Watersheds United Vermont (WUV)
2027 Enhancement Riparian Buffer Grant (ERBG)
Application Guidance Document

Overview

WUV's Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Enhancement Riparian Buffer Grant (ERBG) is for organizations to implement high priority, cost-effective, riparian woody buffer plantings along rivers and streams using native vegetation. Projects must have a minimum buffer width of 35 feet and a minimum planting density of at least 300 stems/acre. All projects and expenses under the ERBG must meet the requirements of the 2023 DEC CWIP (Clean Water Initiative Program) Funding Policy: *2023 CWIP Funding Policy*

Application Due Date …… **October 23, 2026**
Anticipated Notification of Award…….....**Early November 2026**

This round is for Spring and Fall 2027 plantings.

WUV will have ~$300,000 for planting/enhanced survivorship work available for the 2027 planting season

A separate application is required for each riparian buffer planting site. Groups can submit more than one application.

If you have any questions on this grant round, please contact:
WUV Director Lyn Munno at ***lyn@watershedsunitedvt.org***, and
WUV Grant Manager Christian Pelletier at ***christian@watershedsunitedv***t.org

Please don't hesitate to reach out to ask questions; we are happy to help navigate any issues throughout the application process!

Note: The Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) also holds the Enhancement Riparian Buffer Grant. WUV recommends that Conservation Districts apply to NRCC for planting funds and that watershed groups apply to WUV. However, all eligible entities can apply through either Funding Program Administrator for DEC planting funds if there is a need.

Grant Guidelines and Information

Key Dates

October 23, 2026: Application Due

Early November 2026: Funding Decisions Announced

Application Documents and Submission

To complete submission of the application for this grant round you must submit the: ***WUV Enhancement Riparian Buffer Grant Application***

Complete and submit the application as a single Word or PDF file

Email the completed Application to both:
WUV Director Lyn Munno at Lyn@watershedsunitedvt.org, and
WUV Grant Manager Christian Pelletier at Christian@watershedsunitedvt.org

Please note we do not need letters of support

Planting Requirements

General Buffer Requirements:

1. Must be at least 35'
2. Need to have at least 300 stems per acre
3. Native woody species appropriate to site location
4. Planting Plan and Landowner Agreement completed before planting
5. Adherence to the USDA NRCS Forest Buffer Standards

Additional Prioritization Criteria:

1. Stock from Vermont grown nurseries
2. 3 to 5-foot trees (both this and the above recommendation have been shown to lead to lower mortality)
3. Wider buffers (50 feet) where appropriate and possible
4. More stems per acre (400) for certain sites
5. Protect high quality waters
6.. Planting is located on smaller headwater streams

Additional Requirements:

- Projects must adhere to all CWIP FY23 Funding Policy to be eligible for funding: 2023 CWIP Fiscal Policy
- Projects must have an ID in the DEC Watershed Projects Database
- Projects must be approved by the DEC Watershed Planner before funds are awarded
- Projects must be identified/prioritized in existing assessments or plans or prioritized by DEC Watershed Planner
- Projects must be approved by DEC River Scientist before funds are awarded
- All project funding recipients must provide proof of insurance and W-9 forms
- Projects must be able to obtain a signed DEC 10 year Operation and Maintenance Agreement.
- All subcontractors used for projects must be approved using the WUV / DEC sub-contractor approval process and all subcontracts must include DEC standard subcontract language
- Projects must be planned for 2027 implementation
- All plantings should have an internal landowner agreements between the planting group and landowner

Project Type Definition

All projects must meet the following definition and performance measures.

Project Type Definition:

Planting of native woody trees and shrubs within the buffer area of rivers/streams, wetlands, and/or lakes. Planting results in a minimum average buffer width of 35-feet and a minimum density of 300 stems per acre. Buffer supports restoration of river corridor/floodplain, wetland and/or lakeshore, filters nutrient and sediment pollution from runoff, and provides habitat benefits. Includes riparian plantings on agricultural lands. Work includes site identification, planting plan development, materials sourcing, site preparation, and planting installation. Sites will be selected for their benefits to water quality and must meet approval of the State (local DEC River Scientist and Basin Planner). Sites will be stable, proximate to water, and high-priority. Permit(s), access license(s)/easement(s), and operation and maintenance plan(s) are in place prior to planting.

Performance Measures:

1) Acres of riparian corridor buffer planted/restored
2) Linear feet of riparian corridor buffer planted/restored

Please see the milestones and deliverables table below, all plantings must meet all deliverables at the completion of the planting.

