



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

### **Guide to Water Quality Protection and Restoration for Land Trusts**

If you have questions about this RFP, please contact:

Andrew Szwak  
Mid-Atlantic Program Manager  
Land Trust Alliance  
(973) 479-6362  
Email: [aszwak@lta.org](mailto:aszwak@lta.org)

#### **Overview of the Land Trust Alliance**

The Land Trust Alliance (the “Alliance”) saves the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. Founded in 1982, the Alliance builds land trust capacity through standards and practices, education, grants and financial assistance, coaching and targeted initiatives. We give voice to the land conservation movement and advocate for supportive public policies and funding. We inform, inspire and unite the land conservation community through *Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference*, regional and online networks and our digital and print communications. Our 1,000 land trust members have protected more than 56 million acres to date and protect, on average, an additional million acres a year.

#### **Introduction**

Land trusts own and hold conservation easements on millions of acres of land and are protecting thousands more every day. This puts them in a unique position to positively influence the health and safety of local water quality by strategically siting their land conservation efforts and by assisting landowners to improve management of already conserved lands.

To address these needs and opportunities, the Alliance launched the Chesapeake Land and Water Initiative (Initiative) in 2016 as a 4.5-year pilot effort to accelerate land conservation and enhance stewardship of conservation lands to more directly benefit water quality. Among the strategies and approaches that the Initiative has sought to support, through both its competitive grant program and its policy, communications, and training efforts are:

- Prioritize, promote, and incentivize private land conservation and stewardship activities that best protect, improve, or enhance water quality and have potential to serve as replicable models;

- support or build collaborative, diverse partnerships among land trusts; watershed groups; local, state, and federal agencies; and other partners that collectively help achieve land protection and stewardship goals;
- create or support cross-cutting programs linking elements such as innovative science-based planning, community engagement, creative or new conservation financing programs/policies, and/or ecosystem services.

Because land use and land management are key drivers of water quality, land trusts have the potential to play a much greater role than they have to date both in protecting healthy watersheds and in restoring degraded water quality by working with landowners on improved management practices for already conserved land. Our 2015 [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Land Trust Assessment](#) examined that potential in greater detail and its recommendations helped to inform the design and implementation of the Chesapeake Land and Water Initiative.

Since 2016, land trusts and partners, both through the Chesapeake Land and Water Initiative and otherwise, have expanded work on water quality significantly. Keys to the success of such projects have been increasing their understanding of the drivers of water quality, increasing access to water quality-related data and analysis to enhance conservation planning, building new partnerships with watershed groups, local agencies, and others who can provide technical and implementation assistance, and accessing new sources of funding for water quality protection and restoration. Since 2017, the Initiative has provided grants totaling more than \$650,000 to support land trusts' and partners' work on such projects.

Likewise, in 2019, the Land Trust Alliance began laying the groundwork for a similar effort working with land trusts to support water quality protection and restoration in the Great Lakes region. We conducted a survey of land trusts about their water-focused project work and are near to completing an assessment, similar to the 2015 report in the Chesapeake, on opportunities and needs for land trusts in protecting and restoring land to improve Great Lakes water quality.

As a point of reference, the Alliance has published two previous water-related guides for land trusts, "[Protecting Surface Water Quality With Conservation Easements](#)" (2004) and "[Land Trusts and Water: Strategies and Resources for Addressing Water in Western Land Conservation](#)" (2014). With the new resource outlined in this RFP, we are seeking to add to and update our sector's understanding of how land trusts are engaging on water quality protection and restoration and provide information for land trusts to help them implement projects in an Eastern U.S. context—i.e., where quality, and not quantity, is the stronger consideration and pollution, rather than scarcity, is the most significant threat.

Through this request for proposals, we are soliciting a contractor or contractors to develop resources for land trusts that would:

- 1) provide an overview of the major aspects of water quality protection and restoration work being done by land trusts,
- 2) identify the ingredients for success and critical resources to help develop such projects,
- 3) provide a recommended framework for action for land trusts interested in undertaking more intentional water-focused work, and
- 4) provide information resources and examples to learn from to assist with this work.

We anticipate that while a number of the case studies and lessons learned provided in these document(s) will be centered on what has been learned and supported through the Chesapeake Land and Water Initiative, we would like to incorporate some examples from the Great Lakes as well as important, innovative, and/or representative examples from other regions that could be replicable in other geographies.

## **Deliverables and Project Schedule**

### **Deliverable: (GUIDE) Water Quality Protection and Restoration for Land Trusts**

#### **I. Introduction**

This section would present an introductory context for land trust work on water quality, and should generally address:

*What are the basic drivers for water quality, both physically and socially, and how do land trust activities intersect with those drivers to impact them in positive ways? What is the benefit/argument for land trusts to engage more intentionally on water quality issues?*

#### **II. Understanding the policy landscape for water quality**

This section will outline and provide a simple introduction to the primary laws, regulations, and policies that govern water quality and watershed restoration in the U.S., and may address, in brief:

*The Clean Water Act and Total Maximum Daily Loads, Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits, etc. plus voluntary actions that can be taken to reduce pollution loads (and how land trusts can engage)*

