

Forest and Watershed Restoration Act (FAWRA) Project Submission Guidelines

Effective June 14, 2024

This document provides submission guidelines for new FAWRA projects. For additional background information on FAWRA, refer to the [FAWRA FAQ](#).

Note: FAWRA is not a grant program. It is a way for the public, government, and non-governmental partners to recommend and develop projects in partnership with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), Forestry Division (Forestry Division). The Forestry Division administers any projects initiated through the FAWRA and may choose to enter into agreements to implement projects on public lands with governmental entities at its own discretion.

Eligibility

The FAWRA defines an eligible project as “a large-scale forest and watershed restoration project on any lands in the state that increases the adaptability and resilience to recurring drought and extreme weather events of the state's forests and watersheds; protects water sources; reduces the risk of wildfire, including plans for watershed conservation; restores burned areas or thins forests; and includes a related economic or workforce development project or a wildlife conservation or habitat improvement project.” This definition encompasses the following project types:

- On-the-ground restoration treatments.
- Project planning.
- Economic development programs to advance the use of small-diameter trees and wood biomass removed for hazardous fuel reduction and forest and watershed restoration, and
- Workforce development for forest and watershed restoration treatments and projects that supply wood to local businesses.

The following sections provide additional guidance on key eligibility criteria contained within this definition.

Project Scale and Leverage

New Mexico's fire-adapted forests need comprehensive changes in forest structure and fuel loading to significantly alter wildfire behavior, reduce wildfire losses, ensure firefighter and public safety, and improve landscape resiliency. Conducting small scale projects is not as effective as working at the large scale, but large-scale projects are oftentimes too expensive for any one agency or landowner to undertake. One of the goals of FAWRA is to create new opportunities for interagency relationships and coordination that will lead to project efficiencies and improved outcomes. Leveraging relationships with key partners allows us to conduct restoration work at a larger scale and increase project effectiveness.

FAWRA therefore targets projects that encompass geographical features such as ridge tops to valley bottoms or watersheds. Projects will often cross jurisdictional boundaries such as county, state, federal, tribal, or private lands. For evaluation purposes, the minimum planning area for a large-scale project is 20,000 acres, with justified exceptions considered. Additional considerations include the following:

- The proposed FAWRA project is part of a larger scale project or located within a comprehensive forest and watershed restoration planning area.

- Project size is designed to increase landscape resilience to natural disturbance (*e.g.*, fire, insects, flooding).
- The project is strategically located to impact a large part of the watershed.
- The project is located and designed to implement or otherwise align with one or more existing landscape-scale plans, such as a state forest and watershed health plan or forest action plan, a community wildfire protection plan, or other comprehensive forest and watershed treatment plan or wildlife conservation improvement plan.
- Projects incorporate actions recommended by current plans or, where new plans are developed, seek to integrate forest, fire, and water management with community and economic development plans.
- Projects support watersheds that are a source for drinking or irrigation water. This includes the Rio Grande and its tributaries, as well as any watershed directly upstream of a reservoir or an irrigation or acequia system.
- Projects target an area at high or medium/high risk of catastrophic wildfire as defined in the State Forest Action Plan.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Projects requiring NEPA clearance will be considered “shovel ready” if the following criteria is met:

- Necessary state and federal permits and authorizations are completed (if other than a planning project);
- If located on National Forest System lands:
 - The Categorical Exclusion or Decision Memo is signed; and
 - If outside of Mexican spotted owl (MSO) Protected Activity Centers (PACs), MSO critical habitat, and MSO recovery habitat; OR if inside MSO PAC or critical or recovery habitat, the necessary MSO surveys to confirm non-presence are completed or started in the current fiscal year; and
 - If a prescribed burning project with no trees greater than 9” diameter at breast height cut in MSO PACs; and
 - If commercial firewood gathering projects, are outside of MSO habitat.

