

Wisconsin's Landowner Incentive Program Overview



Landowner Incentive Program

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Introduction

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) provides grants and technical support to private landowners to manage and restore habitat for at-risk (rare) species on their land. The program provides up to 75% of the cost for eligible projects. LIP is currently funded by a State Wildlife Grant (Competitive Program) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation.

Any individuals or group may apply for LIP funding and assistance; however projects must take place on privately (non-government) owned land. Projects must be located within Wisconsin's Driftless Area.

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Application Deadline

We will be accepting applications on a continual basis and fund projects on a first-come-first-served basis. Therefore, it is within your best interest to apply promptly.

Who can apply?

Funds may be awarded to individuals or groups (e.g. land conservancies or trusts, watershed councils, conservation organizations) with projects that will take place on privately-owned (non-government) land. Applicants who do not hold a legal interest in the land on which their proposed LIP project will occur must identify the legal landowner(s) and confirm their intent to participate in the project. State owned riparian or shore land below the ordinary high water mark adjacent to private lands are not eligible for LIP.

Note: If the application is submitted on behalf of a landowner, funds will be awarded to the landowner **unless** the applicant holds a legal interest in the property such as an easement, signed agreement transferring management authority, or other binding, documented agreement.

What types of projects are eligible?

Projects that restore or enhance habitat on private land in the Driftless Area and for the benefit of at-risk species are eligible. Eligible projects under LIP may include, but are not limited to, conducting prescribed burns, planting native vegetation, and removing invasive and woody species. Projects are generally one-year in length.

To be eligible for LIP funds, proposals must meet the following requirements:

- Projects must be on private (non-government owned) land
- Proposed management must benefit at least one at-risk species that occupies the property or occurs within ½ mile of the property
- Projects must be within the Driftless Area

My land is currently enrolled in a conservation program – can I still receive LIP funding?

Lands enrolled in **CRP** are not eligible for LIP funding. Land enrolled in other conservation programs such as EQIP and MFL may be eligible provided that LIP does not pay for practices already covered by an agreement with another program. In addition, if the landowner is already receiving cost-share from another program, it may be difficult to manage the landowner's portion of the cost-share (match) and proposals must clearly identify how the LIP and other match will be met. You must first check with the program's administrator or local forester or biologist to be certain that the management practices you are proposing for LIP funds are compatible with the contract or agreement you may have with these other programs. If your property is enrolled in MFL, you must submit approval from your local forester to LIP staff before we provide funds for your project. Not discussing the LIP project with your forester could jeopardize your MFL status and result in penalties.

What is the LIP Priority Area?

Wisconsin's Driftless Area - Prairie, Savanna, and Oak Woodland

The Driftless Area, also known as the Paleozoic Plateau or Upper Mississippi River blufflands, covers approximately 24,000 square miles across southwest Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa, and northwest Illinois. "Driftless" refers to the fact that the area escaped coverage by glacial drifts that covered much of the upper Midwest during the latter part of the Pleistocene epoch, roughly 26,000 to 10,000 years ago.

The driftless landscape is characterized by highly dissected uplands with deeply cut valleys and contains some of the highest quality remnants of Oak Savanna, Prairies, forests, and streams remaining in the upper Midwest states. It contains one of the highest concentrations of spring-fed coldwater and cool-water streams in the United States, streams which cut through karst bedrock to create cliffs and algal talus slopes, providing habitat for plant and animal species that are either unique to this area or at the limits of their ranges.



Private landowners of prairie and savanna habitat are vital to meeting the challenge to protect and manage this region. In Wisconsin, more than 97% of the 7.4 million acre driftless area is privately owned. Thus, improving the status of SGCN in the Driftless Area depends overwhelmingly on the active engagement of private landowners.

Landowner Incentive Program projects to manage or restore Driftless Area prairie or oak savanna/woodland habitat for Species of Greatest Conservation Need will be considered for funding. Priority will also be given to projects located within a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA). To determine if your Township is located within a Conservation Opportunity Area, please refer to the list in the "Application Instructions" appendix. More details on COAs can be found on the DNR's [Wildlife Action Plan website](#).

How are LIP matching funds accrued?

The project match (or share) is the portion of the total project cost contributed by the landowner or their partners. The landowner is responsible for at least 25% of total project costs. Match can include money from **non-federal** sources along with "in-kind" match such as labor, supplies, and equipment donated by the landowner or organizations working with the landowner. Landowners are encouraged to partner with other landowners or conservation groups to reduce out-of-pocket (cash) contributions for their project. Matching fund expenditures must be made in accordance with the funded grant period dates specified in the project's grant agreement.