Project Type	***Milestones***	***Deliverables***
Riparian Buffer Planting	Project initiated; proposal/bid solicitations issued and contractor selected (if applicable) Sites and constraints identified, DEC River Scientist and Basin Planner approval secured Developed planting plan (including species type, number, and estimated cost) in accordance with SGA or River Corridor Planning recommendations (if available) 10-year (minimum) DEC Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Plan drafted and signed; refer to O&M manual for guidance 10-year (minimum) access license or easement (if applicable) drafted and signed by landowner; refer to DEC template for guidance Clean Water Project Sign installed during construction if the project is considered publicly visible. Site preparation activities (if applicable) Buffer restoration planting completed Return of Clean Water Project sign to host site (if applicable) Project complete	Photo(s) of site(s) pre-implementation Signed 10-year (minimum) DEC Operation and Maintenance Plan and Agreement, including map of location of planting and final planting plan (species list and counts). Signed 10-year (minimum) access license or easement (if applicable) Photo(s) of site(s) post-implementation, including photo of Clean Water Project Sign (if applicable) Media announcement Final Performance Report or ANR Online Clean Water Project - Project Closeout Form (once available)

Planting Site Eligibility

Projects must meet at least one of the statutorily-defined purposes for Enhancement Grants:
There are 5 statutorily defined purposes for the Enhancement Grant Program:

a. Protect high quality waters,
b. Maintain or improve water quality,
c. Restore degraded or stressed waters,

d. Create resilient watersheds and communities, or
e. Support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters

Further definition is provided below:

High Quality Water: Per the 2017 Vermont Water Quality Standards (§ 29A-105 (c)) "high quality waters" are waters the existing quality of which exceeds any applicable water quality criteria. The VTDEC uses monitoring and assessment data to assess individual surface waters in relation to Vermont Water Quality Standards as outlined in the 2016 DEC Assessment and Listing Methodology. The four categories currently used to assess Vermont's surface water are full support, stressed, altered and impaired. Waters that currently exceed or support designated and existing uses and meet water quality standards are placed into the full support or stressed categories. Waters that do not support uses and do not meet standards are placed into the altered or impaired category. All altered and impaired water bodies are clearly listed in the relevant Tactical Basin Plan or one can find the list of impaired and altered waters here:
https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-02/documents/2018-vt-303d-list-report.pdf. For the purposes of the Enhancement Program sub-initiative, "high quality waters" are defined as any waters not listed as altered or impaired in the relevant Tactical Basin Plan. Any eligible clean water project located upstream of a "high quality water" body is considered to have the potential to protect "high quality waters."

Degraded or stressed waters: Please see the list of impaired waterways in Vermont to determine whether or not your project is in an area with degraded or stressed waters: https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/map/assessment (list of impaired waters can be found mid page at the link provided). If you need clarification on whether your project area is degraded or stressed, please contact the DEC River Scientist or Basin Planner that is responsible for your project area.

Create resilient watersheds and communities: Projects that assist with a community's resilience against the ecological responses to a changing climate (e.g. extreme droughts or rains, excessive heat, biodiversity decline, etc.) are eligible as long as they meet all other eligibility criteria.

Support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters: Signage, condensed access, and/or targeted outreach and education surrounding a specific project are all considered eligible project components and primary project benefits to "support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters." Other restoration-focused activities may also de facto "support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters" by making the waters more swimmable, fishable, and/or drinkable.

Planting Project Prioritization

Projects will be selected for funding using the following criteria: Projects must meet at least one of the 5 listed statutorily-defined purposes of the enhancement grant program. Projects will be prioritized by how well the project meets the identified statutory purposes. Meeting multiple statutorily defined purposes can increase prioritization of a project but does not necessarily trump a project that highly meets the goals of one statutorily defined purpose. WUV will also prioritize projects that lead to additional water quality improvements and provide co-benefits as identified in planning and prioritization documents, e.g. Tactical Basin Plans, River Corridor Plans, and Stormwater Master Plans? WUV will also consider the project scale, likelihood, overall need, and budget when determining if a project should be funded.

