

# FY 2025-2026 Water Project Funding Application Guidelines



## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The State of Florida has long recognized the importance of protecting water resources and developing alternative water supplies for a growing economy. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) works in partnership with water management districts to provide funding assistance for water resource projects that develop alternative water supplies, protect and restore springs, and other projects that improve water quality or quantity. For FY 2025-2026, two funding programs are available through the Northwest Florida Water Management District (District): alternative water supply and springs restoration.

## STATE AND DISTRICT PRIORITIES

As outlined in Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, one of the District's core missions includes protecting and improving the quality and quantity of water resources and natural systems across northwest Florida. This mission is supported by the Governor's Executive Orders [19-12](#), [23-06](#) and the [Protecting Florida Together](#) initiative. Protecting Florida Together water protection grant programs are available for springs restoration, alternative water supply (AWS), innovative technologies, resiliency from sea level rise and flooding, nonpoint source pollution abatement, and other water quality projects.

The Region II (Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton counties) regional water supply plan (RWSP) identifies AWS as among the priority needs and strategies to ensure sufficient water is available for all existing and future users and natural systems. In addition to Region II, and as resources are available, priority water supply and AWS projects are implemented districtwide.

The District supports and complements these efforts with a minimum flows and minimum levels (MFLs) program, Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plans, and collaboration with DEP and other partners on Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs).

## ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants and grant recipients are governmental entities as described in [s. 287.012\(14\), F.S.](#), and public and nonprofit water supply and wastewater utilities within the District's 16-county region.

Additionally, the District may sponsor landowners for land acquisition projects and agricultural producers to implement springs restoration projects. Visit the District's website for more information on available [Agriculture Programs](#).

## ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND REQUIREMENTS

### A. Eligible Projects

Projects eligible for AWS funding help communities plan for and implement conservation, reuse, and other water supply and water resource development projects.

Projects eligible for springs restoration funding are capital projects that protect the quality and quantity of water that flows to and from springs and land acquisition projects to protect springs.

Funding may be awarded to **Eligible Applicants** for the following types of projects:

Alternative Water Supply*	Springs Restoration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reclaimed Water</li> <li>• Water Conservation</li> <li>• Stormwater</li> <li>• Surface Water</li> <li>• Brackish Groundwater</li> <li>• Desalination</li> <li>• Other Non-Traditional Source Projects</li> <li>• Other Water Quantity Projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hydrologic Restoration</li> <li>• Land Acquisition</li> <li>• Wastewater Collection and Treatment, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Septic-to-Central Sewer</li> <li>– Advanced Septic Systems</li> <li>– Reclaimed Water</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stormwater</li> <li>• Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs)</li> <li>• Other water quality or water quantity projects benefitting springs</li> </ul>

\*For AWS, feasibility and land acquisition projects may be eligible for funding if they relate to one of the project types listed above and are necessary to implement a regional project.

Eligible springs restoration projects may encompass multiple segments or phases. The District may work with applicants and award partial funding for one or more segments or phases.

**B. Match Requirements**

All projects are required to financially match a minimum of 100 percent of the state funding provided, unless waived for financially disadvantaged communities.

Eligible match funding includes local sources, in-kind contributions, and companion projects. Previous funding from the same sources or match claimed toward a previous project may not count toward these requirements. Rural or financially disadvantaged communities as defined in [s. 288.0656, F.S.](#), can request a reduction or waiver of match in their applications.

**C. Additional Project Requirements**

Additional project requirements include:

- Projects that can be accomplished within 24-36 months or less.
- For capital projects, facilities must be constructed, owned, operated, and maintained by the cooperator in accordance with state, federal, and local regulations.

- Quantify the amount of water to be made available, offset, and/or saved for AWS projects and the total nutrient reduction for springs restoration projects. See the ***Application Form*** for more information.
- See also ***General Conditions for Receiving Funds*** for more information.

### **MULTI-PHASE PROJECTS (SPRINGS RESTORATION FUNDING ONLY)**

A common practice with large-scale infrastructure projects is to design and construct a project in phases, where the full benefit or project outcome may not be realized until completion of the final phase. A multi-phase plan outlines the full project cost with funding sources and match over the project’s entire timeframe. It also includes a narrative description of the overall project and schedule with expected outcomes or results at the end of each phase, where applicable.

Some benefits to developing a multi-phase plan for a project may include:

1. Multi-phase plans help build predictability at the local level in terms of funding and may present opportunities for financially disadvantaged communities.
2. Larger projects may be developed in phases, each with tangible results. This can increase the likelihood of projects staying on schedule and on budget, which is a consideration when an applicant’s prior performance is reviewed.
3. Overall longer timeframes may help applicants better secure and leverage the resources needed for large-scale capital projects.
4. Multi-phase projects often support long-term strategies to address water quality and springs protection, which may help to prioritize funding applicability.

New Multi-Phase Projects: To submit a project to be considered for funding as a multi-phase project, complete the applicable section of the application and attach any relevant narrative or project cost information.

Existing Multi-Phase Projects: Multi-phase projects are not required to complete and re-submit an application form each funding year. For returning applicants of a multi-phase project previously submitted, the District will reach out directly for an update on funding and status. Note that because past performance is a factor in project evaluations, regular progress reports demonstrating that all tasks and deliverables are on schedule and on budget is essential.

