 Initiative, which is a Government-wide effort toward a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate and clean energy flow to disadvantaged communities;
- building infrastructure that is resilient and that helps combat the crisis of climate change, and where feasible leverage funding to sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and;
- effectively coordinating with State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments in implementing these critical investments.

Fish and Wildlife Service

FWS Direct Appropriations

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides a total of \$455 million to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for the programs and activities shown in the table below. Funding is provided as emergency discretionary appropriations and is available for obligation until expended.

(\$ in 000s)		FWS Total Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding					
Account Name		FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	Total
22XF1611BL/FFRK40000	Klamath Basin	30,780	30,780	30,780	30,780	30,780	153,900
22XF1611BL/FGOK90000	Klamath Basin	1,458	1,458	1,458	1,458	1,458	7,290
Office of the Inspector General	Directed Transfer (only if specified in bill)	162	162	162	162	162	810
Account Name, Total		32,400	32,400	32,400	32,400	32,400	162,000
Account Name							
22XF1611BL/FFRT40000	Lake Tahoe	3,230	3,230	3,230	3,230	3,230	16,150
22XF1611BL/FGOT90000	Lake Tahoe	153	153	153	153	153	765
Office of the Inspector General	Directed Transfer (only if specified in bill)	17	17	17	17	17	85
Account Name, Total		3,400	3,400	3,400	3,400	3,400	17,000
Account Name							
22XF1611BL/FSCS10000	Sage-Steppe	9,500	9,500	9,500	9,500	9,500	47,500
22XF1611BL/FGOS90000	Sage-Steppe	450	450	450	450	450	2,250
Office of the Inspector General	Directed Transfer (only if specified in bill)	50	50	50	50	50	250
Account Name, Total		10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,000
Account Name							
22XF1611BL/FFRD40000	Delaware Basin	4,940	4,940	4,940	4,940	4,940	24,700
22XF1611BL/FGOD90000	Delaware Basin	234	234	234	234	234	1,170
Office of the Inspector General	Directed Transfer (only if specified in bill)	26	26	26	26	26	130
Account Name, Total		5,200	5,200	5,200	5,200	5,200	26,000
Account Name							
22XF1611BL/FFRF40000	Fish Passage	38,000	38,000	38,000	38,000	38,000	190,000
22XF1611BL/FGOF90000	Fish Passage	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	9,000
Office of the Inspector General	Directed Transfer (only if specified in bill)	200	200	200	200	200	1,000
Account Name, Total		40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	200,000
FWS, Total		91,000	91,000	91,000	91,000	91,000	455,000

These programs will provide habitat restoration, invasive species control, conservation of at-risk and listed species and other benefits to four significant ecosystems as well as opportunities to restore habitat connectivity for aquatic species around the country.



FWS Implementation Strategy

Bureau Governance Structure

The FWS implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding will be led by an Executive Team led by the FWS Deputy Director, and made up of the following personnel:

- Deputy Director
- Assistant Director Management and Administration
- Pacific Southwest Regional Director
- Northeast Regional Director
- Assistant Director Fish and Aquatic Conservation
- Mountain-Prairie Regional Director
- Assistant Director, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs
- Assistant Director, National Wildlife Refuge System
- Assistant Director, Ecological Services

Staff support will be provided by the Division of Budget and Performance. The Communications lead is the Assistant Chief, Public Affairs.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Executive team will meet regularly to establish milestones and consider progress, as well as address implementation issues that may arise. Leads for services essential to successful implementation are on the team to allow for quick resolution of any issues related to grant administration, human resources, contracting and acquisition, and similar efforts. Monthly reports will be provided to the Executive Team by the Division of Budget and Performance.

Timeline for Implementation – FY 2022

See individual program submissions that follow.

Administration

The Service will track administrative costs separately from program costs. There is no statutory limit for administrative costs. The Service intends to set aside sufficient funds each year for administration. The Service will also transfer 0.5 percent to OIG, per the statute.

