



MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership

c/o Norcross Wildlife Foundation

P.O. Box 269, Wales MA 01081

Terms and Conditions of the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund Grant (RCF) Program Round 3, 2021-2022

Using a \$100,000 grant from the *Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust Donated Land and Easement Program* to encourage the permanent conservation of ecologically significant land, the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund will provide funding for the transactional costs associated with the donation of land (including 50% or more partial interest) or a permanent conservation easement/restriction, to permanently protect qualified parcels of land.

Applications:

Are available from the MassConn Web site, [link to application](#), along with the supporting documentation and MassConn Mapper GIS.

For questions about the program, please contact the MassConn Coordinator, Ed Hood, at ehood@Norcrosswildlife.org.

Allowable Project Types:

Only projects where 50% or more of the value of the fee interest in the land, or 50% or more of the value of the conservation easement, is being donated to a qualified organization or municipality, with legally binding, permanent, conservation restrictions, will be supported through a MassConn RCF grant.

Land that is already owned by a conservation organization, or municipal body, government agency or body, or already held by any organization that has land conservation as part of its mission, will not be eligible for funding.

Qualified Organizations for receiving land or easements funded by the MassConn RCF:

Project grants will be made only to organizations that meet certain criteria demonstrating their ability, and legal authority, to hold, monitor and enforce a conservation easement. Eligible organizations must demonstrate legal standing through up-to-date documentation of their 501(c)3 or comparable organizational status, or other proof of their legal ability and authority to own land or hold a Conservation Easement. Municipal entities must provide a letter of approval from their town or city's governing body (be it Selectmen or the Mayor's office), to undertake a specific project, and confirming that the land will be placed into permanent conservation status.

Allowable Costs that can be covered by the MassConn RCF:

Transactional expenses including appraisal, survey, legal fees, including attorney's fees on behalf of the participating organization, such as title exam and closing costs, baseline documentation and other professional services directly related to donating a CR or title. Note that organizations may do a BDR internally and count that as an eligible expense through clear documentation of the hours worked and rate, for up to 10% of the total Transaction Costs to be reimbursed. The legal costs for passing a CR to a second organization in the case of fee title donations.

Non-allowable costs for the MassConn RCF:

Organizational staff and overhead expenses. Tax or accounting services for donor, separate from legal fees directly related to transference of title or conservation easement. Stewardship Funding. Any cost of direct purchase of land or an easement. Reimbursement / replacement for transactional costs already expended prior to approval of a project for RCF funding.

Guarantee of Permanent Protection:

Applicants to the MassConn RCF must make clear how the conservation project they are seeking funding for will be permanent, such as a recorded Conservation Easement/Restriction approved by the appropriate State and Local authority. Fee ownership or partial fee interest in land is in and of itself not a permanent protection and needs to be made binding through an appropriate legal mechanism such as the donation of the CR to another conservation organization, or a legal agreement with the donors that the donated land will be protected in perpetuity by the receiving organization and its subsequent successor or assigns.

Stewardship

To facilitate the successful long-term stewardship and legal defense of conservation projects funded through the MassConn RCF, applicants' projects are *encouraged* to set aside during the project, or provide for some binding way to do so in the future, an amount of restricted stewardship funding equivalent to the RCF grant received, up to a maximum of \$10,000.

Applicants are *encouraged* to submit a plan for the provision of long-term monitoring and stewardship funds for a project. Projects that have such a plan will be given preference over those equivalent projects that lack them.

Project Timelines:

- Round 3 Grant Application Deadline: June 30th, 2021.
- Announcement of Grant Recipients will be made in mid-August, 2021.
- Projects are expected to be completed and meet the "Recording and Accountability" requirements (in the *Terms and Conditions* document) within two years of the grant award being made. However, recognizing the complexity of conservation projects, additional extensions may be made if there is evidence of good-faith effort and some progress on the project. Requests for extensions should be made in writing to the MassConn Coordinator well in advance (at least one month) of the original 1-year deadline.
- Grant funds will be distributed only after full reporting and documentation have been provided (see "Recording and Accountability", below).

- Organizations with an RCF funded project still in progress will be ranked lower against qualified new RCF grant applicants, but not disqualified from consideration.

Distribution of RCF Grant Funds:

Grant funds are to be paid as a ***reimbursement*** of qualified funds expended ***after*** project grant approval, and ***following receipt of*** documentation for the recording of the CR or land title, and provision of full documentation of all expenses (legible receipts and other documentation for expenses paid).

Recording and Accountability

The minimum reporting requirements for grant recipients to receive reimbursement include:

- A narrative report documenting the completion of the project, including a map.
- A copy of the recorded land title and/or CR, with registry of deeds notation. For Fee title projects, documentation of a legally binding mechanism for permanent protection must be provided.
- A copy of all project expenses that are to be reimbursed, in the form of clearly identified receipts, paid invoices or other documentation of expended transactional costs, and an itemization of those expenses.

