Stewardship Grant

2024 Policies

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PROGRAM SUMMARY

The mission of the Watershed District is to protect, manage, and restore the water resources in its boundaries. However, we can't do this work alone. We need an informed and empowered community to help create meaningful change. The Watershed Stewardship Grant Program exists to help grow and support that community.

The Watershed Stewardship Grant program offers financial support and resources for clean water projects to residents and organizations within the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD or the District). Project examples include natural shoreline restorations, native plant buffers for waterbodies, habitat restorations, alternatives to standard lawns, and stormwater best management practices such as raingardens or tree trenches.

The Watershed Stewardship Grant program funds projects that

- Have quantifiable benefits to water quality, habitat, and/or flood reduction.
- Support the Watershed District's 10-Year Plan goals.

Application deadline: For new applicants or anyone that hasn't had a site visit, applications must be received no later than October 31st to be considered for funding of that year. The deadline may be moved earlier if all funds have been committed. Applications received after this date will be held until the following year, but applicant may need to re-apply with updated quotes and project plan changes to meet any new requirements implemented for the new grant year.

Project installation: Grantees have one year to complete their project. If unforeseen circumstances delay a project, the participant may request an extension by email to the grant coordinator.

Grant payment: Grants funds are distributed in the form of a reimbursement after the project has been installed and reporting requirements have been met. Timing of reimbursement will depend upon where the District is within its monthly financial cycle as checks are only cut once per month.

WHO MAY APPLY?

All applicants must be the **property owner** or authorized representative of property owner of property located within the watershed district. Eligible applicant categories include:

- Individual homeowners
- Non-profits (including home, townhome, and lake associations)
- Schools
- Businesses
- Local government

HOW MUCH ARE GRANTS?

These are cost-share grants. This means the grantee covers part of the project cost, and the Watershed District covers part of the project cost (through reimbursement to grantee).

Through this grant program, the District typically offers a 25% to 75% project cost-share award for eligible projects. The offered award will be based on how well the project aligns with District goals. (See "Evaluation of Application" for more info.)

Maximum Award Based on Applicant Category and Project Type

The maximum award is not offered to all projects. The award percent offered to an applicant will be based on benefit of the project to the watershed and how well the project meets District goals.

Project Type	Cost Share Amount for Qualifying Projects							
	Individual homeowner			**Non-profit organization**			**Government, school, business**[1]	
	Minimum award[2]	Maximum award	Maximum in dollars	Minimum award[2]	Maximum award	Maximum in dollars	Maximum award	Maximum in dollars
Native Plants (cost of live plants or seeds)	50%	75%	$1,500	50%	75%	$10,000	50%	$10,000
Habitat Restoration	50%	75%	$5,000	50%	75%	$20,000	50%	$20,000
Lake Shoreline Restoration	50%	75%	$5,000	50%	75%	$20,000	50%	$20,000
Waterbody Buffer	50%	75%	$5,000	50%	75%	$20,000	50%	$20,000
Stormwater BMP (includes rain garden)	50%	75%	$5,000	50%	75%	$20,000	50%	$50,000
Alternative Lawn	25%	75%	$5,000	25%	75%	$20,000	50%	$20,000
Rain Barrel	75%	75%[3]	$100	*Ineligible*			*Ineligible*	

[1] There is no set minimum for cost share percentage for a government agency (city), school, or business.
[2] Minimum percent award if a project meets ALL minimum requirements for the project type. Value may not exceed maximum dollars allowed for project type.
[3] Applicant may qualify for 100% cost share if home is located in an SVI area (community with high Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) per the **MPCA environmental justice areas of concern map**). In RPBCWD, this area is generally within Eden Prairie north of Anderson Lakes Parkway and east of County Road 61.

Key message: Grant award decision is based on project's benefit to watershed.

Maximum per Applicant per Calendar Year

An applicant (individual or organizational property owner) is eligible for up to the maximum award per calendar year. This means one application may include more than one

practice (example: a raingarden and a rain barrel), or the applicant may apply for two separate projects in one year, but the total amount they are awarded may not exceed the maximum for that applicant type.

Applicant category	The maximum dollar amount that an applicant may be reimbursed per calendar year (January-December)
Individual homeowner	$5,000
Non-profit organization	$20,000
Government, school, business	$50,000

Maintenance Funds Available for Some Projects

Habitat Restoration, Lake Shoreline Restoration, and Waterbody Buffer projects may qualify for additional grant funds for three years of professional maintenance following project installation. **Only applicants in the homeowner or non-profit categories are eligible for these additional funds.** The professional performing the maintenance must have demonstrated experience managing native vegetation per grant review committee standards.

Is my project eligible for Professional Maintenance Funds?

Projects that center around native plant installation (Habitat Restoration, Lake Shoreline Restoration, and Waterbody Buffer) are likely to qualify for professional maintenance support for three years if the review committee deems it appropriate and the applicant is an individual homeowner or non-profit organization.

A Stormwater BMP or Alternative Lawn may qualify only if components include a significant native plant restoration area. Alternative lawns (clover, fine fescue, etc.) by themselves are unlikely to qualify for professional maintenance support.

Some project types (Native Plants, Rain Barrel) and some applicant types (Government, School, Business) do not qualify for any professional maintenance funds.

PROJECT TYPE	APPLICANT TYPE		
	Individual homeowner	Non-profit organization	Government, school, business
Native Plants (cost of live plants or seeds)	NO	NO	NO
Habitat Restoration	Likely	Probably	NO
Lake Shoreline Restoration	Likely	Probably	NO
Waterbody Buffer	Likely	Probably	NO
Stormwater BMP (includes rain garden)	Maybe	Maybe	NO
Alternative Lawn	Maybe	Maybe	NO

Rain Barrel	NO	*Ineligible for project type*	*Ineligible for project type*

Eligibility for professional maintenance funds will be determined by the grant program coordinator. At minimum, the restoration project must:

1. Be a native vegetation habitat restoration such as prairie, oak savanna, or forest; be a natural lake shoreline restoration, or be a buffer of native vegetation for a waterbody.

