Public Solicitation Notice
Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program
Public Lands Funding 2026-27

Background

Program Establishment
The Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program (NBHIP) was established in 2018 by the passing of Assembly Bill (AB) 2697 and was designed to address declines in locally breeding waterfowl and ring-necked pheasant populations. Although the NBHIP was established in Code (Section 3480, Fish and Game Code) in 2018, the program was not funded until the passing of AB 614 in October 2021, which created a $10 surcharge for the upland game bird and state duck hunting validations. The implementation of these fees generates roughly $2 million annually, which is deposited into a dedicated Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program Account.

Population Declines
The most common upland nesting waterfowl species in California are mallards, gadwall, and cinnamon teal. These three species comprise a large portion of the annual hunter harvest during the California waterfowl season. Specifically, 60% of mallards, 49% of gadwall, and 53% of cinnamon teal that are harvested in California, were hatched within the state (De Sobrino et al., 2017). Unfortunately, California populations of these three species are experiencing significant declines and are below their long-term average. Statewide, mallards are down 44%, gadwall are down 19%, and cinnamon teal are down 42%, respectively (Central Valley Joint Venture, 2020). Ring-necked pheasants, another upland nesting bird and popular game bird within California, have also experienced substantial population declines (Coates et al., 2017). The loss of quality upland nesting habitat is one of the primary causes of population-level declines for all of these species. In addition to upland breeding bird species, pollinators have declined across much of the United States with some species experiencing significant reductions in both population estimates and range.

Loss of Upland Habitats and Beneficial Agriculture
Large-scale changes within the agricultural landscape have been occurring across the Central Valley since the early 1990's that have resulted in a net loss of upland nesting habitat, largely driven by economic factors and changes in federal subsidies. These changes included increased urbanization, increased tree crops, reduced cereal grains and row crops, a functional elimination of sugar beet crops, new water transfer policies, clean farming practices and the elimination of set-aside programs (e.g., rice field fallowing) (CDFW, 2021). Set-aside programs created huge amounts of fallowed croplands across the nation, with nearly 800,000 acres of set-aside in California alone during the 1987 crop year (Central Valley Joint Venture, 1990). When planted with grasses and legumes, these set-aside lands provided high quality nesting habitat and can have over 50 percent nest success (Duebbert & Lokemoen, 1976). Additionally,

agricultural crops such as cereal grains historically provided high-quality short-term nesting habitats for local breeding populations of waterfowl and pheasants (Earl, 1950); while edge or corridor habitats provide an important source of food and cover for game birds within the agricultural landscape (Coates, et al., 2017).

Public Land Program Objectives

The Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program's (NBHIP) Public Land Program is designed to provide assistance to State Wildlife Areas (WA) and National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) to improve the quantity and quality of upland habitat for the benefit of nesting waterfowl, game birds and pollinators. The public land programs complement a suite of private land incentive programs that work with farmers, ranchers and wetland owners throughout the state to improve nesting habitat on their lands. The private land programs include incentives for Delayed Cereal Grain Harvest, Fallow Agriculture, Agricultural Corridors and Upland Management Agreements.

Public land projects funded through NBHIP may include the cultivation or retention of upland cover such as annual nesting cover or perennial native grasses and forbs, or management activities to improve the quality of perennial grass habitats such as managing noxious weeds and other undesirable plants. Any project that is funded by NBHIP will be required to leave the upland cover habitat unmanipulated (e.g., no discing, spraying herbicides, mowing, chopping, or rolling of vegetation) during the nesting season, which is from April 1 – July 15 in most of the state. Furthermore, to be selected all projects must provide and maintain summer water habitats within one mile of the enhancement areas.

Funding Information

The NBHIP has up to **$850,000** that may be allocated for projects on public lands (WA or NWR) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27, dependent upon the approved Governor's budget. These funds will be broken down into two separate categories:

- Maintenance of existing perennial grass habitat ($150,000); and
- Restoration or enhancement of perennial grass habitats ($700,000).

Eligibility

To accomplish the objectives of this program, the Department is authorized to enter into grants or contracts with public and private entities, including nonprofit organizations, and California Native American tribes to help the department implement the program and improve breeding waterfowl and other upland game bird habitats in California (Fish and Game Code § 3480 "…the department may carry out the game bird breeding habitat purposes of the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program on **State Wildlife Areas** and **National Wildlife Refuges** when necessary and as the department deems appropriate…") The organizations must have the specific capacity (waterfowl habitat

enhancement, native grass restoration, upland habitat creation or agricultural and farming experience to deliver the objectives).

Examples of eligible projects are limited to the following categories:

1. Maintenance of existing perennial grass habitat for breeding waterfowl
2. Restoration and enhancement of existing perennial grass habitat for breeding waterfowl
3. Establishment of new perennial native grass and forb habitat for breeding waterfowl

Noncompliance

Noncompliance issues may impact the ability of a contractor, Wildlife Area or National Wildlife Refuge to apply for or be selected for future projects through NBHIP. Example of noncompliance issues include but are not limited to: requirement to maintain summer water (April 1 – August 1), not planting seed in the same year that it was delivered, disturbing enhanced areas during the nesting season (April 1 – July 15), or not accomplishing projects listed within the plan or scope.

