

**NEW HAMPSHIRE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION
UPPER CONNECTICUT RIVER MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT FUND**

Grant Application Instructions

Introduction—In April 1996, New England Power Company (NEP) filed a notice of intent for a new operating license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for several hydroelectric dams it owned along the upper reaches of the Connecticut River, in an area known as Fifteen Mile Falls (FMF). In October 1996, NEP announced its intent to sell all of its generating facilities in New England in response to a regulatory requirement. As a consequence of the announced sale, NEP and the FMF “stakeholders” (comprised of federal and state agencies, environmental organizations and community groups) worked to develop a comprehensive agreement regarding protection and management of river-related resources. The 1997 “Settlement Agreement” (SA) called for the establishment of an “Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund” (MEF) and funded through annual contributions from the dams’ owner, with amounts related to the income derived from operating the dams. The purpose of the MEF is to provide financial assistance to projects that will restore, protect, and/or enhance the river ecosystem affected by the FMF hydroelectric project, or that will serve as mitigation for some of the impacts of the project. Additional background information can be found in the Settlement Agreement at www.nhcf.org/mef.

In the fall of 1998, U.S. Generating Company (USGen) bought the Fifteen Mile Falls hydroelectric facilities from NEP. Throughout the FMF relicensing process, beginning in 1995 and concluding in 2002, both NEP and USGen worked with a number of the stakeholders to develop a consensus approach to the relicensing, including the Settlement Agreement. A full application to relicense the project was filed in 1999. An environmental assessment, prepared by FERC, analyzed the license application and its supporting studies and plans. In 2002, a new federal operating license was issued by FERC, which upheld the terms of the 1997 Settlement Agreement and endorsed the Mitigation and Enhancement Fund. In 2005, the dams were sold to TransCanada Hydro Northeast Inc. This portfolio was then acquired by Great River Hydro, LLC in 2017.

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation holds and manages funds contributed to the MEF by current and preceding project owners. An advisory committee, made up of representatives of FMF stakeholder organizations, recommends grant awards from the Fund for “projects that will enhance river-related natural resources in the upper Connecticut River watershed.” The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation provides staff support to the advisory committee.

Available Funding—Current available funding is approximately \$7 million.

MEF Service Area—Pursuant to the terms of the SA, the MEF supports implementation of restoration and protection projects within the Connecticut River watershed upstream of the confluence of the White River and the Connecticut River at White River Junction, VT, and West Lebanon, NH.

NOTE: The SA states that projects within the White River sub-watershed will be considered ONLY when those projects offer “***exceptional environmental benefits not available in the upper Connecticut River watershed.***” In order for a proposal within the White River sub-watershed to be considered for MEF funding, applicants must demonstrate the “exceptional” nature of the project. Pre-application consultation with VT resource experts and NHCF staff is recommended prior to submitting a concept paper for a project in this area.

MEF Project Categories—Proposals should address one or more of the following resource categories:

- 1) **River Restoration**—Projects that improve or enhance water quality, fisheries, fish passage (i.e. dam removal, culvert restoration) and habitat for river-dependent species.
- 2) **Wetland Restoration, Protection and Enhancement**—Projects that restore or enhance wetlands to mitigate for wetlands lost or adversely affected by the Fifteen Mile Falls (FMF) Hydroelectric Project (upstream and downstream from the FMF project area)
- 3) **Shoreland Protection**—Projects that restore or protect buffers and eroding river or stream banks within the watershed.

The “Application Evaluation Criteria” provide detailed descriptions of the above categories and a ranking rubric that is used to evaluate proposals to the MEF. ***It is critical to review the criteria before submitting a concept paper.*** Go to www.nhcf.org/mef for the criteria and list of MEF-funded projects.