Project Planning, Readiness, and Leverage

FAWRA funds may be considered for planning projects with sufficient justification and commitment to project implementation (for example, projects that require a biological or archeological survey to fulfill NEPA requirements). A planning project should incorporate collaborative planning with partners as much as possible. For instance, if a planning project is proposed to complete NEPA requirements, a collaborative partner (such as the New Mexico State Land Office) may commit funding for implementation. This type of arrangement demonstrates collaborative planning, leverages resources, and strengthens partnerships, which ultimately lead to stronger projects planning and funding. Collaboration also reduces the risk that projects stay in conceptualization and fail to deliver treatment goals. To demonstrate strong planning, readiness, and leverage, project proponents are encouraged to submit letters of support from key partners with their proposals.

Private Lands

While projects may be located on public or private lands, all projects that include private lands must comply with Article IX, Section 14, the anti-donation clause of the New Mexico Constitution, and be administered by the EMNRD Forestry Division. Projects that include private lands, in whole or in part, must also be part of a larger landscape planning effort to increase forest and watershed protection and

resiliency. Phased projects will require multi-year landowner access agreements between the landowner(s) and EMNRD. The Forestry Division must submit projects proposals involving private lands to the EMNRD, Office of General Counsel for review prior to submittal to the FAWRA Advisory Board.

Project Evaluation Criteria

In recommending projects for funding, the FAWRA Advisory Board will score projects proposed for FAWRA funding using the ranking criteria listed below. In scoring planning projects, consideration should be given to whether the project will lead to these outcomes and the expected acres to be treated as a result of the planning.

1. **(30 points)** Project provides a public benefit and expands the scale of restoration, using the following measures of benefit by project category:
 - a. If the project includes thinning or prescribed fire, the public benefit is the extent of fire risk reduction.
 - b. If the project includes riparian restoration, the public benefit is the extent of improvement to hydrologic conditions and riparian habitat and, if applicable, the extent of fuels reduced.
 - c. If the project includes economic development, the public benefit is provision of economic values, for example jobs or raw materials, to a rural community or communities.
 - d. If the project includes planning (including survey activities), the public benefit is the degree to which state funding will expedite one or more required planning steps and build upon prior investment by other agencies.
2. **(30 points)** Project protects watersheds that are a source for drinking or irrigation water, taking into consideration the importance of the water source as defined in the State Forest Action Plan.
3. **(25 points)** Project addresses utilization of materials or is a project such as prescribed burning or workforce development without a utilization component. Select one of the following:
 - a. Project is in an area with a wood supply that has potential utilization for one or more of the following:
 - i. traditional community uses (e.g., firewood, fencing);
 - ii. small diameter commercial products (e.g., pellets, mulch);
 - iii. conventional wood products (e.g., dimension lumber, railroad ties);
 - iv. biomass energy production (e.g., electricity, heat); or
 - v. burned area restoration or rehabilitation actions/activities utilizing green build techniques.
 - b. Project uses prescribed fire to restore or maintain resilience and does not include a utilization component. Points may be awarded if prescribed fire is the final step in a multi-entry project and previous treatments included a utilization component, or if the use of prescribed fire is required to protect valuable timber resources.
 - c. Project objective is workforce development for wood utilization projects including forest and watershed restoration treatments. Points may be awarded if the project provides worker training (classroom and on-the-job) and results in acres treated without a utilization component.
4. **(15 points)** Project leverages other funding sources and/or creates an incentive for others to make investments.

Submission Process for New Projects

Project recommendations may be submitted at any time using the [Forestry Division Submittable Grant Portal](#) (Grant Portal). Before submitting to the Grant Portal, proposal proponents shall coordinate project proposals with the applicable [Forestry Division district office](#), the District where the proposed project is located. To assist with coordination with districts, proponents may use the project recommendation template for new projects located on the Forestry Division's [FAWRA webpage](#).

Note that coordination with district offices is intended to ensure project recommendations meet eligibility requirements. Project recommendations may not be considered if not endorsed by a Forestry Division district office.