Other Prioritization Criteria:

a) WUV must fund 10% of our available funds on projects that have the potential to protect high quality waters, projects that meet this enhancement goal will be given additional scoring points
b) Projects located outside of watersheds with access to Water Quality Restoration Formula grants will be given extra scoring points but will not automatically trump strong and eligible enhancement buffer projects located within those watersheds.
c) Environment Justice Focus Populations. Act 154 of 2022 (S.148) requires the Agency of Natural Resources to direct investments with environmental benefits proportionately to Environmental Justice Focus Populations. Under this funding source "Environmental justice focus population" means any census block group in which:
    1) the annual median household income is not more than 80 percent of the State median household income;

2) Persons of Color and Indigenous Peoples comprise at least six percent or more of the population; or
3) at least one percent or more of households have limited English proficiency

DEC Approval for Proposed Planting Sites

All sites selected must be part of the applicable Tactical Basin Plan strategies and/or identified in a River Corridor Plan. You will need approval from the applicable DEC Basin Planner for the planting project and the project will need a Watershed Projects Database number. If the planting project was added into the database as part of a larger plan (River Corridor Plan), *you will need a new Watershed Project Database ID that is specific to the planting site*. **If you do not have a WPD-ID for your site, please complete a New Project N- Form** prior to the submission of your ERBG application.

You will also need to contact your DEC River Scientist for approval of the planting (see River Scientist for your area here). This requirement was optional in previous rounds of WUV Woody Buffer funding, but has become a requirement under the 2023 CWIP Guidance. Please give your River Scientist ample time to review and approve the project. If you are not able to receive approval before the application deadline, please still submit your application and let WUV know that approval is pending.

Eligible Expenses for 2027

Refer to the 2023 CWIP Funding Policy for details on project eligibility and eligible expenses - *2023 CWIP Funding Policy*

Tools are an eligible expense if the tool or equipment is used to assist with implementation of clean water projects. The parameters for the purchase of tools and equipment is listed under the ineligible expenses section of the CWIP Funding Policy on pg. 15:

All tools must be under $10,000 and must directly assist in the implementation of the tree planting process. In addition, all tools must have a useful life of over 1 year.

The application has a line item for tools. If your organization is purchasing tools, you must explain all purchases in the budget narrative section so WUV can confirm that these are eligible expenses and meet the above guidelines. *Please note that tool requests must be a minor part of total funding request and must be at an appropriate scale of total planting budget for a group.*

For Riparian Buffer Plantings, this means that groups can include tools in their budget. Examples include:

- Shovels
- Planting Gear (gloves, rain gear, planting boots)
- Saw dust and sorting bags for tree storage
- Wagon or carts to transport trees on large sites
- Stakes or flagging to mark planting area
- Items for tree survival/maintenance

DEC Enhanced Survivorship Treatment Funding

As part of WUV's DEC ERBG, WUV is able to fund enhanced survivorship treatment activities. Enhanced survivorship treatment activities are eligible to be performed on sites supported in whole or in part with DEC funds and registered within the Clean Water Project Explorer as "River – Planting" project type. If this site would benefit from either site prep and/or 1-2 years of follow up maintenance, you can add a budget request for enhanced survivorship activities at the site. This request will

allow you to fund the following activities at the application site throughout 2027 through 2029:

Eligible enhanced survivorship tasks:

1. Visiting planted site in the year of planting and first year post planting to assess if additional enhanced survivorship activities are needed
2. Non-chemical site preparation activities
3. Post planting weeding and vine removal around the immediate vicinity of stems to help new plantings get established above vegetative competition.
4. Re-planting: applicant has the ability to contact WUV post planting if re-planting funds are required.

Please see below guidance on site-prep, weeding, and vine removal: Site – Prep: Chemical site-prep and large scale mowing to combat knotweed are not currently eligible activities for DEC funding.

Site-prep activities can include:

- Site-prep mowing is if it's within the same footprint of the planted buffer and is used just to suppress competing grasses (i.e. not large scale invasive management, some minimal invasive control may be allowed)
- Tiling and scraping of site area to expose bare ground

Weeding activities can include:

- Weed whacking in 4' diameter around planted trees *Planted vegetation should be identified/flagged prior to weeding.
- Passive weeding such as the use of mulch (can do this preventatively)

Vine removal Activities can include:

- Removal of vines from stems including Bindweed, Clematis, or Groundnut
- Vines can be manually pulled during maintenance visits, especially after planting or until trees and shrubs are large enough not to be overtopped.

Enhanced survivorship requests must be included in the budget in the application.

- ➢ There is a separate line in the Planting Budget for Enhanced Survivorship Site Prep work.
- ➢ There is a separate table for Enhanced Survivorship Monitoring and Maintenance expenses.

If your organization receives ERBG funding for multiple sites to conduct Enhanced Survivorship Monitoring and Maintenance work or your organization already has a standalone Master Grant Agreement for Enhanced Survivorship activities, WUV will use the separate Enhanced Survivorship Monitoring and Maintenance budget table in the application for a standalone or master agreement separate from the planting agreement. This allows WUV and groups to close out planting Grant Agreements in the year of the planting and recognizes that maintenance activities are performed and expenses are incurred across multiple sites.