2. Have a diversity and quantity of native plants that provides significant ecological benefits.

3. Would greatly benefit from habitat maintenance from a professional (large area, complicated or difficult maintenance protocol, etc.).

> Key message: Maintenance in the first three years of habitat restoration is essential for success.
>
> For some projects, we offer funds to support professional maintenance.

The amount of the professional maintenance funds will be based on a percentage (up to 30%) of the base grant award. The maximum reimbursement for professional maintenance per year will be 75% of eligible maintenance costs for that year. Reimbursement for professional maintenance will occur once per year after the prescribed maintenance has occurred and receipts have been submitted. To be eligible, an applicant must submit a quote for three years of professional maintenance from a qualified native plant/habitat restoration professional as part of their application or when requested by the grant coordinator.

For example, an eligible restoration project awarded a 75% cost-share grant with a not-to-exceed value of $5,000 may be eligible for up to an additional 30% of the grant value to be used toward professional maintenance over three years. That means, in this example, up to an additional $1,500 in total may be used toward three years of professional maintenance after installation. The amount must be divided over three years. The reimbursement amount for any year will not exceed 75% of out-of-pocket cost. How the amount is split amount the three years will be determined by the grant coordinator based on project scope and estimated professional maintenance costs.

WHAT PROJECTS & PROJECT COMPONENTS ARE ELIGIBLE?

The Stewardship Grant Program funds water resource improvement and protection projects that have quantifiable benefits to water quality, habitat, and/ or flooding. Projects with a greater benefit to water quality or those that achieve multiple District goals will be considered for the maximum cost-share awards. **All projects must take place within the watershed district boundary on property owned by the individuals or organization.**

Seven types of projects are eligible through the Stewardship Grant Program.

1. Native Planting
2. Habitat Restoration
3. Lake Shoreline Restoration
4. Waterbody Vegetation Buffer

5. Alternative Lawn
6. Stormwater BMP

7. Rain Barrel

What project components are eligible?

When a project application is evaluated, some components or elements may be identifies as a non-eligible project cost. For example, aesthetic elements such as stepping stones and bird baths are will be marked as non-eligible. This does not mean you can't include these elements in your project, but they will not be eligible for Stewardship Grant cost share funds.

Eligible costs include the purchase of materials or services (labor) needed for the project. This includes:

- Design fee
- Site preparation
- Erosion control
- Seeds and seeding
- Plants and planting

Landscaping edging may be considered an eligible cost if it supports project maintenance needs. However, if eligible at all, the **allowable cost for edging will not exceed $2/per linear foot**.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT TYPES

1. Native Planting

Native plants play a significant role in ecosystem health including water resources. Native plants provide habitat for wildlife and the base of the food web. As they grow, plants pull carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the form of new root, leaf and stem growth.

Native plants are soil engineers with extensive roots that create structure and nurture a healthy soil ecosystem with microorganisms. Healthy soils have air pockets and rich, dark humus that allows rainwater and snowmelt to soak into the ground where the water is stored and used in time of drought. Native plants also protect soil by shielding it from erosion and shading it to reduce water loss.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Native Vegetation Planting		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$1,500
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$10,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$10,000

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of native plants and/or seeds are the only costs eligible for this type of project. Plants must be installed in the ground and not in containers. Plants/seeds may be used to establish a new planting or to enhance an existing native planting.

Native Plant Requirements

1. **Native plants must be in their natural (wild) form.** No cultivars (cultivated varieties) are allowed. Tip: Purchase plants from a nursery that specializes in native plants.

2. **Native plants must be purchased from approved source.** See the resources section on the Stewardship Grant webpage for a list of potential vendors.

3. **Plant selection must be appropriate for site conditions.** In other words, evaluate your site's sun exposure and soil conditions and find out what plants will do well there. Also, avoid purchasing herbaceous plants that have been container-grown for more than a couple of years – these plants are usually less healthy.

4. Plant selection must include at least three species that bloom in spring, three that bloom in summer, and three that bloom in fall. All flowering plants including trees, shrubs, and grasses count. For application evaluation, the grant review committee will consider "spring' to be April/May/June, "summer" at late June/July/August, and "fall" as September/October.

5. **Plant selection must include at least one keystone species.** A list of keystone species may be found on the resources section of the grant webpage. The keystone species may be the same as one that one of the above bloom requirements.

6. **Practice ecologically friendly maintenance.** This means limiting chemicals and leaving plant material in place. See "Ecologically Friendly Maintenance" for details.

2. Habitat Restoration

Restoring a developed area into a natural habitat has many benefits. In addition to bringing back wildlife habitat, a habitat restoration provides many ecological services including regulating climate, protecting drinking water, flood control, supporting pollinators, nutrient cycling, and supporting human physical and mental health.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Habitat Restoration		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$5,000
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$20,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$20,000

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of materials or services needed for habitat restoration are allowable costs. This includes design fee, site preparation, erosion control, seeding, and planting. Projects may also be offered additional funds to support the first three years of maintenance if it's done by a

professional. Aesthetic elements such as stepping stones, bird baths, and landscaping edging are <u>not</u> eligible.

Native Plant Requirements

1. **Native plants must be in their natural (wild) form.** No cultivars (cultivated varieties) are allowed. Tip: Purchase plants from a nursery that specializes in native plants.