Project Review Process

Forestry Division staff, in coordination with the EMNRD, Office of General Counsel, will review projects, confirm project eligibility, and resolve any outstanding issues before forwarding projects to the FAWRA Advisory Board. Once a project is determined to be eligible, District Foresters and partners (if applicable) will be invited to present projects at the next scheduled FAWRA Advisory Board Meeting. Presentations will be made using a pre-defined PowerPoint template, should minimize text, and incorporate maps, photos, and/or other images required to adequately describe the proposed project. Presentations will be subject to a 15-minute time limit.

The FAWRA Advisory Board will make final recommendations for project funding to the Forestry Division.

FAWRA Advisory Board Meeting Schedule and Format

The FAWRA Advisory Board meets quarterly to receive presentations for projects, make funding recommendations for projects, discuss progress on funded projects, and to maintain clear guidelines for FAWRA. New projects can be vetted at any meeting.

- Project proponents submit project recommendations to be reviewed by Forestry Division, Resource Management Bureau and EMNRD Office of General Counsel for eligibility six weeks prior to the FAWRA Advisory Board meeting. If there are no submissions by this deadline the meeting may be cancelled.
- Project proponents submit final recommendations and slides two weeks prior to the meeting and distributed to the FAWRA Advisory Board. This may be accomplished by editing the original project recommendation in Submittable.
- At the meeting, project proponents and district staff present their project.
- Projects scoresheets are submitted by the FAWRA Advisory Board members no later than two weeks after the meeting.
- Summary of project scores and recommendations are submitted to the State Forester three weeks after the meeting.
- Forestry Division determines funding decisions and provides notice of the decisions within four weeks of the meeting.

Prior to the end of each fiscal year the FAWRA Advisory Board will review its guidelines and make updates to the guidelines at the beginning of the new fiscal year. Meeting schedules for the entire fiscal year will be included in the guidelines.

FAWRA Advisory Board meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act and published on the Forestry Division [Public Meetings and Hearings webpage](#).

Schedule for FY2025 (subject to change)

- FAWRA Advisory Board meeting on September 12, 2024
- Prepare annual report to the legislature for submittal by December 6, 2024
- FAWRA Advisory Board meeting on December 12, 2024 updates
- FAWRA Advisory Board meeting on March 27, 2025
- FAWRA Advisory Board meeting on June 12, 2025

Implementation of Approved Projects

FAWRA Funds are transferred by the Office of the State Engineer to EMNRD at the beginning of each fiscal year (July 1). The Forestry Division will develop project work plans with the sponsor or partnering organization, if applicable. The Forestry Division will advertise and hire project contractors following the state procurement code or may establish agreements with other federal, state, or local government agencies or tribes, pueblos, and nations to participate in the implementation of projects. Non-governmental project partners may not receive funds; however, funds may be used for project proponent match if the need for match is specifically detailed in the project proposal. Forestry Division staff will oversee and report on project implementation.

Reporting

The Forestry Division will provide an annual report to the Governor and Legislature detailing year-to-date progress made on each project 45 days prior to the New Mexico Legislative Session. The annual report is posted to the Forestry Division's [FAWRA webpage](#) annually.

Annual reports will include:

1. project name,
2. type of project,
3. project status (workplan/contract pending, ongoing, completed),
4. project location: geographic location, landownership, Forestry Division district,
5. project photos - before and after,
6. leverage (source and amount),
7. funding (expended to date, balance),
8. target metric (*e.g.*, acres or river miles treated, plans produced, feasibility study or survey completed),
9. metric accomplished (number or percent completion),
10. landscape priority factor (*e.g.*, fire risk, watershed productivity),
11. sponsor or partnering agency/organization,
12. best outcome delivered by this project achieved to date, and
13. narrative summary of challenges encountered and lessons learned.

(Items 1 through 10 are compiled quarterly. Items 11 and 12 are provided by the District Forester and partners once a year for the Annual Report. Item 13 is summarized by the Forestry Division, Resource Management Bureau.)

Guidelines approved by the FAWRA Board and effective on: June 14, 2024