### **WATER RESOURCES INFORMATION**

Information to assist in completing applications is provided on the District’s and on DEP’s websites. Detailed guidance from DEP to water management districts submitting requests for funding AWS projects is in the [AWS Funding Guidance](#) document and for springs projects in the [Springs Funding Guidance](#) document. DEP has several tools and guidance documents available for calculating nutrient reductions for springs restoration projects on its [website](#).

Additional programs and links are below. See also ***Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*** for more information.

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection: <https://floridadep.gov/>. See the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration for Total Maximum Daily Loads, Basin Management Action Plans, Reasonable Assurance Plans, and TMDLs.
- Northwest Florida Water Management District: <https://www.nwfwater.com/>. See the Water Resources pages for Minimum Flows and Minimum Water Levels, Surface Water Improvement and Management, and Agriculture.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

All applications will be reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria noted below.

Evaluation Criteria	Description (as applicable to each project type)
1. State and District Priorities	(1) Project is located within or benefits a RWSP (for AWS projects) or BMAP area (for Springs projects; (2) Will benefit water bodies with adopted MFLs or on the District’s MFL priority list; (3) Implements other District plans or priorities, such as a SWIM Plan.
2. Projected water quality, quantity and other outcomes, results, benefits	(1) Provides regional benefits; (2) Provides multiple benefits to water supply and water quality; (3) Has complementary efforts, such as an AWS project that also provides water quality improvements; (4) Clearly quantifies the amount quantity of water created or saved and/or the nutrient reductions or measurable improvements in water quality and/or the number of acres acquired; (5) Has additional benefits to the community (e.g., socio-economic).
3. Cost effectiveness, cost sharing and leveraging, and resource strategies	(1) Demonstrates cost effectiveness, such as capital cost per 1,000 gallons of water made available; or capital costs per pound of nutrients reduced; (2) Represents a quality return on investment, i.e., the amount of local cooperator funding leveraged by the state grant, while recognizing funding limitations of economically disadvantaged communities; (3) Project is part of a local sponsors’ long-term strategy to address water quality or water supply issues; (4) Is part of a local plan or budget; (5) The degree to which applicant has leveraged additional funding sources to complete the project.
4. Applicant capacity, local commitment, and readiness for implementation	(1) Is ready to proceed and can be implemented in a timely manner; (2) Has demonstrated local commitment to the project, e.g., match funding and public support; (3) Is committed to complete project within 24-36 months or less; (4) If previous District grant recipient, projects and project activities have been on schedule and on budget; (5) Has anticipated potential obstacles or challenges and has a plan or strategies in place to overcome them.

## ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED/FINANCIALLY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

An economically distressed county or community is defined in [s. 288.0656, F.S.](#), under the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI). An economically distressed, or “financially disadvantaged small community” is also defined in [s. 403.1838\(2\), F.S.](#) Visit [www.floridajobs.org/business-growth-and-partnerships/rural-and-economic-development-initiative/rural-definition/rural-communities](http://www.floridajobs.org/business-growth-and-partnerships/rural-and-economic-development-initiative/rural-definition/rural-communities) or call (850) 717-8506 for more information.

## APPLICATION PROCESS AND SUBMITTAL

A notice of funding availability (NOFA) is announced through email, the District’s website ([www.nwfwater.com](http://www.nwfwater.com)), and in the Florida Administrative Register ([www.flrules.org](http://www.flrules.org)). Interested parties may obtain the application form from the District’s website or by emailing the District.

Applications with supporting materials shall be transmitted by email to: [grants@nwfwater.com](mailto:grants@nwfwater.com). It is recommended that applications be sent with read receipt enabled. Please note the maximum electronic mail size that can be received is 15 MB. All applications must be received on or before the due date noted in the **Funding Cycle Schedule** below.

### FUNDING CYCLE SCHEDULE

Activities or Event	Date(s)
Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) Posted	December 13, 2024
<b>Application Due Date*</b>	<b>February 21, 2025</b>
Evaluation of project applications	February-March 2025
List of funding recommendations presented to the District Governing Board for approval and transmission to DEP	April-May 2025
Projects evaluated by DEP	Summer 2025
Notice of funding status to applicants	Fall 2025 – Winter 2026

*\*Funding applications must be received no later than 11:59 PM Eastern Time.*

### PROJECT SELECTION AND AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

The District will review all applications for basic minimum requirements, conduct initial screenings, then evaluate and short-list projects according to the **Evaluation Criteria** noted previously. Final selections and formal recommendations will be presented to the District’s Governing Board for approval, and upon approval, the recommended projects will be forwarded to DEP in May 2024 for funding consideration. Recommendations may include partial funding of specific segments of project submittals.

Any awarded projects are subject to the availability of funds in the state’s FY 2025-2026 budget (July 1 – June 30). In recent years, the Governor and Legislature have approved \$55 million annually for AWS and \$55 million annually for springs protection.

Note that communication between District staff and an applicant about a particular project does not imply funding for that project. **No funding decisions are final until 1) approved by the District Governing Board, 2) approved by DEP, and 3) notice has been received in writing from the District.**

### NOTIFICATION OF AWARDS

All applicants will be notified of final project funding decisions consistent with the **Funding Cycle Schedule**.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For additional information or assistance, please contact:

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