2. **Native plants must be purchased from approved source.** See the resources section on the grant webpage for a list of potential vendors.

3. **Plant selection must be appropriate for site conditions.** In other words, evaluate your site's sun exposure and soil conditions and find out what plants will do well there. Also, avoid purchasing plants that have been container-grown for more than a couple of years – these plants are usually less healthy.

4. Plant selection must include at least three species that bloom in spring, three that bloom in summer, and three that bloom in fall. All flowering plants including trees, shrubs, and grasses count. For application evaluation, the grant review committee will consider "spring' to be April/May/June, "summer" at late June/July/August, and "fall" as September/October.

5. **Plant selection must include at least one keystone species.** A list of keystone species may be found on the resources section of the grant webpage. The keystone species may be the same as one that one of the above bloom requirements.

6. **Practice ecologically friendly maintenance.** This means limiting chemicals and leaving plant material in place. See "Ecologically Friendly Maintenance" for details.

Other Requirements

1. **Project size must be at least <u>250 square feet</u> of <u>developed or disturbed land</u>.** Developed means that the area is impermeable or of low permeability and creates significant stormwater runoff. Examples of developed land includes lawn/yard, turfgrass, parking lot, paved patio, or other hard or soil compacted surface. Severely eroded or otherwise degraded natural sites may also be considered for a grant.

2. **You must have a native vegetation establishment and maintenance plan.** You may develop these yourself or hire a professional. Plan materials must include a map showing location of the project on the property, a planting plan, an estimated timeline of project installation tasks, site photos, detailed cost estimate, and a long-term maintenance plan.

3. You must provide an estimate for 3 years of professional maintenance (some exceptions allowed). We'll use this to consider cost share support for professional maintenance.

4. **Location is <u>not</u> adjacent or near a waterbody:** If so, project may be reclassified as a shoreline restoration or waterbody buffer of native vegetation and must meet requirements for those projects.

3. Lake Shoreline Restoration

Natural shorelines are best for lake health. When designed correctly, a restored shoreline will greatly reduce erosion from wave action, erosion from stormwater runoff, and pollution from

stormwater runoff. Native plants will support ecological services including providing shoreland habitat for fish, turtles, songbirds, dragonflies, and butterflies.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Lake Shoreline Restoration		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$5,000
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$20,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$20,000

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of services or bioengineering materials needed for lake shoreline restoration are allowable costs. This includes design fee, site preparation, bioengineering components, erosion control, seeding, and planting. Projects may also be offered additional funds to support the first three years of maintenance if it's done by a professional. Aesthetic or recreational elements such as stepping stones, boulders, beaches, and docks are not reimbursable.

Native Plant Requirements

1. **Native plants must be in their wild form.** No cultivars (cultivated varieties) are allowed. Tip: Purchase plants from a nursery that specializes in native plants.

2. **Native plants must be purchased from approved source.** See the resources section on the grant webpage for a list of potential vendors.

3. **Plant selection must be appropriate for site conditions.** In other words, evaluate your site's sun exposure and soil conditions and find out what plants will do well there. Also, avoid purchasing plants that have been container-grown for more than a couple of years – these plants are usually less healthy.

4. **Plant selection must include at least three species that bloom in spring, three that bloom in summer, and three that bloom in fall.** All flowering plants including trees, shrubs, and grasses count. For application evaluation, the grant review committee will consider "spring' to be April/May/June, "summer" at late June/July/August, and "fall" as September/October.

5. **Plant selection must include at least one keystone species.** A list of keystone species may be found on the resources section of the grant webpage. The keystone species may be the same as one that one of the above bloom requirements.

6. **Practice ecologically friendly maintenance.** This means limiting chemicals and leaving plant material in place. See "Ecologically Friendly Maintenance" for details.

Other Requirements

1. **Project must occur on a shoreline of one of the primary lakes in the watershed district.** This includes these lakes: Ann, Duck, Hyland, Lotus, Lucy, Mitchell, Red Rock, Rice Marsh, Riley, Round, Silver, Staring, and Susan.

2. Project size must be at least 25 feet of shoreline or 25% of shoreline, whichever is greater, with an average natural area width of 10 feet.

3. **You must have a native vegetation establishment and maintenance plan.** In most situations you'll need to hire a professional. Plan materials must include a map showing

the location of the project on the property, a planting plan, an estimated timeline of project installation tasks, site photos, detailed cost estimate, and a long-term maintenance plan.

4. You must provide an estimate for 3 years of professional maintenance (some exceptions allowed). We'll use this to consider cost share support for professional maintenance.
5. The project design must show the ordinary high water line (OHWL) of the lake. An engineer or landscape architect will likely need to be involved.

4. Waterbody Vegetation Buffer

A buffer of native vegetation helps protect lakes, ponds, streams and other waterbodies from stormwater erosion and pollution. A waterbody buffer differs from a shoreline restoration in that no work is done below the ordinary high-water line (OHWL).

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Waterbody Buffer		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$5,000
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$20,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$20,000

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of materials or services needed to install a native vegetation buffer are allowable costs. This includes design fee, site preparation, erosion control, seeding, and planting. Projects may also be offered additional funds to support the first three years of maintenance if it's done by a professional. Aesthetic elements such as stepping stones, bird baths, and landscaping edging are not eligible.

Native Plant Requirements

1. **Native plants must be in their wild form.** No cultivars (cultivated varieties) are allowed. Tip: Purchase plants from a nursery that specializes in native plants.

2. **Native plants must be purchased from approved source.** See the resources section on the grant webpage for a list of potential vendors.