MassConn RCF Funding Priorities

The priority for implementation of the MassConn RCF derives directly from the new Conservation Priority / Focus Area map (the *MassConn Mapper*) created by MassConn in 2016 with a Jessie B. Cox Foundation RCP Innovation Grant, and updated in 2020. The goal is to emphasize the protection of the land determined to be of the “highest conservation value” based on the following five criteria of the MassConn Strategic Conservation Plan, and geographically located through a co-occurrence analysis on the MassConn Mapper:

1. Index of Ecological Integrity.
2. TNC’s Measure of Terrestrial Resilience.
3. TNC’s Measure of Regional Flow.
4. Presence or relative proximity to habitats of known endangered species or species of special concern.
5. Adjacent to, or near, existing protected open space.

The top 40% of land with the highest co-occurrence of the above values, referred to as “Conservation Focal Areas” are depicted on the MassConn Mapper RFP map, which can be accessed at <https://www.mymassconnwoods.org/massconn-regional-conservation-fund>, via the “Conservation Focal Areas” button at the bottom of that page. Areas shown in red are considered to be priorities for conservation, and support by the MassConn RCF fund. The larger the percentage of the parcel, and/or total acres within this top 40% / conservation focal area, the higher the parcel’s rank for funding consideration.

Additionally, MassConn will prioritize the maximum number of possible projects across the largest number of organizations possible. Funding will be tiered based on acreage, with smaller projects qualifying for less funding, but not disqualified because of their small size if they meet ecological

guidelines from the MassConn Mapper. Funding more projects across a greater number of organizations will be prioritized over supporting multiple projects from a single organization.

Grant Sizes

Grant awards will be based on a sliding scale of acreage and the amount of conservation priority land to be protected, with the maximum award for a project being \$20,000.

Small grants in the \$2,500 to \$5,000 range are encouraged (see “Terms and Conditions” for project size and ranking guidelines), and the Steering Committee reserves the right to prioritize some smaller projects that meet minimum conservation priority criteria, and provide partial funding to larger projects.

The Steering Committee reserves the right to distribute smaller / partial grants if there are more qualified projects than maximum funding of each will allow.

Project Ranking Guidelines:

Projects will be ranked based on the total acres to be conserved and the total acres of land rated as “conservation priority” / top 40% on the MassConn Mapper.

Projects where the land is being donated in fee, or the full value of the conservation easement is being donated, will be ranked higher than projects where only partial fee ownership or part of the value of the easement is being donated.

Projects that have a clearly defined plan of action, with documented agreement, or active negotiation with the land or CR donor, will be prioritized above those that do not – see “Project Readiness” in the RCF application.

Multiple projects from a single organization may be deferred to ensure as many organizations as possible can execute eligible projects.

Projects that have firmly established mechanism for providing stewardship funding will be preferred over equivalent projects that do not.

Authority of the Steering Committee:

Decisions about the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund will be made by the MassConn Steering Committee, at their discretion, guided by the ranking system and criteria identified in this “Terms and Conditions” document. Sole authority for the implementation of the MassConn RCF rests with the Steering Committee and all decisions by the MassConn Steering Committee regarding the Regional Conservation Fund will be final.

The Steering Committee reserves the right to alter the eligibility and ranking requirements and criteria if it is found that existing elements of the program are limiting the number of qualified projects or creating other unforeseen difficulties for the program and its applicants.

Governance and Management Plan

The members of the MassConn Steering Committee and the MassConn Coordinator have oversight of the MassConn RCF. The MassConn Coordinator would will manage implementation the RCF, but all final funding or other project decisions will be made by a majority vote of the Steering Committee. The Coordinator serves the Steering Committee as a non-voting member. The quorum for voting will be 4 members plus the coordinator, to record all votes.

The steering committee has three members from Connecticut based organizations and three members from Massachusetts based organizations, and one member working for a Massachusetts based organization (Norcross) with large, continuous land holdings in both States.

When a Steering Committee member has a project under review, they may discuss the project with the full Committee, but then should fully recuse themselves from the voting, accomplished either by anonymous ballot, or by the physical exit of the party from the room during the vote.

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Opacum Land Trust – Financial Host for MassConn and the Cox DLEG / MassConn RCF project.
- Norcross Wildlife Foundation – Physical host for MassConn, and primary financial supporter of MassConn Coordinator.
- Organizations with voting representatives on the MassConn Steering Committee, who will oversee the program and select grant recipients:

- Connecticut Forest & Parks Assoc. (CT)
- East Quabbin Land Trust (MA)
- Joshua's Trust (CT)
- Monson Conservation Commission (MA)
- Norcross Wildlife Foundation (MA & CT)
- Northern Connecticut Land Trust (CT)
- Opacum Land Trust (MA)

Contact information and deadlines:

Please send all applications to Ed Hood, MassConn Coordinator, at ehood@Norcrosswildlife.org (please put "MassConn RCF Application, Your organization name" in the subject line), or by mail to Ed Hood, MassConn, c/o Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, P.O. Box 269, Wales, MA.

Please address any queries about MassConn and the MassConn RCF to Ed at above contact information. Please put "MassConn RCF" in your subject line.

Applications will be accepted through the end of business, June 30th, 2021.

Grant Awards will be announced in mid-August, 2021.