



Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations: Habitat Protection and Restoration

2026 Application Guidance

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT) invites proposals for projects through its Habitat Protection and Restoration focus area. This request for proposals (RFP) process will be used for the disbursement of up to \$1,300,000 in 2026.

Program Goal and Objective

The goal of the GLFT's Habitat Protection and Restoration grant category is to preserve essential habitat; protect, restore, and stabilize important fish habitats; and increase habitat availability. The GLFT pursues these efforts through direct investment in specific places with degraded or vulnerable habitat through connectivity enhancements. Funding is distributed through a combination of funder-directed and competitive grants.

Land acquisition, dam removal, fish passage, and other capital projects are highly resource intensive and, as a leading strategy, would quickly exhaust the resources of the GLFT. Therefore, the GLFT limits its direct investment in these projects to situations where the habitat opportunity is prime, other funders are contributing, long-term management is assured, and the proposed acquisition or restoration project has the strongest community support and interest.

Habitat Protection and Restoration Program Priorities

This grant program emphasizes on-the-ground, tangible projects to protect or restore habitat and the associated efforts to support these activities. Please note and carefully attend to the following as you develop your proposal:

1. The GLFT prefers to support projects that offer an increase in long-term, sustainable, natural reproduction for species now supported by hatchery production. Project benefits should be targeted toward salmonids and nonsalmonid predator game species.
2. Projects that offer secondary benefits—for example, improved sea lamprey management or protection of state-listed threatened or endangered species—may be supported at a greater funding level.
3. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Framework (GLAHF), the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) Barrier Removal Collaboration Suite, existing field inventories, or similar tools to identify appropriate projects or as part of their proposed scopes of work.^{1,2}

Supported efforts may include:

- Protection, enhancement, and/or restoration of valuable Great Lakes fisheries habitat that supports the long-term, sustainable, natural reproduction of species now supported by hatchery production or the rehabilitation of lake whitefish, lake trout, lake sturgeon, or other important Great Lakes fish populations.
- Restoration of Great Lakes wetlands.
- Removal of dams or barriers to restore fish passage (see [*Policy on Habitat Protection and Restoration Proposals*](#)).

¹ GLAHF is a spatial framework of nested grids designed to link data and allows data aggregation and viewing spatial information at multiple scales. GLAHF can be used to relate habitat-based characteristics to specific biological components of the ecosystem (e.g., ice cover, substrate, currents, temperature, upwelling, tributary inputs), relate biotas to ecological habitat types, set spatial priorities and track progress for monitoring or restoration, integrate research and management actions, and more. See it at <https://hub.glahf.org/>.

² The GLFC Barrier Removal Collaboration Suite is “an application that improves your ability to share your views on water barriers and tributaries, comment on others’ views, create topics to discuss, and form shared interest groups to collaborate on barriers.” Access the tool at <https://www.seasketch.org/#projecthomepage/583f3ca58b284e1c6aec68a6/about>.

- Project planning, including community engagement, engineering and/or design work, that is a necessary precursor to a project supporting one of the above goals. Recognizing the progression of planning and community engagement efforts, the GLFT welcomes proposals that are solely focused on these early project stage activities.
- Field inventories that comprehensively identify road-stream crossings and other barriers at the watershed scale for watersheds identified as high priority in planning or other management documents. Inventory methods should follow the [*Great Lakes Road Stream Crossing Inventory Protocol*](#) to ensure that information is collected consistently among watersheds. Applicants seeking funding to conduct inventories should be well positioned to implement restoration plans based upon the results.
- Targeted acquisition of land or easements to protect essential habitat.

To be considered for funding fee-simple acquisitions/leases/easements or similar land-control costs, a project shall demonstrate, at a minimum, that it conforms with the GLFT [*Policy on Land Acquisition*](#) and that the proposed land purchase cost is an essential component in support of one of the activities described above.

Applicants should note that the GLFT funds habitat research and evaluation of restoration efforts through a separate program areas..

Submission and Award Dates

Applications are due by **Friday, February 20, 2026**, at 5:00 PM EST. Funding decisions will be made by the GLFT’s Board of Trustees on Tuesday, May 12, 2026. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by Tuesday, June 3, 2026. Grant awards will be available to successful applicants upon formal action by the board.