Klamath Basin Restoration Activities

Program Managers

Pacific Southwest Regional Director, Executive Lead
Klamath Basin Collaborative Coordinator



Program Description and Objectives

Funding provided will be allocated for habitat restoration and water right acquisition to help restore the Klamath ecosystem, as well as for enhanced hatchery production of listed Klamath species (Lost River and shortnose suckers).

The headwaters for the Klamath Basin start in the arid mountains east of the Cascade Range in southern Oregon. Downstream, these waters support one of the largest lake-wetlands complexes in the western US. These unique aquatic habitats in the Upper Klamath Basin support the incredible biodiversity for which the watershed is celebrated. Water is also a critical economic resource as it is used for irrigating crops and supporting cattle across the Basin, where there is a long history of highly productive farming and ranching.

River, riparian, lake, and wetland habitats are what make the Klamath Basin unique. These habitats historically supported millions of fish and waterbirds. Wetlands and riparian habitats also provide key ecosystem services that sequester nutrients and provide habitat for all life stages of fish native to the basin. More than half of the wetlands in the Basin have been modified by draining, levee construction, and agricultural practices. These changes have impacted populations of all species that depend on these habitats including water dependent birds, fish, and other organisms.

The Service's Klamath Basin Restoration Program will fund projects and activities identified through a collaborative, transparent and science-based process. Each year the Service will develop an annual spending plan that describes specific projects and activities that will be funded from the Klamath infrastructure funding. To guide the development of these annual spending plans, the Service intends to use its science-based strategic conservation plans, coupled with input from Tribes and other conservation partners at annual stakeholder workshops. Examples of the plans the Service will use to guide this work include: *the multi-partner developed Integrated Fisheries Restoration and Monitoring Plan (IFRMP)*; *Klamath NWR Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs)*; *Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Strategic Plan, 2022-2026*; and *the Revised Recovery Plan for Lost River Sucker and Shortnose Sucker*. Funds will be distributed through a combination of competitive contracts, Tribal grants and other grants, and co-operative agreements. The activities that will be funded represent an expansion of existing activities that span multiple FWS programs.

The objectives of the Service's Klamath Basin Restoration Program include enhancing captive rearing of listed sucker species at the Klamath Falls National Fish Hatchery, addressing water quality/quantity issues throughout the Basin [e.g., water quantity at Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge and water quality in Upper Klamath Lake (UKL)], and supporting projects that will help improve conditions for waterfowl, salmon, suckers and other native fish species throughout the Klamath Basin. Generally, we anticipate focusing on priority projects that fall into several of the following categories:

- Tribal trust commitments
- Aquatic habitat restoration activities



- Waterfowl conservation
- Water quality improvement projects
- Klamath sucker and salmon conservation and recovery
- Klamath River science and data collection
- Monitoring activities to inform adaptive management processes
- Voluntary restoration of private lands
- Securing water for wildlife refuges
- Climate adaptation strategies

Implementation Strategy

The Fish and Wildlife Service will target projects that will maximize environmental benefits, can be initiated quickly, will create jobs in the Klamath Basin and improve conditions for the many Tribes and communities that depend on a healthy, resilient, and well-functioning watershed. Projects that will be funded will not have a significant in-house labor component.

A project evaluation process will be developed by the Service, Tribal partners and other stakeholders.

The Service intends to host/sponsor stakeholder workshops [e.g., with Tribes, States and other stakeholders] to help identify and evaluate candidate restoration projects and to develop annual spending plans based on restoration priorities. Specific details surrounding priority restoration projects from eligible plans or new projects will be identified through workshops, which will include a neutral facilitator, to ensure that all voices are heard. Stakeholders will rank projects, and a list of recommendations will be generated, based on funding available. This list will then be reviewed by the Regional Director for approval. The Service will also identify priorities each year and will determine funding needs. The Service will also reinvigorate work with the Department on strategic use of funds to facilitate development of a Basin-wide agreement on water supply and environmental restoration.