3. **Plant selection must be appropriate for site conditions.** In other words, evaluate your site's sun exposure and soil conditions and find out what plants will do well there. Also, avoid purchasing plants that have been container-grown for more than a couple of years – these plants are usually less healthy.

4. Plant selection must include at least three species that bloom in spring, three that bloom in summer, and three that bloom in fall. All flowering plants including trees, shrubs, and grasses count. For application evaluation, the grant review committee will consider "spring' to be April/May/June, "summer" at late June/July/August, and "fall" as September/October.

5. **Plant selection must include at least one keystone species.** A list of keystone species may be found on the resources section of the grant webpage. The keystone species may be the same as one that one of the above bloom requirements.

6. **Practice ecologically friendly maintenance.** This means limiting chemicals and leaving plant material in place. See "Ecologically Friendly Maintenance" for details.

Other Requirements

1. Project must extend at least 25 feet along (parallel to) shoreline with an average width of 10 feet. This includes the shoreline of any waterbody including lakes, ponds, wetlands and creeks.

2. The project must be located outside the shoreland zone (above the ordinary high water line or OHWL).

3. **You must have a native vegetation establishment and maintenance plan.** In most situations you'll need to hire a professional. Plan materials must include a map showing the location of the project on the property, a planting plan, an estimated timeline of project installation tasks, site photos, detailed cost estimate, and a long-term maintenance plan.

4. You must provide an estimate for 3 years of professional maintenance (some exceptions allowed). We'll use this to consider cost share support for professional maintenance.

5. Alternative Lawn

An alternative lawn such as a bee lawn or meadow lawn can provide many benefits. These include providing foraging and nesting spaces for insects, reducing the need for maintenance (watering, fertilizing, mowing), and a greater resiliency to flooding and drought.

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of materials or services needed to convert a standard non-native turfgrass lawn into an alternative lawn with increased ecological and water resource protection benefits such as a bee lawn or meadow lawn. This includes design fee, site preparation, erosion control, seeding, and planting. Projects may also be offered additional funds to support the first three years of

maintenance if it's done by a professional. Aesthetic and recreational elements such as stepping stones, bird baths, and landscaping edging are <u>not</u> eligible.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Alternative Lawn		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$5,000
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$20,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$20,000

Requirements

1. Project must be at least <u>100 square feet</u> in size.
2. Project must adhere to standards for chosen alternative lawn.
3. **Practice ecologically friendly maintenance.** This means limiting chemicals and leaving plant material in place. See "Ecologically Friendly Maintenance" for details.
4. **Applicant plans to adjust mowing frequency and timing as follows:** Wait until lawns are at least 4 ½ inches tall before mowing and raise mowing height to 3 inches or higher. Flowering dandelions and clover are especially important in early spring as they boost the limited supply of pollinator food sources.

6. Stormwater Best Management Practice (BMP)

Examples of stormwater BMPs include rain garden, tree trench, sand filter, bioretention basin, infiltration basin, vegetated swale, infiltration trench, and green roof. Visit the [Minnesota Stormwater Manual](#) for more information. Where applicable, native plants may be required.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Alternative Lawn		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Homeowner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$5,000
Non-profit property owner	**Up to 75%** of project cost	$20,000
Municipality, school, business	**Up to 50%** of project cost	$50,000

Approved Uses of Funds

Funds may be used for approved stormwater BMPs. If you are doing work that is required as part of a permit from the watershed district, you cannot use any grant funds (from the District or other organization) for this work. <u>However, you may use grant funds for a stormwater BMP or components thereof that go above and beyond basic permit requirements.</u> The other exception is bioengineering components of a shoreline stabilization, even if a permit is required.

Requirements

1. **Project must not be a BMP required by a permit.** A BMP that goes above and beyond permit requirements or the cost difference of an BMP upgrade is eligible for grant funds.

2. **A civil design plan or technical drawing must be submitted.** This typically requires involvement of an engineer, landscape architect, or knowledgeable advisor.

3. **A site visit <u>during</u> construction is required.** This is in addition to any initial site visit and project close-out site visit.

7. Rain barrel

A rain barrel is a simple way to reduce runoff from your roof and most effective when emptied regularly. Reuse the collected water for irrigation of lawn or native plantings.

Approved Uses of Funds

The purchase of materials or services needed to install a rain barrel. More than one rain barrel may be purchased with a limit up to the discretion of RPBCWD staff.

Maximum Grant Award

Maximum Cost-Share: Rain Barrel		
Applicant Category	**Cost Share Percentage**	**Cost Share Maximum Award**
Residential property outside SVI area*	**75%** of project cost	$100
Residential property within SVI area*	**100%** of project cost	varies

* SVI area: Community with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) of high. In RPBCWD, the high SVI area is generally within Eden Prairie north of Anderson Lakes Parkway and east of County Road 61.

Requirements

1. Applicant must provide an installation plan/description.

2. **Grantee must commit to emptying rain barrel on a regular basis** in a way that allows water to infiltrate into the ground. It's not recommended to water edible vegetables/fruit with stormwater runoff.

3. **If installation site is part of a multi-family residence,** applicant has the legal right to install a rain barrel or has permission from the homeowners association and/or property manager, whichever is appropriate.

SELLING YOUR HOME AFTER RECEIVING A GRANT

Residential projects (e.g. single-family home; private owned condo or townhome) must be maintained by the grantee for 5 years following installation of the project. If a grantee sells their home before the end of the 5-year maintenance period, the cost share (grant) agreement does not transfer to the new homeowner.

If you're thinking about applying for a Stewardship Grant and are also thinking about selling your home within a few years, reach out to the grant coordinator before you apply for a grant. Depending on the type of project, it may not be in the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District's best interest to offer cost share funds for a project if the maintenance requirement is voided because of a property sale.