Applications must be submitted through the GLFT website (<http://www.glft.org/>). The web-based application system will prompt you with questions and instructions to guide you through the application process.

To begin, visit the [*Habitat Protection and Restoration*](#) page on our website, where you will find application guidance documents and other useful information to help you with the process.

Grant opportunities for which the GLFT is accepting applications can be viewed by clicking the “Browse Our Active Grant Opportunities” button, which will direct you to a page with online applications. Click on the title of the grant opportunity in which you are interested and follow the instructions to apply.

You will be required to create a user account to submit an application. You will be asked for an email address and password. If you do not know your password, click on “Forgot Your Password” and instructions to change your password will be sent to your email address.

If you do not have a user account in our system, click on “Create an Account” and follow the instructions provided. You may then proceed to the grant application.

To return to an online application you have already begun, click on the “Dashboard” button, which will appear in the upper right corner of the page after you log in. The Dashboard page will provide access to your applications and/or active projects.

If you have previously submitted a grant application to the GLFT, you may already have a user account based on your email address. If you are unable to sign up for an account using your email address, this may be because you already have an account. If you experience this problem, you may reset your password by clicking the “Forgot Your Password” link.

If you need assistance to set up your account, please contact GLFT staff.

When completing the online application:

- Remember to save your work often.
- When uploading a document, click “Save” to complete the file transfer.
- You may leave your work and return at a later time to complete the application.
- Make sure that your answers to each question are within the text field limits.
- Check each field before it is submitted.
- Be sure to answer all of the required questions.
- The system will not allow an application to be submitted if a required question is not answered.
- No changes can be made to the application once it is submitted (if an error was made, contact GLFT staff).

Applicants are encouraged to log in to the site and review the application well in advance of the submission deadline.

Application Assistance

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact GLFT staff prior to submission of a grant proposal to discuss project goals and alignment with GLFT priorities. Staff are also available to assist applicants in navigating the online grant proposal submission process. Please contact Manja Holland-Smith at 517-371-7468 or mhollandsmith@glft.org to discuss a proposal.

Applicant Eligibility

Organizations that are eligible to apply for GLFT grants include nonprofit organizations with a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS (or nongovernmental organizations that hold charitable status in their country), as well as educational and governmental (including tribal) organizations.

Application Requirements

You will be asked to submit the following information.

Applicant Information and History

Supply information about the applicant, including the name and email address of the project manager and the history of the organization's grant applications to the GLFT (if applicable), including whether or not the organization has previously applied to the GLFT, whether the organization has previously received funding from the GLFT, and whether the organization has previously proposed this project to the GLFT. Supply information about who will sign the grant agreement if the project is funded.

Grant Request

Supply information about this grant proposal, including the project area, project zip code, funding amount requested from the GLFT (as well as available matching funds), and the project start and end dates.

Project Description

Briefly describe the project. Include the following items (applicants are encouraged to reference the [GLFT Policy on Habitat Protection and Restoration Proposals](#) while completing this section of the application).

Project Summary

1. **Project summary.** Briefly explain what the project proposes to accomplish using terminology that would be appropriate to include on the GLFT website or in a press release to communicate project goals to a general audience. (Limit your response to 75 words.)
2. **Project goal(s).** Explain the goal(s) of the project and how this goal relates to the overall GLFT mission to provide funding to enhance, protect, and rehabilitate Great Lakes fishery resources. (Limit your response to 800 words.)
3. **Geographic focus area.** Explain the geographic impact area of the project. Identify the areas of habitat improvement, including potential new access to tributary segments, spawning, and nursery areas. Provide a map that identifies the barrier/project location. Due to limited funding, the GLFT will only consider project sites located:
 - a. Within the Lake Michigan basin
 - b. In the state of Michigan within other Great Lakes basins (i.e., the Michigan shore of Lakes Erie, Huron, and Superior)

Priority will be given to projects focusing on Lake Michigan. Projects located within the Lake Michigan basin but outside of the state of Michigan (e.g., Indiana, Illinois, or Wisconsin) must be regionally significant for funding consideration. (Limit your response to 250 words.)