By end of February 2022, the Service will launch development of a conceptual outline of the process describing the mechanics and timing of the Klamath Bipartisan Infrastructure Law process with Klamath Basin stakeholders. The Service will present the concept to Tribes and other stakeholders in order to consider and incorporate feedback it receives, as appropriate. We anticipate workshops will be held in April and May to identify which priority projects are implementable in the next 12 to 18 months. From these workshops, the annual spend plan and the details surrounding the specific restoration projects will be developed. The Service expects that funding will be available for on-the-ground restoration actions in August/September 2022. This process will occur each year until funds are expended.

The Service has been part of, and has supported, long-standing partnerships in the Klamath Basin for more than 20 years with the States of California and Oregon, local Tribes and various conservation partners from throughout the Basin. We have deep and important relationships with each of the Tribes in the Klamath Basin, and plan to use existing mechanisms to fully engage with them on the best uses of infrastructure funding. In past years, we have received



appropriated dollars for Klamath restoration, and had a robust dialogue with the Klamath Basin Tribes about priorities. This has resulted in our agency providing capability funding to the Klamath Tribes and Yurok Tribe, as well as supporting a fish hatchery and many critical restoration projects. We intend to use these strong partnerships to advance basin-wide conservation to ensure robust, inclusive Tribal consultation and stakeholder involvement. Within the Federal family, we anticipate working closely with the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

Performance

Monitoring plans will be required as part of project proposals and selected projects will be required to implement those monitoring plans. These plans will track progress during and after the proposed project period to ensure project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise. The Service is developing additional performance measures for this funding.

Lake Tahoe Restoration Activities #2

Program Managers

Pacific Southwest Regional Director, Executive Lead

Pacific Southwest Assistant Regional Director, Fish and Aquatic Conservation, Staff Lead

Program Description and Objectives

The program objectives align with the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act Section 5(d)(2) which states *The Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary, the Planning Agency, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, shall deploy strategies consistent with the Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan to prevent the introduction or spread of aquatic invasive species in the Lake Tahoe region.*

Implementation Strategy

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are commonly spread by activities such as boating, fishing, hatchery releases, and aquarium dumping. The Lake Tahoe Region is not only threatened by new introductions of AIS to Lake Tahoe from other waterbodies, but also the expansion of existing populations within the lake that imperil Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) and other native aquatic species and the habitat on which they depend.

AIS control measures are permitted under the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act for established populations of invasive plants, fish, and invertebrates. Under the Lake Tahoe AIS Management Plan, these invasive species are targeted for removal to reduce their impact and limit their spread. The FWS spend plan proposal is to primarily use funding in direct collaboration with



the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) and other partners, in support of implementation and evaluation of the Lake Tahoe AIS Management Plan. Priority actions include aquatic invasive fish removal such as management of tributaries to Lake Tahoe to remove and prevent migration invasive species into priority conservation waters; aquatic invasive invertebrate removal that focuses on mysid shrimp and crayfish removal from Lake Tahoe that will significantly contribute to the reestablishment of native zooplankton populations and re-establish a native food chain for the benefit of native species; develop, refine and implement research and monitoring plans for these program areas with specific goals, objectives, and metrics that will adaptively inform effectiveness and provide adaptive management strategies through implementation, AIS Prevention and Biosecurity projects that will augment existing prevention programs under the Lake Tahoe Management Plan, and aquatic invasive plant removal, with emphasis in the Tahoe Keys. The Fish and Aquatic Conservation program manages AIS for the Service.

The partnering Tribe is the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. The Fish and Wildlife Service has a close relationship with the Washoe Tribe, and the infrastructure bill's funding will provide important capacity to control aquatic invasive species for the benefit of LCT and other native species. LCT is a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, and a recovery priority for the Service, Washoe Tribe, and other Federal and non-Federal partners in the Lake Tahoe basin. LCT recovery is also a priority for the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. The Service will work with partners to target funds to support LCT reintroduction and recovery through implementation of the Lake Tahoe AIS Management Plan. The Service expects that substantial funding will be available for on-the-ground actions in the fourth quarter of FY 2022. This process will occur each year until funds are expended. The Service will also work with the Department to deploy this funding in support of President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative.