ECOLOGICALLY FRIENDLY MAINTENANCE

Ecologically friendly maintenance is one of the native plant requirements for some projects. Below are how RPBCWD defines ecologically friendly maintenance:

- **Do not use fungicides or insecticides.** These kill "good" and "bad" fungus and insects.
- **Limit herbicide use** to invasive weed control and carefully follow label directions.
- To reduce competition with native plants, plan to pull or otherwise control weeds at least three times during the growing season.
- **Limit fertilizer use to those without harmful salts.** Natural fertilizers such as top-dressing with compost or compost tea are preferred. **Native plants usually do not need ANY fertilizer.** Alternative (bee) lawns: Clover and other legumes fix nitrogen in soil so fertilizer isn't needed.
- **Limit watering** to the establishment phase (first couple of years).
- Select appropriate weather conditions for planting and/or seeding.
- **Provide soft landings (native plants, leaf litter, and plant debris) under trees**. Soft landings support overwintering and pupating insects, which serve an important role in nature including serving as food sources for songbirds.
- **Practice "messy gardening**." Dead standing plants and fallen leaves provide winter and early spring shelter for beneficial insects, birds, and soil microbes. Leave flower stems no shorter than 18 inches. Even better, don't cut off spent flowers as they provide food for birds year-round.

NON-ELIGIBLE PROJECTS OR COMPONENTS

Below is a list of projects or components that at not eligible for the RPBCWD Stewardship Grant Program:

- Projects on property that you or your organization DO NOT OWN: The program does not fund projects that are not on your property. For example, if you have a city-owned pond in your backyard, grant funds are not available for you to do work on that pond. Always get permission from property owners before performing work on property you do not own.

- Water conservation: The grant program does not fund projects that have a primary goal of drinking water conservation, for example high efficiency washers, low-flow toilets, or smart irrigation controllers/sensors. For funding assistance with these projects, check with your city or county.

- Invasive species removals: Projects that solely control or remove aquatic or terrestrial invasive species do not qualify by themselves for the grant program.

- Permit-required work: If you are doing work that is required as part of a permit from the watershed district, you cannot use any grant funds (from the District or other organization) for this work. *Exceptions*: vegetated shoreline stabilization with native plants; work that goes above and beyond basic permit requirements.

- Aesthetic or decorative elements: Stepping stones, bird baths, fountains, and other elements not essential to project function do not qualify for grant reimbursement.

- Expenses from before project is approved: Expenses incurred prior to project approval are not reimbursable (in other words, do not get started until you have signed the grant agreement). An exception is design costs: If you pay a designer to create a plan for you, you can include that in your application estimate and reimbursement request.

- Edging: Edging may be useful for some projects and **may qualify as an eligible cost**. However, the amount the District is willing to reimburse for foot of edging will be based upon the current average price of lower cost edging such as vinyl, brick or pre-cast concrete. Higher cost edging such as stone, poured concrete, and steel may be allowed in some project types, but the District will consider the necessity for edging and the comparative cost of lower cost edging.

PART 1: APPLICATION PROCESS

SCHEDULE A SITE VISIT

The first step in the application process is to schedule a site visit. A District representative will visit your property to meet with you and discuss your project idea. After this site visit, you may proceed with the grant application.

PLAN YOUR PROJECT CAREFULLY

Grant awards are based on your proposed project plan and estimated costs. If the completed project cost is higher than your estimate, your grant award will not be adjusted. You will have to either adjust your plan to compensate or be willing to cover the extra cost yourself.

Any significant adjustments to your project plan after your grant agreement is in place, must be pre-approved by the grant coordinator. If the final project differs significantly from the project plan, you may no longer be eligible for grant reimbursement.

RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR COMMUNITY

As a local government organization, funded by taxpayer dollars, it is the responsibility of the Watershed District to ensure program funds are used effectively. Therefore, applications are closely evaluated for use of cost-effective methods and materials.

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

1. **Application**: Link to application is on the Stewardship Grant Program webpage

2. **Photographs**: Provide two or more photos of project site before project installation. <u>Include for all project types</u>.

3. **Site Map**: Provide a map showing outline of project location on your property. <u>Include for all project types</u>. An aerial (satellite) image with contour/topographic lines is preferred. The online county property maps are useful for this!

4. **Detailed Cost Estimate**: If you're hiring a professional to do the work, provide their quote. If you plant to build the project yourself, provide itemized costs and in-kind contributions. Taxes are eligible costs.

   a. Detailed quote of services from professional business

   b. Itemized costs of purchased materials and/or equipment rentals

   c. In-kind contributions related to project construction (See "In-kind Contributions" below for more information)

   - In-kind labor: Provide estimated number of hours for each person

   - In-kind materials: Provide list and approximate value of materials

5. **Project Design**: Provide a basic sketch of project design with relevant details based upon your project type. Relevant information may include location of features, planting plan with locations of plantings, specifications for materials, etc. <u>Include for all project types.</u>

6. **Civil Design Plan:** A technical plan/drawing, typically done by an engineer or landscape architect, is required for a <u>Shoreline Restoration</u> or a <u>Stormwater BMP project</u> (rain garden, tree trench, swale, permeable pavement, etc.). Shoreline work must show the ordinary high water (OHW) line.

7. **Native Vegetation Restoration and Maintenance Plan:** Submit this if you are doing a <u>Habitat Restoration</u>, <u>Shoreline Restoration</u>, or <u>Waterbody Buffer</u> project.

