



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



An enthusiastic landowner in McKinley County, painted his barn after becoming a partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Photo: USFWS

1) Can I be a partner?

Most of our partners are private, non-Federal, landowners. This includes individual private landowners, local and county agencies, municipalities, Tribes, Pueblos, private 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. In New Mexico, however, land owned by the New Mexico State Land Office is considered privately-owned for the purposes of the Partners Program.

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?

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 organizations, whenever possible, to leverage funding and in-kind assistance. This stretches our funding and increases the number of acres restored.



Rio Grande Gorge- Taos, New Mexico Photo: USFWS

5) How much funding is available for my project?

Up to \$25,000 is available 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 landowner agreement?

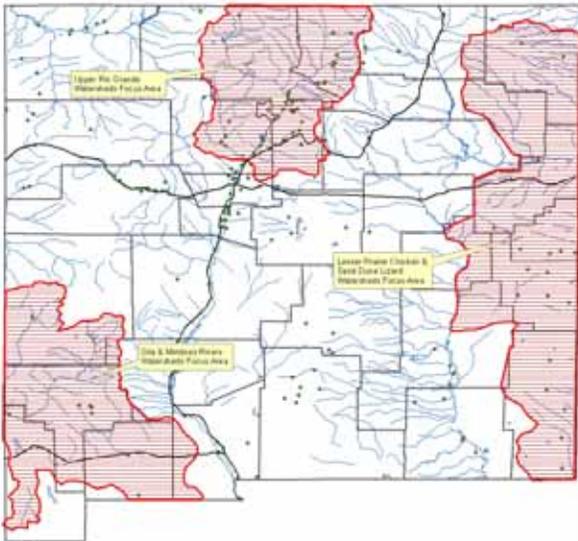
Before beginning a habitat restoration project, the Service and the landowner (Cooperator) must sign a Private Lands Agreement (PLA). This PLA states that the landowner will not return the project area to its former use, or alter or remove any project components (e.g., pipes, fences) for the specified term of the PLA. The term of the PLA must be a minimum of 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.

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) When do I receive the money for the project?

Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects are reimbursable projects. This means that landowners are reimbursed for the costs they incur in developing an approved project. For example, the Cooperator pays up front for materials, labor, and other project expenses and then submits the receipts to the Service for reimbursement. The Cooperator may perform the restoration and be reimbursed directly for acceptable expenses or the Cooperator can hire a contractor and the Service will reimburse the Cooperator for those expenses. The Service does not pay the contractor directly; money is deposited into an account authorized by the Cooperator, after the Cooperator submits billing receipts to the Service. Final payment is not dispersed to the Cooperator until the Service determines the project is complete.



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

Three 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 shown above as the:

- Gila-Mimbres Riparian Area;
- Upper Rio Grande Riparian Area; and the
- Lesser Prairie-Chicken Area.

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 which include migratory birds, declining species, and Federal and State threatened and endangered 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-sharing; and/or
- 2) are most cost effective.

9) 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.



Getting the work done.

Photo: USFWS

10) Is my land suitable for habitat restoration?

Almost any land, whether it has been cropped, grazed, mined or cleared, can be restored. 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.

11) 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. 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.

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

The Service does not provide funding for stock pond construction under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. 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. We can, however, provide technical assistance that can help improve an existing pond for wildlife use.



Wetland restoration in a floodplain. Photo: USFWS

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

Between 1989 and 1999, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in New Mexico followed the national guidelines for the program, and wildlife ponds were designed and created in many upland areas of New Mexico. It has since been determined that these created ponds are not cost effective; these ponds have increased maintenance needs and costs; and may not hold water without high priced liners. The Partners Program will assist with technical advice and will consider funding wetland restorations that restore wetland wildlife habitat functions lost within a floodplain due to man-induced impacts. These projects must be cost effective, supported by ground water, and require little or no maintenance.

14) 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?

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. A Partners biologist can help you determine what type of permits and clearances might be required for your potential 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 State Section 401 water quality certification.
- Projects that use or store water need to be evaluated by the Office of the State Engineer for water rights. Your project should not adversely impact other landowners by flooding adjacent lands, diverting water from irrigation ditches without water rights, creating additional erosion or siltation problems, etc.
- 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

15) When will the work be started?

You must receive a final copy of your Private Lands Agreement (PLA), which has been signed by both you, the landowner (Cooperator), **and** by the Service **before** you can begin work on the project. If you incur any project-related expenses before you have a signed PLA, you cannot be reimbursed for those expenses by the

Federal government. As described in the previous question and answer, you also must obtain any other necessary permits before beginning your project.

Note: Prior to receiving a PLA, the Cooperator 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.) A waiver for an electronic deposit can be applied for under limited circumstances. The Cooperator must also register for a DUNS (Data Universal Numbering System) number for U.S. government contractors and grantees, and sometimes with the CCR (Central Contracting Registry). Our staff will be happy to provide you with contact information for these processes.

16) When will the work be completed?

Cooperators are required to complete the project within 12 to 18 months (as defined in the PLA) from the date of the Service's signature on the PLA. The time can be extended for justifiable delays by modifying the agreement.

17) What kind of maintenance is required?

Most restoration 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.



Habitat for the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly. Photo: USFWS

18) After the restoration 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.

19) How do I apply to the Partners Program? Is there a deadline for applications?

Contact your Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program State Coordinator or visit our website at: http://www.fws.gov/ifw2es/NewMexico/PFW_home.cfm for an application. Applications may be submitted throughout the year. However, since program funds are generally received only once a year so we have established an application deadline that is announced annually through a Request for Proposals. Usually the application deadline is near the end of the calendar year. Please call or go to our website to receive the Request for Proposals.

Projects will be ranked shortly after the due date. As soon as funding becomes available, we will notify applicants of their selection or non-selection. Additional projects may be funded until the end of the fiscal year (September 30) if more funding becomes available.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

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AT: http://www.fws.gov/ifw2es/NewMexico/PFW_home.cfm