MEF Priority Areas—The MEF Advisory Committee completed a meta-analysis of the MEF service area to identify priority locations with high concentrations of important resources where project proposals are most likely to meet the purposes of the SA and MEF criteria. The analysis—updated with new data in 2016—resulted in reports and recommendations for *Priority Riparian Areas* and *Priority Connectivity Projects*. *The MEF Advisory Committee will give funding priority to project proposals that occur within the Priority Riparian Areas and that address the Priority Connectivity Projects.*

Priority Riparian Areas—Eight (8) *Priority Riparian Areas* were delineated where existing data, studies and reports have identified critical resources that overlap. Organizations are encouraged to develop medium- to large-scale, on-the-ground projects (not additional studies) within the *Priority Riparian Areas* that have a strong nexus with one or more of the three MEF resource categories (listed above). The intent is to catalyze directly-correlated, multi-resource proposals within the *Priority Riparian Areas* that provide watershed-level benefits and may require significant funds for implementation. Full report at www.nhcf.org/mef.

Priority Connectivity Projects—This study identified man-made impediments to in-stream connectivity, with an emphasis on dams that inhibit aquatic organism connectivity to the main stem of the Connecticut River, and where identified high-value, in-stream ecological resources are likely to significantly benefit from impediment removal. The report identifies nine (9) “Very Highest Priority Dams” and eight (8) “High Priority Dams”. The intent is to catalyze project proposals to remove or facilitate aquatic organism passage (AOP) through these identified dams. For culverts, because of changes in state rules on AOP, MEF generally will no longer fund individual culvert replacement or watershed culvert-inventory projects. MEF will consider culvert replacements as part of a larger, watershed-level initiative, or culvert replacements that are directly related to improving AOP at one or more identified dam-connectivity improvement projects that have known in-stream resources and significant connectivity miles to be gained. Full report at www.nhcf.org/mef.

The conclusions in both reports are based solely on natural-resource information and do not take into account land-ownership patterns or other cultural factors. Areas identified in the reports might not yield feasible projects or proposals due to lack of landowner/community interest or other constraints.

Consultation and Coordination—The Connecticut River watershed has been the subject of *numerous* studies, planning efforts, management documents, and federal-designation processes. The results of these activities provide a wealth of guidance about relative priorities for restoration work within the watershed. *Applicants are **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** to consult with appropriate federal, state, regional, and local agencies to determine how their project fits within established priorities or planning guidance.* This consultation should take place **BEFORE SUBMITTING A GRANT APPLICATION**. Key contacts:

- NH Wildlife Action Plan – Emily Preston, 603-271-5860, emily.preston@wildlife.nh.gov, <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/wap.html>
- VT Wildlife Action Plan – Jon Kart, 802-595--1810, jon.kart@vermont.gov, www.vtfishandwildlife.com/SWG_CWCS.cfm
- The Nature Conservancy Connecticut River Program – Kim Lutz, 413-584-1016, klutz@tnc.org
- Upper Connecticut River Important Bird Areas Project – Pam Hunt (NH Audubon), 603-224-9909 ext. 328, phunt@nhaudubon.org, <http://www.nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/IBA.htm>
- NH Natural Heritage Bureau – Amy Lamb, 603-271-2215 ext. 323, amy.lamb@dred.nh.gov
- VT Non-game & Natural Heritage Program – Everett Marshall, 802-371-7333, everett.marshall@vermont.gov
- US Fish and Wildlife Service – John Warner, 603-223-2541, john_warner@fws.gov
- Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture – www.easternbrooktrout.org/
- Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge – Andrew French, 413-548-8002 x111, andrew_french@fws.gov
- National Park Service Rivers, Northeast Region Hydro Program – Kevin Mendik, 617-223-5299, Kevin_mendik@nps.gov
- NH Fish & Game Department:
 - NH River Restoration or Shoreland projects – John Magee, 603-271-2744, john.a.magee@wildlife.nh.gov
 - NH Wetland projects – Mike Marchand, 603-271-3016, michael.marchand@wildlife.nh.gov
- NH Department of Environmental Services - Tracie Sales, Rivers Management and Protection Program, 603-271-8811, tracie.sales@des.nh.gov
- VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation
 - VT River Restoration projects – Mike Kline, 802-490-6155, mike.kline@vermont.gov
 - VT Shoreland projects – Perry Thomas, 802-490-6198, perry.thomas@vermont.gov
 - VT Wetland projects
 - Caledonia/Essex/Washington Counties: Shannon Morrison, 802-490-6178, shannon.morrison@vermont.gov
 - Orange/Windsor Counties: Rebecca Chalmers, 802-490-6192, rebecca.chalmers@vermont.gov
- NH Division of Historical Resources – Edna Feighner, 603-271-2813, edna.feighner@dcr.nh.gov
- VT Division for Historic Preservation – Scott Dillon, 802-272-7358, scott.dillon@vermont.gov

