

2025-2027 Lawn Conversion and Riparian Buffer Mini-Grant Program for Conservation Districts

GUIDELINES

Application Deadline: June 30, 2027

Pennsylvania's conservation districts are encouraged to apply for funding to convert mowed/maintained lawn to native upland forests or meadows or install riparian forest buffers in conjunction with landowners. This grant is first come first served. The grant round will stay open until funds are used up or June 30, 2027, whichever comes first.

Mini-grants are limited to \$25,000 per project.

Eligible Expenses (not limited to):

- Contractor fees or other labor costs
- Site preparation and post-planting establishment activities
- Herbicide applications
- Soil testing and appropriate soil amendments
- Tree and shrub stock
- Tree protection materials (tubes or other shelters, stakes, etc.)
- Seed, carrier (rice hulls or clay kitty litter), and weed-free straw
- Equipment rental
- Supplemental or replacement plantings
- Permanent signs

Signs: Projects installed on public land require a financial assistance acknowledgement sign. Projects installed on private property do not require a sign. However, a sign is still encouraged to assist with long term asset stewardship. If a sign is installed, it should include the following funding citation:

"Financial and other support for this project is provided by the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. through the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, Environmental Stewardship fund, under the administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation."

Purchasing large pieces of equipment, such as chain saws, augers, tractors, etc. is not an eligible expense.

Landowner Agreements:

All lawn conversion and buffer installation sites must include a signed landowner agreement at the time of application.

The DCNR Template Landowner agreements are required prior to using any mini-grant funds. Template agreements will be provided by PACD.

Budget

A written budget estimating the cost of project materials, labor, and post planting establishment related to the site. The budget should include all cash and non-cash costs to be considered for grant funding.

Modifications:

Modifications to the project budget or project must be approved in writing by PACD to maintain funding eligibility. Submit requests for changes, indicating the reason for the change to Holly Miller, PACD Program Manager at hmiller@pacd.org.

Timeline

A written schedule for major project milestones such as outreach, site design, site preparation, planting, and post planting establishment.

Procuring Labor and Materials:

Grantees are reminded that labor and materials for all lawn conversion and buffer projects included in the grant agreement scope of work must be procured openly and competitively. Written estimates/quotes are acceptable.

Match: A 50:50 match is required for this grant.

We encourage conservation districts to contact volunteer groups like the PSU Master Watershed Stewards and CBF. Follow this link to find your MWS county coordinator <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/watershed-stewards/counties>

Payments:

The conservation district will receive 45% of grant funding upon approval of the application and receipt of all signed landowner agreements and signed planting & maintenance plans; 45% will be paid to the conservation district after submitting the mid-term report to PACD; and the final 10% after submitting the final report to PACD.

Refund:

Unused grant funds, cancelled grant projects, or funds used for ineligible expenses must be refunded to PACD within 60 days of the project end date.

Mid-Term Report:

A mid-term report is required at the estimated half-way point of your project. A report template will be provided by PACD.

Final Report:

A final report must be submitted within 60 days of the project end date. The final report must be submitted electronically. A report template will be provided by PACD.

LAWN CONVERSION

Lawn Conversion Funding Summary:

Funding is to be used on shovel-ready projects converting presently maintained lawn to actively managed upland forest or perennial native meadow.

Meadow establishments are primarily implemented outside of the riparian area (300-ft or further away from a waterbody), but exceptions may allow meadow establishments within 300ft upon DCNR review if certain criteria are met, or due to specific site conditions prohibiting forest planting.

Upland forest plantings are always implemented outside of the riparian area; plantings 300-ft or closer to a waterbody are considered riparian forest buffers and must complete a different application.

Eligible Project Sites

Lawn Conversion projects must occur on presently maintained lawn. A lawn is an area of maintained exotic grasses making up a yard on a residential, commercial, school, or other property and is presently mowed at 8" high or shorter. Multiple contiguous properties may be combined into one project to meet the minimum acreage required by the program, but each property must have its own landowner agreement and establishment plan. Projects may be implemented on public or private lands. There is no minimum acreage limit as long as funding is available.

Ineligible Land Uses

Due to best management practice descriptions and PA Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan goals, only currently maintained lawn is eligible for DCNR Watershed Forestry funding. Ineligible land uses include, but are not limited to:

Pasture
Hay field
Cropland
Unmowed/"Let go" lawn
Abandoned mineland
Natural areas
Greater than 60% existing canopy, when planting forest
Project areas with high invasive plant pressure

Planting Plan:

A written planting plan is required prior to using any sub-grant funds. Include a layout plan of the site including details on soils and site preparation; lawn conversion acreage; upland forest and meadow species, size, and spacing; specific materials and planting methods; seedling protection; and any other details, photos, or specifications necessary to adequately explain the project design.

Before beginning a lawn conversion project, please review the following list of concerning invasive species. If these are in abundance, greater than 10% within a project area, the landowner should get them under control before starting a lawn conversion project. They are difficult to control once you start establishing an herbaceous plant community.

- Japanese Stiltgrass
- Arthraxon
- Wavy Leaf Basketgrass
- Oriental Bittersweet
- Canada Thistle
- Reed Canary Grass
- Japanese Knotweed
- Ailanthus
- Any woody invasive plant (bush honeysuckle, privet, multiflora rose, etc)

Maintenance Plan:

A written maintenance plan is required prior to using any sub-grant funds. Details regarding post planting establishment activities (roughly 1-3 years) such as invasive species control and herbicide use; and long-term maintenance (roughly 3+years) to meet the grant requirement of ensuring the project's continuance for at least 5-10 years. Target survival rate should be at least 70%. The plan shall also include who will perform the activities and what is expected of the landowner. A maintenance plan template document will be provided by PACD.

RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFERS

Multifunctional riparian buffer specifications:

A riparian forest buffer that provides opportunities for harvesting products such as nuts, berries, woody florals, forbs, and potentially woody biomass. Inputs such as fertilizer or manure would not be permitted, and harvesting would not be permitted in the first 15 feet of the buffer from the edge of the streambank. An overall minimum width of 35 feet is recommended. Click here for more information on multi-functional buffers: <https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1743756&DocName=Multifunctional%20Stream%20Buffer%20Program.pdf>

Buffer Planting Plan:

A written planting plan is required and must be reviewed and signed by a DCNR Service Forester and submitted prior to using any sub-grant funds. Include a layout plan of the site including details on soils and site preparation; buffer width and length, tree/shrub species, size, and spacing; specific materials and planting methods; seedling protection; and any other details, photos, or specifications necessary to adequately explain the buffer design. Considerations for multifunctional buffer should show details appropriate for managing multifunctional buffers, including access (foot, mechanized etc.), maintenance, or anticipated harvest practices.

A template document will be provided by PACD.

Buffer Maintenance Plan:

A written maintenance plan is required and must be submitted prior to using any mini-grant funds. Details regarding post planting establishment activities (roughly 1-3 years) such as invasive species control and herbicide use; and long-term maintenance (roughly 3+years) to meet the grant requirement of ensuring the buffer's continuance for at least 25 years. Target survival rate should be at least 70%. The plan shall also include who will perform the activities and what is expected of the landowner. A buffer maintenance plan template document will be provided by PACD.

Contact

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