Donated labor, supplies or equipment as part of the landowner match are subject to the following provisions:

1. All sources of the landowner match must be indicated in the grant application, although revisions are possible within the grant period.
2. The general hourly value of donated labor is \$24 per hour while skilled labor is \$32 per hour.
3. The value of donated materials shall conform to standard LIP or market rates.

How much LIP money may be requested?

Although applicants may request up to \$25,000 in LIP cost share, the overall LIP budget is fairly small and funding is contingent on availability. Most projects fall in the range of \$3,000 to \$8,000.

How are LIP funds distributed?

LIP funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis. All project expenditures must be made in accordance with the funded grant period dates specified in the grant agreement. Successful applicants will be provided with written guidance and on how to keep financial records to be eligible for reimbursement and may work with the program coordinator if additional assistance is needed.

Common mistakes made in keeping records include:

1. Claiming a charge or match incurred before the start date or after the end date specified in the grant agreement
2. Missing a copy of an invoice
3. Not submitting a final project report, or the final report has not yet been approved
4. Inadequately documenting volunteer labor
5. Not listing all the costs (donated costs and out-of-pocket costs) to earn the full grant amount. For example, to earn a \$10,000 grant, you must list \$13,334 of eligible, documented project costs - $\$13,334 \times 75\% = \$10,000$
6. Claiming the same cost twice
7. Claiming indirect or administrative costs for reimbursement or as match (such as grant record-keeping)

How will proposals be selected?

The Landowner Incentive Program staff will review the pre-proposals to ensure that the project meets the minimum necessary eligibility requirements. Successful pre-proposal applicants will be invited to submit a full project application.

The Landowner Incentive Program staff will review applications and evaluate the full project application based on the [ranking criteria](#).

DNR staff will ensure all recommended proposals comply with state and federal laws including, but not limited to, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Projects will also be reviewed to assure compliance with other agreements and programs already in effect on the property. Landowners whose projects are not funded are encouraged to discuss their applications with LIP staff and may resubmit at a later time.

What happens after my proposal is selected?

All applicants will be notified of their funding status shortly after the review process is complete. Applicants with approved projects will work with a LIP biologist to finalize details of the project and draft a management plan if one is not included with the application. Landowners must complete a management plan as part of their planning work, if not already completed.

The grant agreement is signed by the department, cost share recipient (may be different from the landowner if a legal interest in the property has been documented), and the landowner. Read your grant agreement carefully. It contains conditions that govern your project, and outlines the approved project scope, management, time period, and budget. The grant agreement is recorded at the register of deeds office for a ten year period, and the Landowner(s) agrees to keep the property in its restored state as described in the project objectives and work description for this time. This is **not** considered a deed restriction, as the record will be removed at the end of the ten year period. The landowner will retain one signed copy and send one signed copy to the register of deeds office within 30 days.

Important: Costs incurred prior to the beginning date of the grant agreement (i.e. before the agreement is signed by ALL parties) **will NOT be eligible for reimbursement.**

What are my responsibilities if my project is selected?

At the time you receive your grant agreement, you will also receive information on financial administration of your project, what to do if your project requires changes, and how to request reimbursement of project expenditures. The LIP coordinator will review these materials with you and be available to answer questions throughout the course of your grant.

The financial records should be maintained according to the grant agreement, including documentation of time and labor contributed by the landowner or a partner organization. In general, your accounting for project costs must be in conformance with generally accepted accounting practices, you must maintain good records and documentation, and all of your financial records are subject to audit and must be kept and made available for inspection for 3 years after receiving final grant payment.

The funded project period will be defined in your grant agreement. Funded projects will submit a final report within 60 days of the project's end date. The final report will be submitted and approved by program staff before you may receive your last reimbursement payment. You may, however, request partial reimbursements at any time in the active grant period with documentation that the specified match percentage has been met.

How do I apply?

New landowners must first submit a pre-proposal during our open enrollment period. The pre-proposal gives staff a general overview of your proposed project and whether it is eligible for funding. If your pre-proposal application is accepted, you will be requested to submit a full proposal that contains a detailed budget, work schedule, and monitoring benchmarks. The pre-proposal form is available on the [LIP website](#) during our open enrollment period.

Full proposal applications should be submitted electronically using the fillable form on the DNR website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/forms/1700/1700-059.pdf>

If for any reason you will be unable to submit your application electronically, please contact the LIP Coordinator as soon as possible to make other arrangements.