*What do land trusts need to know about these in order to engage in this regulatory space, or to utilize the programs and funding available for compliance to help implement voluntary practices on private land working with landowners?*

#### **III. Strategic conservation planning for water quality**

This section will discuss how land trusts can incorporate water quality into conservation planning (for both protection and restoration) and identify and describe a few examples and resource links. It may address:

*What data is available for land trusts to use? How can it help to set priorities for either land protection (new conservation) or watershed restoration (enhanced stewardship and management)?*

*Who should land trusts engage through their strategic conservation planning—including technical experts, data producers or GIS analysts, community members, potential new partners, etc.*

*What examples of such planning would be useful for land trusts to learn from?*

#### **IV. Strategic conservation actions land trusts can undertake**

This section will highlight the different types of projects land trusts are engaging in to improve water quality, as well as up to 10 examples of these different types of projects to learn from. For each example, it would be helpful to address both the planning and process for each project, factors/elements that contributed to project success, relevant partnerships that brought technical or other assistance to the project, and project funding components. At least two examples should focus on regional-scale, collaborative conservation partnerships that have land conservation and watershed restoration as strategies and/or goals. At least two examples should also illustrate how watershed conservation and restoration advance equity and social justice in the forms of cleaner drinking and/or surface waters in local or downstream communities.

## **V. Resources available to fund water quality restoration/land protection projects**

This section should provide an overview/orientation to major programs and funding but does not need to be exhaustive. It should at least include brief information on:

*Farm Bill Conservation Title programs (e.g., ACEP-ALE/WRP; RCPP; EQIP; CREP; CSP)*

*Environmental Protection Agency programs (e.g., Clean Water Act Section 319 grants). [Coordination with EPA staff working towards an agency-specific clean water resource guide is required.]*

*Chesapeake Bay Program/Great Lakes Restoration Initiative*

*Clean Water/Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (specifically how they are used for land conservation and which states are doing the most work using this source of funding – and have the appropriate state authority to do so) [See above note regarding coordination with EPA staff.]*

*State programs – these do not need to be outlined specifically and in detail, but this section should include a brief description on how land trusts can find this information themselves, and a few examples of leading state programs in the Chesapeake and Great Lakes regions*

*Other sources of innovative conservation finance, including private capital investment, pay-for-performance contracting (which can be funded by public sources outlined above), mitigation and in-lieu fee for wetlands, stream restoration, forest conservation, etc. that are used for water-focused land conservation and watershed restoration.*

This section should also include a list of and links to well-selected resources on the above that can provide greater detail than will be provided in the report itself. In other words, this report does not need to replicate other important resources if they already exist—but it should curate a list of these for the report audience.

Finally, the document should also include a series of questions for land trusts to consider in their own evaluation and due diligence process.

The Alliance will assist in identifying land trusts and other subject matter experts that the contractor may wish to contact to gather information, case studies, and practitioner perspectives necessary to represent the latest thinking and practices. The Alliance will facilitate a peer review process of the draft document.

Note: Two recent publications for land trusts by the Alliance, "[Reshaping the Energy Future](#)," "[Carbon Markets: Are They Right for your Land Trust?](#)," and "[Carbon Offsets in Conservation Easements: The Essentials for Land Trusts](#)" may provide a useful reference point for contractors in conceptualizing this deliverable. The latter two of these are available for purchase only; please contact us if you would like a reference copy.

**Timeline:** The goal is to have an initial draft of the project to the Alliance in July, 2021 and a final version complete by 12/31/21. The Alliance will work with the contractor to develop deadlines for internal and external review with a select group of advisors.

**Audience:** Land Trusts and restoration partners

### **Additional Contractual Information**

- This is a work for hire. All materials developed by the contractor(s) created as part of this engagement will become the exclusive property of the Alliance.
- Proposals should not exceed \$20,000 (not including travel).
- When applicable, travel and expenses will be reimbursed at a reasonable rate, with protocols agreed upon in advance.

### **Key Qualifications**

The qualifications of the bidder should include the following:

1. Technical expertise/knowledge on water quality restoration policy, projects and programs, and the mechanics, components and process for watershed restoration project development and resourcing.
2. Knowledge of how land trusts operate, familiarity with the Land Trust Alliance and experience working with conservation easements, land trusts, and/or land conservation and stewardship strategies.
3. Demonstrated experience publishing well-written resources, preferably in the areas of land conservation, restoration, &/or water quality.

### **Proposals**

Proposals should include the following:

1. Cover materials
  - Proposal
  - Statement of qualifications
  - References from projects similar in size and scope (references may be contacted to verify the scope and quality of previous related work)
  - Potential conflicts of interest, if any
  - Attach: At least one writing sample
2. Project proposal
  - Proposed approach and methods
  - Timeline and availability

- Estimated budget; time and expenses

**Submission Deadline**

March 22, 2021

**Submit proposal electronically to:**

Andrew Szwak

Land Trust Alliance

[aszwak@lta.org](mailto:aszwak@lta.org)

**Additional Information:**

Land Trust Alliance homepage: <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>

Chesapeake Land and Water Initiative: [Grants](#) and [Resources](#)