Performance

Program performance will be measured with existing metrics in the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) Tracker, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Thresholds, and the additional metrics identified in the Lake Tahoe AIS Action Agenda. These metrics include acres treated, number of projects completed, percent increase or decrease of AIS infested acres, and reductions in biomass of invasive fish and invertebrates, and the response of LCT and other native species to the available habitat in Lake Tahoe.

Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation

Program Managers

Mountain-Prairie Regional Director, Executive Lead
Mountain-Prairie Assistant Regional Director, Migratory Birds/Science Applications, Staff Lead
Coordinator, Sagebrush Ecosystem Team, Staff Lead



Program Description and Objectives

This program builds on an existing collaborative effort by the Service and our public and private partners to conserve the sagebrush ecosystem of the American West and the nationally-significant biological, cultural and economic resources it supports. Working across 13 Western States and multiple jurisdictions, this partnership is using leading-edge science and a Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) approach to identify the most pressing threats to a sustainable sagebrush ecosystem, such as invasive species and wildfire, and investing in tangible, measurable actions to address those threats in the face of a changing climate.

Operating on a landscape that comprises one-third of the contiguous United States, the Service and our partners such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the States, are deploying innovative technical tools to highlight the most intact, climate-resilient “core” geographies within sagebrush and target on-the-ground habitat conservation projects to defend those cores and the natural resources values they support. In so doing, this partnership is (1) employing a strategic, cross-cutting, and accountable business model (2) promoting viable rural economies, e.g., public lands outdoor recreation and sustainable livestock production and (3) reducing the need for future Federal regulatory intervention for declining native wildlife populations ranging from resident game species (e.g., Greater sage-grouse) to non-game migratory birds (e.g., Sagebrush sparrow).

The additional funding made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will accelerate and scale up the work of this partnership. Through the Service’s Sagebrush Ecosystem Team (SET) – a cross-programmatic, multi-region working group – the Service will use cooperative agreements and related mechanisms to acquire mission-critical science and to deliver voluntary habitat conservation projects through Private Landowner Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and other partnership-driven work. These projects will focus on (a) protecting sagebrush habitat against the spread of invasive annual grasses and the destructive wildfires they fuel (b) removing encroaching conifers from sagebrush habitat for the benefit of migratory birds and other native wildlife species and (c) restoring mesic (wet) habitat to combat the effects of extreme drought. The combined effect of these strategic investments in the “ecological infrastructure” will help mitigate the onset of climate change in this vital and uniquely American landscape, protect existing livelihoods and create new job opportunities through on-the-ground restoration work, and further demonstrate the Service’s commitment to good government through close and transparent coordination with our Federal, State, Tribal, and private partners.

Implementation Strategy

Over the past two fiscal years, the Service and our partners have developed a prioritization framework to target funding for on-the-ground projects in core sagebrush geographies, with a focus on habitat for declining sagebrush-obligate migratory bird species and an emphasis on slowing or stopping the spread of invasive annual grasses (e.g., cheatgrass) and the destructive wildfire these grasses fuel. Other, related prioritization criteria include conifer removal; mesic restoration; partner funding leverage and feasibility; and, mission-critical science acquisition.



The SET has successfully used this framework and a team of cross-programmatic team of Service sagebrush conservation practitioners to identify, review, rank, and fund internal and external projects. We will use this same proven framework and associated processes to implement the additional funds made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law during fiscal years 2022-2026.

While the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding represents a significant increase in available funding for the Service's sagebrush conservation operations, the existing framework is built to target funding to strategic actions in an efficient, inclusive and scientifically-defensible manner. The Service is ready to scale up our existing process to implement these additional funds and has identified the following major steps to do so:

- Review and revise as necessary our existing SET roster to ensure adequate regional and programmatic representation for all three Service sagebrush regions. (Ongoing)
- Ensure good alignment with partner plans, programs, and priorities. (Ongoing)
- Review and refine project selection criteria based on any new science. (Ongoing)
- Review and revise as necessary existing project tracking systems to inventory and catalog all funded projects. (Ongoing)
- Solicit project proposals to augment existing backlog of projects/proposals from programs/partners. (February 2022)
- Convene SET sub-team to review/rank/fund proposals. (March 2022)
- Proceed with obligation of funds and delivery of work. (April 2022/field season, recognizing many of these projects by definition are multi-year)
- Implement any applicable monitoring protocols to capture initial biological response and other measurable outcomes from project implementation. (April 2022/field season, recognizing many of these projects by definition are multi-year)
- Track, report on, and communicate around key elements of projects and outcomes. (April-September 2022)
- Conduct after action review to identify any necessary process improvements for FY 2023. (October-November 2022)
- Commence next cycle. (December 2022-September 2023)