4. **Benefiting species.** Describe the species that will benefit. Project benefits should target Great Lakes salmonids and nonsalmonid predator game species. Projects that offer secondary benefits (e.g., improved sea lamprey management or protection of state-listed threatened or endangered species) are encouraged. The GLFT also will consider projects that facilitate rehabilitation of a Great Lakes fish species, such as lake whitefish and lake sturgeon, that has been targeted by the GLFT for rehabilitation. In addition, the GLFT prefers to support projects that offer an increase in long-term, sustainable, natural reproduction for species now supported by hatchery production. **A letter of support from a Department of Natural Resources or tribal fisheries biologist indicating that the project will benefit the identified species is required.** (Limit your response to 250 words in addition to the letter.)
5. **Habitat benefits.** Describe the project's benefits to the Great Lakes fisheries habitat, including physical and chemical improvements. Identify whether there are any barriers downstream of the proposed project. To the extent possible, include information about the system in which the proposed project would occur, such as river flow, depth, width, and current physical and chemical conditions. When appropriate, applicants are encouraged to draw on GLAHF, existing field inventories, or similar products to demonstrate that the effort you propose is an efficient and appropriate intervention and to characterize anticipated benefits. (Limit your response to 500 words.)
6. **Relationship to management plans.** Identify the watershed plan, river assessment, and accompanying management plan, or comparable management plan in place, which support the current project request. (Limit your response to 300 words.)
 - a. Describe how the project is consistent with the plan's management objectives.
 - b. For fish passage projects, describe how the project is consistent with sea lamprey control plans and policies of the GLFC and other invasive species management plans.
7. **Relationship to ongoing activities.** Provide information demonstrating that the proposed project will not duplicate ongoing activities in the region or activities funded by alternative sources. Projects that build upon or advance existing work or provide new approaches for addressing persistent issues are encouraged. If the project is closely tied to ongoing work, explain how coordination will occur. (Limit your response to 300 words.)
8. **Partnerships and collaboration.** List collaborating individuals and/or organizations, if any, and describe how they have been/will be involved in the project. Priority will be given to projects that involve strong support and collaboration of individuals and/or organizations. (Limit your response to 300 words.)

9. **Communicating results.** Identify key/target audiences and describe plans for disseminating the results of the project to those audiences. Priority will be given to projects that include a sound plan for reaching key audiences with information about the outcomes of the project. (Limit your response to 250 words.)
10. **Evaluating results.** Describe the plan for evaluating project results. Priority will be given to projects that include the implementation of a sound evaluation method; those that will provide information or insights that will help guide future GLFT grant activities; and/or, when appropriate, those that make use of GLAHF, or similar products as part of their evaluations. (Limit your response to 250 words.)
11. **Sustainability plan.** Except for work that is of an obvious one-time nature, explain a clear plan for sustaining the effort beyond the ending date of the GLFT grant. Priority will be given to projects that will likely continue beyond the GLFT's investment. (Limit your response to 250 words.)
12. **Long-term maintenance and operation.** Describe the long-term maintenance and operation plans for the project site and any GLFT-funded improvements. The GLFT requires property interests to remain available for project purposes, be in the control of the applicant or partnering landowner, and be maintained by a public agency or private nonprofit entity for a period of at least 20 years. Furthermore, any facilities or improvements constructed using GLFT funding are also required to be maintained and controlled at the grantees' expense for a period of at least 20 years. (Limit your response to 250 words.)
13. **Cost-effectiveness.** Explain the project's benefits relative to the requested GLFT investment. Priority will be given to projects that yield benefits commensurate with or greater than the GLFT's investment. (Limit your response to 300 words.)
14. **Permits/authorization.** Describe authorizations, permits, or approvals required to undertake the project, if applicable. The project must have the express written support of the property owner(s) or operator(s). Local community support for the project is also preferred. This must be validated by a letter from the property owner(s) or operator(s) of dam structures or barriers. Letters demonstrating local community support are optional but encouraged. Please attach your letter(s). Only PDFs will be accepted. If you have multiple letters, please merge them into a single PDF before attaching. (Limit your response to 250 words in addition to the letters.)
15. **Applicant capacity.** Describe the applicant's capacity to administer and complete the proposed project, including demonstrated experience in successfully managing grants and executing projects of a scope and depth comparable to those of the proposed project. Priority will be given to applicants with experience, expertise, and exceptional past project implementation performance. (Limit your response to 250 words.)