Other organizations with useful information:

- North Country Council (Regional Planning Commission for northern NH) – 603-444-6303
- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (Regional Planning Commission for west-central NH) – 603-448-1680
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (Regional Planning Commission for the Northeast Kingdom of VT) – 802-748-8303
- Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (Regional Planning Commission for east-central VT) – 802-457-3188

Eligibility—Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations, community organizations, educational institutions and federal, state and local government agencies. Organizations must be recognized as tax-exempt under Section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code, or be a government entity. Nonprofit organizations or community groups that do not have 501c3 status may apply if another tax-exempt organization serves as fiscal sponsor (and executes a fiscal-sponsor agreement).

Application Process—MEF has established a two-step process to accept proposals from eligible organizations through GrantSource, NHCF’s online grant application portal.

Concept Paper—All applicants must first submit a concept paper that describes the proposed project, a timetable for completion, how the proposal meets the MEF criteria and/or MEF Priority Areas, and

collaborating organizations, together with a detailed map of the project area (including GPS coordinates) and a draft project budget. The concept paper enables preliminary review by the MEF advisory committee and helpful feedback to potential applicants. Before submitting a concept paper, potential applicants must discuss their proposal ideas with appropriate resource contacts on the previous page AND with NHCF Senior Program Officer Ben Amsden at 603-263-8355, or by e-mail at ba@nhcf.org.

Proposals requesting up to \$10,000: Funding decisions may be made solely on the content of the concept paper submittal, but in some cases, the MEF advisory committee may request a full proposal. These decisions will be made in January.

Proposals requesting more than \$10,000: Applicants whose concept papers have been reviewed and accepted by the MEF advisory committee will be invited to submit a full application. Please note that being invited to submit a full application does not guarantee funding. Staff will provide feedback prior to submitting a full application.

Multi-Year Funding—Applicants may submit proposals for multi-year project funding for up to three (3) years. The Foundation will employ a flexible approach in committing funds for the second and third years of a project depending on the type of project, the size of the request, amount of funding available, the applicant organization, the pool of applications, and so on. The Foundation may (1) approve the entire requested amount in the first year, (2) approve funding only for the first year and invite a streamlined report and reapplication for subsequent-year funding in the next grant round, or (3) require a full application for subsequent funding in the next grant round.

Multiple Applications—Applicants may submit more than one application in any given grant round for separate projects that are not directly correlated with one another (i.e. a dam-removal project in one location and a shoreland protection project elsewhere may be separately eligible). Likewise, applicants are encouraged to think comprehensively about their projects and to combine multiple related objectives in a single application (i.e. permanent conservation of a property together with habitat restoration on that same property).

Funding Limits—Applicants are strongly encouraged collaborate with other organizations and to leverage MEF grant requests with other funding sources. The maximum limit for any single application is determined by the total amount available in the fund. The advisory committee will entertain funding large, comprehensive proposals that are highly relevant to the criteria, particularly within Priority Areas.

Indirect/Overhead Costs—In addition to including appropriate line items describing direct costs, the budget may include a line item for indirect/overhead costs. Indirect costs are capped at 20%, with the amount of subcontracts that can be counted towards the calculation capped at \$25,000. If you need assistance with this calculation, contact Ben Amsden at (603) 263-8355, or by e-mail at ba@nhcf.org prior to submitting any materials.