As discussed above, the Service is one partner in a larger constellation of public and private entities, all pulling together toward a common vision for a healthy sagebrush ecosystem working for wildlife and people. This is a multi-decade effort that began with efforts to conserve the Greater sage-grouse and has evolved into a larger, ecosystem-level initiative guided by numerous, interlocking plans, strategies, and partnerships, including but not limited to:

- The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Sagebrush Conservation Strategy and associated landscape conservation design (which links directly to the Service's SHC approach in sagebrush).
- The Bureau of Land Management's ongoing efforts to revise land use plans for sagebrush habitats (which relates to various related products, such as the Department of



the Interior's Science Framework for Conservation and Restoration of the Sagebrush Biome).

- The US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service's Sagebrush Biome: Framework for Conservation Action.
- The Intermountain West Joint Venture's Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands campaign.

In addition, Tribes are important partners to protect the health and stability of the sagebrush biome. The Service is working with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) and our State and Federal partners on a conservation design for the sagebrush ecosystem that will incorporate Tribal input at the State scale. Tribal lands identified in the ecosystem-wide conservation design would be eligible for conservation and restoration projects and will be identified through partnerships once funding is in place. This design will identify priority areas for conservation and restoration, as well as key threats to address. Our initial work indicates numerous Tribal lands will be important to the overall solutions for sagebrush biome. However, our work also acknowledges Tribes in the sagebrush ecosystem are independent, sovereign nations. It follows that project planning and delivery will be different for each Tribal nation and must consider local cultural context, partnerships, and other factors.

The Service has existing Tribal partnerships in the sagebrush ecosystem. For example, in Wyoming, the Service and the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes of the Wind River Reservation are working through our Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (both located at Lander, WY) to restore important habitat for Greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush-obligate wildlife species, to deliver stream restoration projects to enhance fisheries and aquatic health in local waters, and to engage Tribal youth in fencing and other "hands on" habitat conservation projects on the reservation. We will continue to pursue these and other potential partnership opportunities on other Tribal lands across the sagebrush biome.

Additional Funding Detail

The Service is fortunate to have many active public and private partners in sagebrush conservation. These partners historically leverage Federal funding at rates that exceed 4:1, greatly amplifying the conservation impact of Service investments in this important ecosystem. We anticipate we will realize the same results in implementing projects funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Service will also work with the Department to deploy this funding in support of President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative.

Performance

As mentioned above, the Service is employing an SHC approach to our sagebrush conservation work. Monitoring is an integral component of SHC and generates new information about species population response to habitat treatments, which the Service and our partners then use to adapt management actions. For our sagebrush conservation work, we have identified priority species (three sagebrush-obligate migratory bird species and Greater sage-grouse), set



population objectives for these species, and are currently developing a robust monitoring scheme to gather and analyze data on how these priority species are responding, for example, to removal of invasive grasses in core geographies. Additionally, we will evaluate other existing performance measures for their utility in tracking this effort (e.g., acres/miles restored) and determine if additional performance measures are necessary. The Service maintains several existing databases, including Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS) (used by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program), the Conservation Efforts Database (<https://conservationefforts.org/>), and a regional Project Tracking System (PTS), all of which will be leveraged to monitor and report on these funds. As an example, the Project Tracking System is a comprehensive database to capture all projects funded by the SET. The PTS can be queried and can generate real-time reports on project status and related information. The Service will use the PTS and other companion systems to monitor project implementation progress for the duration of this program.

