

Watershed Forestry – Lawn Conversion PLUS Program

Program Description

Lawn Conversion Program Description

Through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), **funding is available for Lawn Conversion projects throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in Pennsylvania**. Funding is to be used on shovel-ready projects converting managed lawn to actively maintained upland forest or perennial native meadow.

Funding Details

Non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses are eligible to apply for funding as an Implementation Partner. Landowners must work with a non-profit organization or for-profit business to implement projects on their land. Upon successful completion of and approval of project documents, funding will be dispersed to the Implementation Partner. The **Funding Contract** and **Landowner Agreement** must be signed, and the **Planting Plan** approved by DCNR prior to funding disbursement. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until funds are exhausted. Funding amounts are offered on a flat per-acre basis: \$5,000/acre for upland forests and \$3,700/acre for perennial native meadows. Additional funds may be requested by submitting an additional justification and providing a detailed project budget.

Eligible Project Sites

Lawn Conversion projects must occur on lawn and other non-agricultural turf greater than or equal to 0.25-acre. Turf, or lawn, is an area of short, managed grasses making up a yard on a residential, commercial, school, or other property. Pastures, cropland, and sites with more than 30% existing overall canopy are ineligible for this program. Other instances may exist that make a project ineligible for this funding and DCNR will evaluate all projects to determine eligibility. Multiple contiguous properties may be combined into one project to meet minimum acreage required by the program, but each property must have its own landowner agreement and establishment plan.

Upland forest plantings are implemented outside of the riparian area (300-ft or further away from a waterbody); plantings 300-ft or closer to a waterbody are considered riparian forest buffers and must utilize a different funding source. **Meadow establishments** are primarily implemented outside of the riparian area but may be planted within it upon DCNR and WPC review.

Review and Tracking

After planting, DCNR or WPC staff will review the planting to ensure project completion. All projects are subject to an annual review by DCNR or WPC staff for the duration of the landowner agreement (5-years). Annual reviews will verify planting survival and identify maintenance or establishment concerns. Upland forest planting projects must maintain at least 70% survival through termination of the Landowner Agreement (see Document #5 – Landowner Agreement for terms). Meadow establishment projects must establish and maintain a diverse array of desired native forbs and grasses through termination of the Landowner Agreement.

Project Application Process

Complete all application materials (**Project Application, Map of Project Extent, Planting Plan, Funding Agreement, and Landowner Agreement**) and send them to DCNR (Kelsey Miller: c-kelmille@pa.gov). After the complete Project Application has been received, DCNR and WPC will review the application materials, may schedule and conduct a site visit, and will notify the applicant of eligibility for planting and funding award via email. Final planting plans and seed mixes must be approved by DCNR before planting.

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Upland Forest Planting – Standards

Funding Rate: \$5,000 per unique acre

Planting Guidelines:

- Tree and shrub plantings 300-ft or further away from a waterway
- 150-200 stems per acre planted
- Minimum of three different native woody species approved by DCNR
- 70% planting survival by year five (5)

Eligible Costs: *including, but not limited to*

- Contractor fees or other labor costs
- Tree and shrub stock (except ball-and-burlap)
- Herbicide applications
- Tree protection materials
- Competing and noxious plant control
- Supplemental or replacement plantings

Expectations:

- Plant trees and shrubs appropriate for the soil conditions, physiographic region, and surrounding forest compositions.
- Mowing is permitted up to twice per year through the establishment phase (typically until years 4 or 5) to aid tree and shrub establishment. After establishment, mowing should cease to allow for natural regeneration processes to create natural forest understory conditions.
- Fertilization of the planting area is not permitted.

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Meadow Establishment – Standards

Funding Rate: \$3,700 per unique acre

Planting Guidelines:

- Planting and sustaining a perennial meadow
- Dominated by perennial native forbs and grasses
- Seed mixes approved by DCNR prior to ordering
- Planting is established with a diversity of desired native forbs and grasses by year five (5)

Eligible Costs: *including, but not limited to*

- Contractor fees or other labor costs
- Seed, carrier (rice hulls or clay kitty litter), and weed-free straw mulch
- Site preparation activities
- Soil testing and appropriate soil amendments
- Herbicide applications
- Disturbance activities to maintain the meadow
- Supplemental or replacement plantings

Expectations:

- Choose forb and grass species appropriate for the soils, hydrologic conditions, and physiographic region. We recommend conducting a soil test during the planning and design process.
- Mowing is not permitted for the first five years of establishment, unless recommended by DCNR during an annual visit. Mowing guidelines will be provided upon recommendation.
- For the duration of the landowner agreement, the meadow must be maintained as a diverse community of desired native forbs and grasses, with flowering plants expected for spring, summer and fall seasons for the most benefit for pollinators.
- The meadow will remain in a native meadow state and be maintained to arrest succession (e.g., mowing, invasive species removal, controlled burns, etc.).
- Fertilization of the planting area is not permitted.

Implementation Timeline:

Allow for one year of pre-planting preparation prior to seeding the meadow. For example, if you expect to plant in April 2021, start the necessary outreach, paperwork, and preparation in the Spring and Summer of 2020.

Spring Planting	Fall Planting
March – July: Site visits, agreements, payment Mid-July – October: Site preparation November – March: Order seed March – April: Final site preparation April – May: Planting	March – July: Site visits, agreements, payment Mid-July – September: Site preparation August – September: Order seed September: Final site preparation September – October: Planting