Deadlines— The Foundation announces details on the upcoming grant round each year by late summer and early fall, and grant decisions are made once a year. Current deadlines are available at www.nhcf.org/MEF. In extraordinary circumstances (for time-sensitive projects), the advisory committee may consider “off-cycle” grant requests outside the normal application deadline. Examples of such circumstances include land purchases where an option or sales agreement does not coincide with the application deadline, or where a commitment of funds is needed to match other, time-sensitive funding sources. Such applications are by invitation only. Potential “off-cycle” applicants **MUST** contact Ben Amsden at (603) 263-8355, or by e-mail at ba@nhcf.org prior to submitting any materials.

How to Apply—For concept papers and full applications, you will be asked to upload information through GrantSource in the following areas:

1. *Project Description*: Describe the goals, objectives and activities you will implement, the geographic area served, and a time line for completing the project.
2. *MEF Priority Areas*: Whether the project is located within one of the identified Priority Riparian Areas or addresses one of the Priority Connectivity Projects.
3. *MEF Proposal Categories and Evaluation Criteria*: Describe how the project fits into one or more of the MEF Proposal Categories (Riverine, Wetland, Shoreland), and how the specific criteria within each relevant category apply to the project, as well as the General Criteria for Proposal Selection.
4. *Relevance to Federal, State, Regional or Local Priorities for the Connecticut River and its watershed*: Describe how your project advances relevant protection and/or restoration priorities within the Connecticut River watershed as articulated by federal and state agencies; regional planning commissions; local communities; and nonprofit organizations. (*See the list of contacts above.*)
5. *Collaborating and Cooperating Organizations*: For each collaborating organization, list the contact person, contact information, and description of their role.
6. *Evaluation Plan*: Identify the specific measurable outcomes or changes that will occur as a result of this project. How will you know the project has been successful? All grantees must report to the Foundation at the end of the grant period on the outcomes specified here. (Fill out/submit the MEF Project Metrics Form to estimate the anticipated on-the-ground impacts at the end of the project.)

REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS FOR ALL APPLICATIONS—Within GrantSource, you will be required to upload digital copies of the following documents:

- **Project budget (using the MEF template)** with details on income and expenses, including cash and in-kind contributions from other sources and the status of those sources (we strongly encourage projects that leverage other funding). The budget **MUST** show a specific column of anticipated MEF expenses (apart from other funding sources and in-kind contributions).
- One or more **detailed maps** showing the location of the proposed project or program. Applications must include (either on the map or in the narrative) GPS coordinates for the project. PLEASE NOTE: Multiple maps must be combined into one file prior to uploading, pdf format is preferred.
- Completed **MEF Project Metrics Form** showing anticipated project outcomes.

OPTIONAL ATTACHMENTS—Within GrantSource, applicants may upload digital copies of the following documents:

- One or more **letters of support** from project partners. These letters must be project specific, and include detail describing the involvement of the partner and their precise role in the project. Do not include general, non-specific letters of organizational praise or support. PLEASE NOTE: Multiple letters must be combined into one file prior to uploading, pdf format is preferred.

NOTE ON USE OF RESTORATION MATERIALS: The use of erosion control matting with welded plastic or 'biodegradable plastic' netting or thread shall not be used on projects funded by the MEF. These products are a known source of entanglement and mortality to the state threatened black racer and other snakes and to other wildlife species. Coco matting, coconut fiber matrix, jute netting and erosion control berm is acceptable.

Have questions? Need help? If you have questions or need more information about specific project ideas, contact Ben Amsden at (603) 263-8355, or by e-mail at ba@nhcf.org. This application information and related materials are available at www.nhcf.org/mef.

GrantSource—If you have questions about or need assistance with GrantSource (e.g. setting up or updating your organizational profile, accessing your username and password, uploading documents, etc.), or with other grant-process questions, please contact Wendy Cahill at 603-225-6641, ext. 21249, or by email at wlc@nhcf.org.