Delaware River Basin Restoration Program

Program Managers

Northeast Regional Director, Executive Lead
Landscape Partnership Coordinator, Staff Lead

Program Description and Objectives

The Delaware River Basin program provides competitive matching grants for habitat conservation to State and local governments, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, and other eligible entities in the Delaware River Basin in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative includes more than 40 partner agencies and organizations. Since 2018, the fund has awarded \$26.6 million to 123 projects, which generated \$46 million in match, for a total conservation impact of \$72.6 million. The Delaware River Basin Conservation Act (DRBCA) is synchronized with a complementary funding program, the Delaware River Restoration Fund, which is sponsored by the William Penn Foundation and invests an additional \$2 million to \$3 million annually in clean water programs.

The Service's Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (DRBRP) will set priorities for advancing green infrastructure in the Delaware River watershed to guide strategic investment of \$26 million (over 5 years) in infrastructure funding that will be available in this region. The Service will also work with the Department to deploy this funding in support of President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative.

Together with our partners at the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative (Collaborative) Steering Committee, the Service will set priority actions to be funded in this year's Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (DWCF) request for proposals (RFP) under the heading of "nature-based solutions": approaches that use, mimic, or enhance physical, biological, geological, and chemical processes



that exist in natural systems to provide services, like shoreline protection. Examples of nature-based solutions we will prioritize for funding include wetland restoration, riparian buffers, upgrades to road-stream crossing for safety and aquatic passage, measures like living shoreline that improve coastal resilience, forest restoration and management, and land protection.

With \$5.2 million in Federal funding, allocated in FY 2022 from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law we will fund projects that make natural systems, and the human and natural communities that depend upon them, more resilient to change, and protect ecosystem services, like clean water and flood protection. Priority will be given to projects that support the four main priorities of the DWCF program: fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flow management, and equitable access to nature for all communities. The RFP will open in February 2022 and proposals will be due in April 2022. The review committee will select proposals in early summer, and we will award funding in September 2022.

The Steering Committee for this effort comprises geographic proportional representation and diverse group representation. Tribal representation on the Steering Committee will include three members of federally recognized Tribal Nations descended from the indigenous Lenape people of the Delaware River watershed (Delaware Nation and Delaware Tribe in Oklahoma, and the Stockbridge Munsee Mohican Nation in Wisconsin).

The DRBRP also sees its grant program, the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (DWCF), as a tool to improve relationships with Tribal partners and participation in conservation planning within the watershed. In FY 2022 the DWCF will focus \$2 million in grant funding toward capacity building, prioritizing projects that build capacity among partners working to improve fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature in the Delaware River watershed. The Service intends to discuss this capacity building opportunity with the Lenape Tribes, encouraging them to apply for funds that could help build capacity within their organizations -- capacity that could then help them participate and implement conservation on their ancestral lands.

Monitoring and Evaluation

With a focus on climate-change mitigation, resilience, and environmental justice, the Service and our partners will invest in nature-based solutions that support the Administration's priorities for implementing the infrastructure legislation, and improve outcomes for fish, wildlife, and people.

Through collaboration and consensus building, the DRBRP will create a list of priority nature-based solutions that are key to improving resilience and promoting equity within the Delaware River watershed. As a complement to this list, the Collaborative will set green-infrastructure goals for the unique habitats and species needs of the watershed. Through our Delaware Watershed Conservation Blueprint, we will use the latest science to design data products (maps, decision support tools, etc.) that guide where our partners focus their efforts and investments within the watershed. Lastly, we will direct funds through our DWCF grant program to finance the deployment of priority nature-based solutions to meet our shared goals.



The DRBRP's DWCF grant program tracks program performance and conservation outcomes by monitoring progress at the project and program scales. Our partners at NFWF use a database to collect and track project metrics, collecting data during the proposal (proposed accomplishments), annual report and final reporting milestones (actual accomplishments). NFWF collects this data through its Easy Grant and FieldDoc databases. Individual project data is rolled up to assess cumulative program impact across the watershed. Projects specifically funded with infrastructure funds will be tagged in this database to track this subset of investments. This enhanced tracking will allow us to evaluate where infrastructure investments are made (spatial data), the conservation outcomes of these investments (acres restored, miles restored, lbs. of nutrients reduced, etc.), and how these investments feed into the larger conservation blueprint for the Delaware River basin. The Service and NFWF will review and evaluate these investments annually to investigate the following questions:

- How impactful are the investments?
- Are investments spread equitably across the watershed?
- Are certain types of nature-based solutions being deployed more or less frequently than others? If so, why?

