

## **Grant Application and Instructions**

### **About**

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Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation's (TPWF) Buffer Lands Incentive Program (BLIP) provides financial assistance to help defray due diligence and other projects costs related to placing a donated or purchased conservation easement on a property. The purpose of the program is to incentivize easements that are adjacent to or strategically benefit existing protected lands, including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department state parks, state natural areas, wildlife and coastal management areas, national wildlife refuges, nonprofit preserves, or other significant privately conserved lands.

Grant awards will be made up to \$75,000 per project and can cover up to 100 percent of eligible costs. A major portion of program funding is dedicated to conservation easement projects that support the habitat and lifecycle needs of grassland birds and shorebirds. Grassland bird and shorebird conservation efforts are critical as no other group of birds in North America has shown a greater or more consistent decline than those associated with grassland, shrub, and coastal habitats. A smaller portion of funding is dedicated to easements under 1,000 acres in the Hill Country (defined as the 18 counties within the [2022 State of the Hill Country Report](#)). The remaining funding will be used to support easements with important conservation values, such as freshwater resources, threatened or endangered species, or other declining or priority habitat types.

### **Eligibility**

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Land Trust Alliance accredited land trusts and/or government agencies are eligible to apply. All other qualified easement holders will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Typically, the program will reimburse landowners directly or through a grant to the nonprofit easement holder after a successful closing. However, in certain circumstances, the program may reimburse the cost of an appraisal required to conduct due diligence on a potential project regardless of whether the easement moves forward. We do not accept applications for easements with a closing date more than six months from the submission date.

Eligible costs include:

- Survey and mapping
- Baseline documentation
- Environmental assessment
- Mineral assessment
- Title work
- Closing costs, such as recording fees
- Stewardship endowment
- Appraisals (case-by-case)

Land trust or landowner incurred legal fees are not eligible for reimbursement.

While successful applicants will only be awarded a single grant per project, project sponsors are encouraged to apply for any project that qualifies.

## Grant Approval and Allocation Process

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TPWF will have sole discretion on the amount of funding awarded to each project based on the below scoring criteria. Landowner financial need will not be considered.

When feasible and after an application has been submitted, TPWF staff and/or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) staff will join the land trust on a tour to evaluate the property. TPWF will review applications on a rolling basis with relevant staff from TPWD.

## Scoring Criteria

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Applications will be scored out of a total of 100 points based on the following criteria:

### 1) Native Wildlife Value (25 total points)

- State whether the project includes habitat for shorebirds or grassland birds
- Describe the presence and diversity of native species documented on the property. Include any special status (e.g., threatened, endangered, [Road 2 Recovery](#), and Species of Greatest Conservation Need species)
- Describe the presence and diversity of native species documented on the buffered, conserved protected areas
- **Shorebird Priority Map Results (if applicable):** Visit the [Shorebird Priority Map](#) website and provide a brief results summary, including whether your property exists in an area of high importance for a particular species and/or in an area of high importance for species abundance

### 2) Vegetation Diversity, Habitat and Soil Health (20 total points)

- Describe the quantity and quality of native flora
- Describe the presence of under-represented or high-priority habitat

### 3) Watershed Value (15 total points)

- Describe the project's ability to protect headwaters, springs, creeks, wetlands, riparian buffers and other sensitive watershed features

### 4) Scale and Strategic Location (15 total points)

- Describe the project's connectivity with existing protected lands, both public and private
- Describe this project's ability to meaningfully contribute to ecosystem services beneficial, adjacent, or strategic to existing conservation lands
- Describe if this project conserves migration routes and/or terrestrial or aquatic corridors

### 5) Threat (15 points)

- How the area is experiencing or expected to experience rapid development or changing land use
- Describe any risk to the property, including the landowner's pressure to develop, subdivide, or sell

**6) Conservation Easement Terms (10 points)**

- Describe the conservation easement and how its terms will prohibit fragmentation and incompatible land uses and encourage responsible stewardship
- Describe any easement terms that may not be seen as beneficial to the conserved area (e.g., development envelopes within a viewshed, mineral development, etc.)

While the rankings of categories 1-3 above weigh significantly in the BLIP evaluation process, “buffer lands” cannot be solely valued for the quality and quantity of their natural resources and imperiled species. Equally critical is how conserving the tract will mitigate future impacts of potential development and reduce incompatible land uses that would significantly degrade the conservation value of the area. Ultimately, one outcome of each successful project will be to protect significant landscapes, creating a buffer around already protected lands.

**Application Components**

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Please submit electronic copies of the following materials in standard digital format (PDF, JPG, Microsoft Word/Excel), labeling each document clearly. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will be reviewed in the order received. TPWF will make best efforts to notify the applicant of any funding decision within 30 days from the date of application. To expedite this process, please limit your application materials to only essential information, taking no more than four written pages to answer Section 1 (Project Overview) and Section 2 (Scoring Criteria Questions). You may submit via email or by using Box, Dropbox, WeShare, .zip files, etc.

Applicants are encouraged to have a pre-application discussion with TPWF and may contact Merrill Gregg at [mgregg@tpwf.org](mailto:mgregg@tpwf.org) and Sam Stone at [sstone@tpwf.org](mailto:sstone@tpwf.org).

**1) Project Overview**

- A concise narrative of the proposed project and benefits to related protected lands
- Indicate if the project falls under the program’s Shorebird and Grassland Bird Category, Small Hill Country Easement Category, or Other

**2) Scoring Criteria Questions 1-6 (see above)**

- Succinct answers to each of the above Scoring Criteria, including evidence of your answer

**3) Project Budget**

- Requested grant amount, using the attached Excel spreadsheet
- Supporting documentation for eligible project costs associated with the grant request

**4) Other Materials**

- A map that clearly demonstrates your project location in relation to other public or conserved lands
- Up to one additional map evidencing the significance of the project to critical habitats, shorebirds, grassland birds, or other species/habitat types
- Three to five photos

- 5) Grant Applicant's Organizational & Financial Status (required once annually for repeat applicants)
- Copy of IRS determination letter
  - Evidence of current Land Trust Alliance accreditation
  - Most recent copy of audited financial statements
  - A statement attesting to the fact that there are no conflicts of interest between the land trust applicant and the private landowner, including the submission of this grant application
  - Point of contact

### Award Requirements

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At the time of grant award notification, a conditional award letter will be sent to the sponsoring land trust. Grants or landowner reimbursements will not be paid until the project has closed and transaction expenses are incurred, except as noted above. Funds will be made available by TPWF following receipt of invoices and other required closing documentation as described below.

Grantees must submit the following within 30 days after project closing to receive payment:

- 1) Copy of document confirming easement is legally recorded
- 2) Updated Funding Spreadsheet with copies of expense receipts for transaction costs (including full amount, description of report/ document, complete vendor information, and receipts marked PAID)
- 3) Other information or documentation, as may be requested by TPWF

Should your application be approved, TPWF kindly asks that you acknowledge our involvement in your project in any press release or media communication.



#### KEEPING TEXAS WILD

*For over 30 years, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has been conserving our wild things and wild places. Addressing Texas' greatest conservation challenges and opportunities, the impact of our work is far-reaching—from the shores of the Gulf Coast to the mountains of West Texas.*