8. **Estimate for 3 Years of Professional Maintenance:** Submit this if you are doing a <u>Habitat Restoration</u>, <u>Shoreline Restoration</u>, or <u>Waterbody Buffer</u> project. These types of projects may be eligible for cost share of professional maintenance during the vegetation establishment phase. The grant coordinator will be able to identify if your project is eligible.

9. **Plant List**: If your project includes plants, we need details. This info will help us evaluate if your plant selections are appropriate for the site.
    a. <u>Quantity and size</u>: How many plants of each species? What size are the plants (plug, pot size, etc.)? If seeds, what is the seeding rate you plan to use?
    b. <u>Scientific names</u>: Common plant names vary widely so we need scientific names. For native habitat projects, you may use only the natural (wild) forms of native plants (in other words, no cultivated varieties). Seeding mixes also require scientific names.
    c. <u>Plant grower/nursery</u>: Who grew the plants or seeds? Note that this may be different from the seller (place of purchase).

IMPORTANT: For habitat restorations, shoreline restorations, waterbody buffers, and native plantings, ONLY NATIVE plants/seeds in their <u>natural form</u> (wild, non-cultivated variety) may be used.

What is a native plant? The District defines native plants as native to the region between central Minnesota and central Iowa.

Cultivars often have an extra name. Look for native plants WITHOUT a variety name. Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a native plant, but 'Hello Yellow' Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa* 'Hello Yellow') is a cultivar.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

If a grantee plans to install a project themselves, in-kind contributions of materials and labor may count, within reason, toward total project cost for some applicant types and some project types (see table below). These in-kind contributions will be counted toward the grantee's share of project costs. For in-kind labor, hours will be credited at **$15 per hour for unskilled labor**. For skilled labor (person has professional skills/training/experience relevant to the project), a credit of $25 per hour may be used for in-kind labor if approved in advance by the grant program coordinator.

However, grantees will not be allowed to earn actual money from their in-kind contributions. In other words, the value of 20 hours of sweat equity may be counted toward total project cost, but you will not actually be paid ("get cash back") for your labor.

Are In-kind contributions allowed for the Grantee's Share of Cost?

PROJECT TYPE	APPLICANT TYPE		
	Individual homeowner*	Non-profit organization*	Government, school, business
Native Plants (cost of live plants or seeds)	*No*	*No*	*No*
Habitat Restoration	**Yes**	**Yes**	*No*
Lake Shoreline Restoration	**Yes**	**Yes**	*No*
Waterbody Buffer	**Yes**	**Yes**	*No*
Stormwater BMP (includes rain garden)	**Yes**	**Yes**	*No*
Alternative Lawn	**Yes**	**Yes**	*No*
Rain Barrel	*No*	*Ineligible for project type*	*Ineligible for project type*

*Exception: Minnesota Water Stewards, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists may not credit in-kind labor toward total project cost if they are using the project to accumulate volunteer hours for one of these programs.

PUBLIC DATA

All information, including but not limited to applications, conceptual designs, contractor bids, cost estimates, final decisions and specifications, copies of permits and proof of expenditures is subject to disclosure to the public when submitted to the District, except where specifically protected as non-public by state law. Bottom line: Your application is public data.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATION

Applications are screened by the grant coordinator to make sure they meet minimum program requirements and include required information; the coordinator will ask applicant for more information if anything is missing. The permit coordinator will also review to see if a permit is needed. Highly technical or complicated projects may be referred to the Watershed District's consulting engineer for review and recommendation.

After screening, applications are forwarded for evaluation by the full grant review committee, which includes the grant coordinator, technical advisor, and representative from the Citizen Advisory Committee. The group meets as needed to evaluate applications and make funding recommendations. *See the grant program webpage for application evaluation (scoring) forms.*

Complete applications are evaluated in the order they are received. Incomplete applications are placed on hold until applicant provides requested information. The amount of time it takes to evaluate an application depends upon the number of applications received,

GRANT PROGRAM GOALS

Projects must demonstrate an improvement over existing conditions for water quality, natural habitat, and/or flood reduction. Projects that minimize impacts rather than improve existing conditions may receive funding up to the difference between the cost of the BMP and the traditional approach.

In general, the Stewardship Grant program funds projects that:

- Have quantifiable benefits to water quality, habitat, or flood reduction
- Support the District's 10-Year Plan goals

Projects are also evaluated on whether they:

- Produce examples that the District can share with others
- Increase awareness of water resource issues
- Increase visibility and general knowledge of clean water projects
- Build community connection through shared actions for clean water

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Key message: Applications are evaluated on how well they meet program goals.

Some types of projects have specific requirements. See project type definitions for more information. For example, habitat restoration projects require the use of native plants. However, rain garden projects do not require native plants (though they are encouraged) but plants must be appropriate for site conditions (sunlight exposure, soil moisture, etc.).

GRANT AGREEMENT APPROVAL PROCESS

Once the grant review committee has a funding recommendation, a grant agreement is drafted and sent for approval. The level of approval for a grant agreement depends on the amount of the not-to-exceed value listed in the grant agreement.
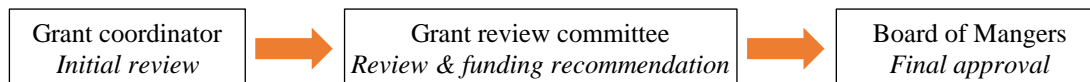
Review for grant agreement LESS THAN $10,000

The grant review committee make recommendations about project funding. If the recommendation is for a grant award less than $10,000, it will be forwarded to the District Administrator for review/approval.