This annual review will inform how we shape priorities in our annual DWCF grant program RFP to guide grant applicants to undertake infrastructure projects that are as impactful and strategic as possible.

Timeline for Implementation – FY 2022

The Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (DRBRP) is poised to deploy \$5.2 million of these funds through our Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund grant program in FY 2022. The DWCF grant program launches our request for proposals in February 2022. This year's RFP will be tailored to emphasize our interest in investing in nature-based solutions and provide examples of priority work the program will fund under this category. Partners then submit proposals by the April 2022 deadline. During May – June 2022 reviewers (partners from Tribal, Federal, State, local, community, and NGO organizations who make up our Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative) score and rank proposals based on priorities set by the collective, selecting projects that strategically and efficiently deliver conservation priorities. Awards are made in September of each year.

This timeline will be repeated annually to deploy \$5.2 million increments starting in FY 2022 through FY 2026 until the entire \$26 million directed to the DRBRP is invested in nature-based solutions that will improve the habitat and quality of life for those living in the Delaware River watershed.

Performance

The DRBRP tracks progress and performance measures under our DWCF grant program through NFWF's Easy Grant and Field Docs systems. Applicants can choose from an extensive list of project metrics to describe the conservation outcomes of their proposed/ funded projects.



The DRBRP's DWCF grant program is focused on advancing justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within our projects to ensure that all communities share equitably in the benefits of a healthy watershed. In addition, the DWCF program will track the types and locations of nature-based solution investments made within the Delaware River watershed. The performance of these investments will be measured by 1) the amount of nature-based solutions deployed (i.e. number of oyster reefs, miles of riparian buffers, number of trees planted, etc.) and 2) the beneficial outcomes produced by investing in nature-based solutions, including:

- Reduced flooding in waterfront (coastal and river) communities
- Healthier salt marshes which absorb rising waters
- Improved populations of migratory fish due to better connectivity of spawning habitat
- Increased oyster reefs and living shorelines that buffer coastal zones
- Increased access to nature in nature deprived communities
- Increased urban tree canopy and forest management in the headwaters
- Availability of high-quality water across the watershed

National Fish Passage Program

Program Managers

Assistant Director Fish and Aquatic Conservation, Executive Lead
Branch of Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation, Staff Lead

Program Description and Objectives

The National Fish Passage Program (NFPP) is an existing program that relies on a network of Service biologists and engineers stationed throughout the country to provide technical expertise, financial assistance, and coordination support to complete aquatic ecosystem restoration projects. The Service works with Federal agencies, State governments, private landowners, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to restore fish passage and aquatic connectivity by removing or bypassing barriers. Projects range in size from large-scale dam removals, to the repair or removal of culverts at road-stream crossings, to the installation of fish screens at agricultural water diversions. The NFPP has reopened access to thousands of miles of habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms.

The NFPP is an essential element of Service efforts to tackle climate change, deliver environmental justice, and build our economy. In addition to providing benefits for fish and aquatic species, the NFPP's work to restore degraded and fragmented aquatic habitats decreases public safety hazards and improves infrastructure resilience by reducing flood risks, removing obsolete dams, and improving water delivery for local agriculture irrigation districts. This important work also creates construction, engineering, and other jobs, stimulating the local economy.



The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requires that NFPP funds be utilized “for restoring fish and wildlife passage by removing in-stream barriers and providing technical assistance.” A portion of the funding provided each year will be used to provide technical assistance (e.g., project management, biological expertise, engineering support, environmental compliance, and monitoring). Funding to external partners will be distributed via cooperative agreements and grants.