Land Acquisition

This section is required only if your proposal includes a request from the GLFT to support the acquisition of real property through fee simple or lesser interest in a property. **If your proposal does not include land acquisition, you may skip to the next section.**

The GLFT has determined that its primary mission is NOT to acquire property, except in limited circumstances where the acquisition of fee simple or lesser interest in property is an essential element in accomplishing its primary mission. In general, the GLFT relies upon federal, state, and local agencies, private land conservancies, and private foundations that routinely acquire interest in lands to protect, enhance, and preserve natural resources or access of value to the public.

16. **Acquisition need.** In order to be considered for funding fee-simple acquisitions, easements, or similar land-control costs, projects shall demonstrate, at a minimum, that the proposed land-control cost is an essential component to protect critical habitat or to restore Great Lakes wetlands. Describe how the proposed land acquisition supplies a necessary component in support of protecting or restoring Great Lakes fisheries habitat. (Limit your response to 250 words.)

Validate this need by supplying a letter from the local Michigan Department of Natural Resources district office, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, or local land conservancy. Please upload your letter(s) in the online application. If you have multiple letters, please merge them to create a single PDF before uploading.

17. **Property history.** Provide a brief history of the property and its purchase status, including the applicant's current stage in the purchase process. (Limit your response to 300 words.)
18. **Development pressure.** Describe the rate at which land costs and/or growth and development pressures in the proposed area are increasing. (Limit your response to 125 words.)

Detailed Budget

Submit a detailed budget for the total project period, using the [GLFT template](#). If your project spans multiple years, complete one form showing a cumulative budget for the entire project period as well as one form for each budget year. Enter the budget name on each page according to the year (e.g., Cumulative Budget or Budget Year 1 of 2). The total amount requested from the GLFT under "Income" should reflect the project expenses for that budget name. You may add or remove expense subcategories and lines, but the main expense categories may not be changed.

Note: According to the GLFT [Overhead Policy](#) for all projects, administrative/overhead costs are limited to 10 percent of the total salaries and wages. Definitions of the budget categories can be found on our [Resources page](#).

Budget Narrative

Briefly explain how the figures in each budget category on the detailed budget were estimated and justify the need for the costs. Projects with financial support from other sources are encouraged. On-the-ground restoration projects funded through this grant announcement will generally not exceed 50 percent of the total project cost for projects sponsored by tribal, state, or local governments or by a nonprofit organization. Although matching funds are not required, proposals that include local funding and promote community participation in the use of fishery resources will be favored. (Limit your response to 300 words.)

If matching funds or in-kind contributions are involved, please:

- Identify the sources and amounts and explain for each whether these have been pledged, requested, or secured.
- Explain whether the GLFT funds are to be used as a match requirement, and, if so, what percentage of GLFT funds would be used to complete specific items (e.g., 30 percent of needed funds for a task would be from the GLFT, 70 percent from other sources).
- For projects involving contracted services, include a detailed explanation of how funds would be allocated.
- Address contingency plans if pending funding is not realized.

Chart of Work

Using the [GLFT template](#), complete a chart of work form. Submit the form with the application. A chart of work template is available for download in the application as a Word or Excel file. The chart of work should complement the project description narrative and indicate major outcomes, associated activities/timelines for each outcome, associated costs for activities, and associated deliverables for each outcome.

Site Photographs

In the online application, upload photographs of the project site(s) as appropriate. Pictures of current site conditions are encouraged but not required. If you have multiple photographs, please upload them as a single PDF or as image files using a zip file folder.

Additional Documents

In the online application, upload additional documents of relevance, such as figures, captions, feasibility studies, letters of support, literature citations, or other graphics. Do not use this space to provide additional language for required responses exceeding the word count limits, as they will not be considered. If the files correspond with a narrative section question, please indicate the connection to the graphic. Only PDFs will be accepted. If you have multiple pages, please merge them into a single PDF before uploading.