Grant coordinator	Grant review committee	District Administrator
Initial review	*Review & funding recommendation*	*Final approval*
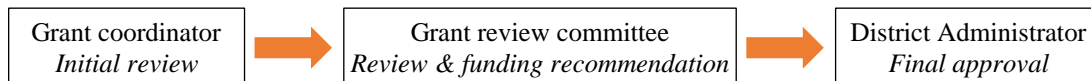
Review for grant agreement MORE THAN $10,000

If a recommendation is for a grant award of $10,000 or greater, the recommendation will be brought to the District Board of Managers for consideration at one of their regular monthly meetings. If Managers approve the recommendation, the District Administrator may move forward with awarding the grant.

Grant coordinator	Grant review committee	Board of Mangers
Initial review	*Review & funding recommendation*	*Final approval*

Review for grant agreement greater than $20,000

If a recommendation is for a grant award of $20,000 or greater, the recommendation will be presented at a **Public Hearing** separately or as part of a meeting of District Board of Managers. The Mangers will consider public input from the hearing as part of their decision. If approved, the District Administrator may move forward with awarding the grant.

Grant coordinator	Grant review committee	Public Hearing	Board of Mangers
Initial review	*Review & funding recommendation*	*Open for public comments*	*Final approval*

PERMIT REVIEW

If the District determines your project triggers a watershed district rule, you will need to apply for a permit. However, the permit fee will be waved, and District staff will work with the applicant on the permit process.

Key message: If you end up needing to apply for a permit for a

grant-funded project, the permit fee will likely be waived.

Examples of actions that <u>may</u> trigger a rule (this is not the full list):

- Work within a designated wetland

- Work below the ordinary high-water line of a waterbody (e. g. shoreline work)

- Dredging or removing sediment of 1 cubic yard or more from the beds, banks or shores of any public waterbody by any means

Read the full list of watershed district rules at **rpbcwd.org/permits**

If you are doing work that is required as part of a permit from the watershed district, you cannot use any grant funds (from the District or other organization) for this work. One exception is a vegetated shoreline stabilization with native plants.

Key message: Grant money can't be used for a project that you must do.

However, grants may be used for projects, or parts of projects, that go above and beyond permit requirements. (Example: A permit requires you to put in a 15-foot buffer along a waterbody, but you decide you would like to do a 25-foot buffer. You may apply for funding for the extra 10 feet but not the initial 15 feet).

GRANT AGREEMENT

Program participants enter into a binding agreement with the District providing the terms under which cost-share funding is provided. After approval of the project, the agreement is signed by participant(s) and the District Administrator. Amendment of any of the terms of the agreement will be by mutual agreement signed by all parties to the original contract.

The agreement includes, but is not limited to, promoting and acknowledging District sponsorship, reporting, payment schedule, terms of agreement and use of funds, cost overruns, and cancellation. The agreement also allows the District access to the project area for evaluation and promotion.

PART 2: BUILD YOUR PROJECT

STICK WITH THE PLAN

The District will not reimburse costs expended for construction of the project that does not substantially conform to the approved plans, designs, and/or specifications as shown in the grant agreement. Also, the District will not reimburse costs expended for partial completion of the project. However, District staff will work in earnest with participants to address unexpected conditions, changes in conditions or other eventualities that affect the construction or

implementation of a project and will present a modification of the cost-share agreement to the Administrator or Board of Managers when necessary.

Key message: To be reimbursed, you need to build what

you agreed to build as stated in your grant agreement.

REIMBURSABLE PROJECT COSTS

The following will be considered as reimbursable project costs if you include them in your project scope (plan):

- Materials and professional labor listed in the project scope as shown in your grant agreement

- Equipment rental fees

- You may estimate state and local taxes from project materials/services within your total project cost.

- In-kind materials or labor ("elbow grease hours") contributed by you or members of your household/organization that are essential to project success (provide an estimate of these with your application)

- Contractor project consulting or design fee (within reason) incurred BEFORE or AFTER your grant agreement is in place

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Key message: Build your project the way you said you'd build it in the grant agreement. If you

don't, we may not reimburse you for the project.

NON-REIMBURSABLE PROJECT COSTS

The following are not eligible project costs:

- **Expenses for activities started or purchases made BEFORE your grant agreement is in place**. In other words, do not begin your project until you have an executed grant agreement (an executed grant agreement has been fully signed by all property owners and the District administrator). Exception: Some contractors require a consultation or design fee in advance of beginning a project, and this fee may be counted toward total project cost.

- **Expenses not part of your original scope of work** will not count toward reimbursable cost. In other words, if you decide to expand your project, the expansions are not eligible project costs. If during installation you need to adjust your scope of work, reach out in advance to the grant program coordinator to see what adjustments may be made.

- **Purely decorative or aesthetic elements** such as bird baths, fountains, and stepping stones do not count toward reimbursable costs.

- **Landscape edging may be ineligible** for reimbursement unless pre-approved as part of project design. Including edging in a project without pre-approval may void your grant agreement if it interferes with project function such as collection of stormwater runoff.

- **Costs above the original estimated project total.** A grant agreement includes a percent cost-share award and a not-to-exceed amount. The not-to-exceed amount is calculated from multiplying your percent cost-share award and estimated total project cost. If you underestimate the cost of your project, you will need to scale back if you want to stay within your not-to-exceed amount or be prepared to cover that additional cost. If scaling back means significant change to your project plan, your project may no longer meet grant requirements. Please discuss plans to scale back in advance with the grant program coordinator.

Key message: If you're unsure a cost is reimbursable,

reach out to the grant coordinator.

PROJECT CONSTRUCTION TIMEFRAME

Project installation must be completed within one (1) year of the grant agreement execution (all parties have signed grant agreement). If unforeseen circumstances delay a project, the grantee may request a time extension in writing to the grant coordinator.