Implementation Strategy

The NFPP maintains and annually updates a list of shovel ready priority fish passage projects that will provide conservation benefits to a wide range of aquatic species and habitats and that can be initiated quickly. The Service will initially target projects from this list that maximize benefits for priority species and habitats and that support Administration efforts to tackle climate change, deliver environmental justice, deliver on conservation through the America the Beautiful initiative, and build our economy.

In the coming months, we intend to refine the current approach for selecting and implementing individual projects to ensure these funds are being directed to the highest priority projects nationwide that will maximize benefits for high priority species and aquatic habitats. In addition, we will incorporate project selection criteria that reflect the Administration’s broader programmatic goals, including in support of President Biden’s America the Beautiful initiative.

The development and implementation of individual projects will also continue to engage and leverage resources of our many and diverse partners, including other Federal agencies, State governments, private landowners, Tribes, and NGOs. This will include engaging the existing network of partnerships under the National Fish Habitat Partnership program. In addition, we intend to work with other State and Federal agencies (e.g. NOAA Fisheries, Federal Highway Administration) to ensure that other Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding also aimed at improving fish passage is implemented in a coordinated fashion.

Since the NFPP’s inception in 1999, the Service has partnered with Tribal Governments (Federally Recognized) and Tribal Organizations (Not Federally Recognized) across the country to restore aquatic habitat and fish passage both on and off Tribal lands. For example, in Nevada, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, the Service, and other Federal partners successfully installed a state-of-the-art fish screen to existing water infrastructure allowing the iconic Lahontan cutthroat trout to access historic spawning grounds above Derby Dam for the first time in over a century. In Maine, the Penobscot Indian Nation was a key partner, along with the Service and others, in the monumental collaborative effort to restore the Penobscot River. This basin-wide restoration project included the removal of two dams, the construction of a bypass channel around a third dam, and improvements to fish passage and power generation at several other dams. Nationwide, Tribal governments conduct, support, and collaborate with the Service on NFPP projects to restore, conserve, and protect Tribal resources.

Funding through the NFPP represents a critical investment opportunity to protect Tribal resources, improve Tribal relations, and uphold the Service’s Tribal trust responsibility. The



NFPP is a voluntary, non-regulatory program that provides technical and financial assistance to Federal, State, local, Tribal, and private partners to implement cooperative and environmentally sound fish passage projects that benefit Federal trust species. Tribes aiming to implement fish passage projects in collaboration with the Service will be eligible for funding made available to the NFPP through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

As an example of a recent project, the NFPP worked with the National Park Service, Piedmont Environmental Council, Trout Unlimited, and others to build a new bridge over a stream in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. The project provided benefits to aquatic species, while also providing safe and reliable public and emergency vehicle access to the park's trail system. In rural Missouri, the program has maintained a long-term partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation to replace culverts at road stream crossings. The projects provide benefits to the federally threatened Niangua darter and have resulted in road-stream crossings that are easier to maintain and safer for people to use during moderate flood events. In Massachusetts, the program has provided technical assistance to a long-term partnership effort among the Service, conservation organizations, State and other Federal agencies, the City of Taunton, and local planners to remove dams on the Mill River and monitor the effects of the projects. These projects restored aquatic connectivity to an important tributary to the Taunton River, resulting in improved populations of river herring and American eel and safer recreational access.

In addition to our work with a variety of partners on individual projects, we intend to work with other State and Federal agencies (e.g. NOAA Fisheries, Federal Highway Administration) to ensure that other Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding also aimed at improving fish passage is implemented in a coordinated fashion.

Timeline for Implementation – FY 2022 to FY 2026

For FY 2022, each Service region will propose a list of high priority projects to restore fish and wildlife passage by removing instream barriers that will also advance Administration priorities to increase resilience to climate change and support disadvantaged communities. Criteria will be established for project selection and projects for FY 2022 funding are expected to be selected by mid-summer. Projects for FY 2023 and subsequent years will be submitted each January with project selection occurring in the spring.

Performance

Current performance measures for NFPP include the number of fish passage barriers removed, along with the number of miles of upstream habitat reopened for fish and other aquatic organisms. Other metrics include the number of partners involved and the amount of funding leveraged.