PART 3: REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

Reimbursement is made after completion of the project and reporting requirements have been met. The participant must document completion and have it confirmed by site inspection from a District representative. Applicants must provide copies of paid invoices and receipts for all costs and reasonable documentation of labor hours contributed. Claimed expenses will be verified by the District.

Site visit

A site inspection to confirm proper installation of project must also be performed before reimbursement may proceed. The grantee should reach out to the grant coordinator (or other designated person) to schedule this inspection when the project is nearing completion.

Reporting requirements

Within 30 days of project completion, the grantee must submit a project report that includes the following:

- Completed report form: A link to the online form is located on the grant webpage

- Proof of purchases: Itemized receipts and/or paid invoices for project costs

- Photos: Two or more good quality photographs of completed project
- Other: Other documentation such as list of in-kind contributions

Reimbursement request

After successful project inspection and completion by grantee of their reporting requirements, the grant coordinator will submit a reimbursement request. All financial requests must go before the District Board of Managers at an upcoming monthly meeting (first Wednesday of the month). Typically, a reimbursement request must be ready for the board packet by the 15th of the month in order to be included for consideration for the next month's board meeting.

The final step in reimbursement is printing and mailing of a reimbursement check to the grantee. The grantee may request to pick up the check in person at the District office during business hours.

Reimbursement calculation

Final reimbursement amounts are calculated by multiplying the percent award (such as 50%) by the total final project cost, up to the not-to-exceed value provided in the grant agreement. A not-to-exceed value limits the reimbursable amount and helps keep staff within program budget.

If the final project cost is less than the approved project estimate (you came in under budget), the reimbursement will be the applicable percentage of that final cost. However, if the final project cost is greater than the approved project estimate (you went over budget), the reimbursement remains the applicable percentage of the estimated cost and overage is your responsibility.

> **EXAMPLE:** You were awarded a 50% cost share grant of with an approved project estimate cost of $4,000. The cost share not-to-exceed value on your grant agreement is $2,000.
>
> Scenario #1: Your final project cost came in **under budget** at $3,800. Your reimbursement will be **50% of the final cost** of $3,800. Your grant reimbursement will be $1,900.
>
> Scenario #2: Your final project cost came in **over budget** at $4,600. Your reimbursement will be **50% of the estimated cost** of $4,000. Your grant reimbursement will be $2,000.

PART 4: OBLIGATIONS AFTER PROJECT INSTALLATION

MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

Maintenance of the project is the responsibility of the grant recipient. Local government, school districts, businesses, and non-profits are required to maintain their projects for 10 years. Homeowners are expected to maintain their projects for 5 years.

Homeowners and local government sign a maintenance schedule as a part of the funding agreement. Businesses and non-profits may be asked to record a maintenance declaration on the deed to their property. RPBCWD reserves the right to request repayment of a grant if the project is not adequately maintained.

Key message: You need to take care of your project after it's installed.

If you don't, we can ask you to return the grant money.

If you have been offered professional maintenance funds as part of your grant agreement, you will need to submit receipts on an annual basis (this may be included with annual reporting requirements below). Reimbursement will not occur until the professional maintenance for the year has occurred and been verified.

Projects with native plant requirements must follow the ecologically friendly maintenance requirements as found in the Native Plant Pledge shown in Appendix A.

ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

As part of your grant agreement, you may be asked once a year to submit an online form to update us about your project during your required maintenance period. Information you'll be asked to provide includes:

- General update of project
- Maintenance or inspection activities that have occurred
- Current photographs of project

This form also offers an opportunity for you to ask us questions or bring up any concerns you have. An email reminder will be sent with a link to the annual reporting form. If we don't hear from you or have concerns, we will reach out by phone and/or stop by the property.

In addition, a District representative may visit your property to inspect the project. The conditions for the visits will be outlined in the grant agreement. If entering your property, we will notify you by knocking on your door or leaving a note or follow up with an email or phone call if warranted.

Key message: You need to check in once a year after your project has been installed for the

number of years outlined in your grant agreement.

APPENDIX A: NATIVE PLANT PLEDGE

APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF GRANT PROCESS

Before you apply

1. Visit the Stewardship Grant webpage for resources and ideas.

2. Once you have your idea, fill out and submit the online Site Visit Request form.

3. A District representative will contact you to schedule the site visit.

4. Develop a project plan after your site visit; reach out to your site visit contact if you would like to discuss the plan.

5. Assemble application materials.

Apply by filling out the appropriate online application form and provide required documents, which will vary by project type. Most likely, you;ll need to submit:

- Online application
- Project location map
- Project design
- Photographs
- Detailed cost estimate
- Plant list (if you're using plants)

Incomplete applications will not be considered. You must have a site visit prior to applying.

If your project is approved

- We will send you a grant agreement. Once this is fully signed, you may get started!
- Keep a list of your expenses and save all project-related receipts.
- Issues come up. If you think you need to change your plan, contact us for pre-approval.
- Take photos! Before, during, and after. You'll need these for your project report.
- You've got one year from approval to finish your project and submit your report.
- As your project nears completion, reach out to schedule a site inspection.

After you've completed your project

- Send in copies of all your receipts, including from any contractors you worked with (electronic copies or scans are acceptable are fine).
- A District representative conduct a project inspection.
- Financials are processed once a month at the watershed. Once your reimbursement request is submitted, it may take one to two months for you to receive your check.

Long-term

- Take care of your project! Grantees are required to maintain their projects for the number of years specified in the "Maintenance" section of their grant agreement.

- Submit a brief annual update for the 5 or more years (the number of years will be stated in your grant agreement).

- After installation, your project may be inspected by a District representative.

- Stay in contact. The Watershed District often offers continuing education on topics like maintenance, and other opportunities to learn and get involved.