Noncompliance issues that are due to unpredictable weather events will not negatively impact future applications. If contracts or managers are aware of any issues that may cause project delays, they should notify the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program Coordinator immediately.

Solicitation Procedure and Schedule

The Department is soliciting proposals from qualified organizations for FY 2025-26 for upland habitat projects using Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program funds. In addition to posting this grant/contract Proposal Solicitation Notice (PSN), individuals, organizations and or institutions who have expressed interest in NBHIP will also be contacted by email about the PSN.

Proposals should meet the following Fish and Game Code § 3480 requirements: "… cultivate or retain upland cover crops, cereal grains, grasses, forbs, pollinator plants, or a combination thereof to provide waterfowl and other game bird nesting habitat cover…"

Up to $850,000 of NBHIP funds may be available for grants or contracts under this PSN. If you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact Luke Matthews, Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program Coordinator, at Luke.Matthews@wildlife.ca.gov.

Schedule

Solicitation Released	February 3, 2026
Proposals Due by 5:00 PM (Pacific Daylight Time)	March 13, 2026
Internal Review and Recommendation Development	April 3, 2026
Award Notification Distributed	April 10, 2026
CDFW Contracting/Grant Process Begins	June 22, 2026

Submission Procedure

In order to be considered for FY 26/27 funding, all applications must be filled out completely and submitted using the provided template (Exhibit A). Applications may be submitted by email with the subject line of "**Project/Area Name-NBHIP Public Lands**" to Luke.Matthews@wildlife.ca.gov.

Review and Scoring Procedure

Administrative Review
An administrative review will determine if the proposal package is complete and meets all the requirements for submission. If the proposal does not pass the administrative review, the proposal will not be considered for funding. Items needed to pass administrative review include: proposal uses provided application template and is within three-page maximum (not including map and budget), projects must directly benefit breeding waterfowl, and proposal must be received by timeline identified.

Selection Committee and Technical Review
Following the administrative review, the Selection Committee will evaluate the remaining eligible applications and score them based on the ranking and scoring criteria provided below. The Selection Committee will include the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program Coordinators, a biologist from the U.S. Geological Survey, and members of the following Units within the Department's Wildlife Branch: Wetland Conservation Program, Upland Unit and Waterfowl Units.

Scoring Process**:** A minimum of three reviewers associated with the Department will score each proposal that has passed the administrative review. A total of 49 points will be available for each application and the final score will be based on an average of all three individual scores. Applications will be funded starting with the highest scoring proposals and selections will continue until the funding for that FY has been exhausted.

Evaluation Criteria
Below is the table that will be used to rank and score all eligible applications. For questions about the scoring criteria or to get additional details, please contact Luke Matthews, Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program Coordinator, at Luke.Matthews@wildlife.ca.gov.

Question Number	Screening Criteria	Yes/ No
A	Does project meet minimum acreage requirements?	**Y/N**
B	Was the habitat project coordinated with CDFW or USFWS NWR area staff if work occurs on these lands?	**Y/N**
C	Is the Wildlife Area or National Wildlife Refuge Priority included in the proposal?	**Y/N**
Question Number	**Scoring Question**	**Max Score**
1	**Applicant has successfully implemented projects through NBHIP in the past**	**3**
	3 pts. = Extensive history/expertise and/or successfully completed previously funded projects	
	2 pts. = Lacks some expertise, some problems with successful completion of previously funded projects, and/or named subcontractors not appropriate for work	
	1 pt. = Little experience/expertise and/or many problems with successful completion of previously funded projects and or unqualified, problematic subcontractors, persistent problems with completing funded projects, and/or uncooperative	
2	**Project description is succinct and includes details necessary to understand and use a statement of work for the grant/contract agreement**	**3**
	3 pts. = Narrative clear and comprehensive with roles of staff identified;	
	2 pts. = Some clarity needed on activities and staff roles;	
	1 pt. = Activities proposed are inadequately described and more clarity needed and or narrative general and/or a list of activities with no detail.	
3	**Project budget is appropriate to the work proposed, cost effective, and sufficiently detailed to describe project costs (hours required for job completion, hourly rates, per unit costs)**	**3**
	3 pts. = Budget is detailed, appropriate, cost effective or has cost share;	
	2 pts. = Some budget detail is needed, slightly overpriced budget or no cost share	
	1 pt. = Budget lacks detail, inaccurate, and/or includes inappropriate costs, unspecified lump sums, inaccurate, and/or not cost effective.	
4	**Does the project include cost shared (in-kind or cash) identified in the budget?**	**5**
	5 pts. = Proposal has cost share exceeds 20% of project cost	
	4 pts. = Proposal has cost share from 15-20% of project cost	
	3 pts. = Proposal has cost share from 10-15% of project cost	
	2 pts. = Proposal has cost share from 5-10% of project cost	

	1 pts. = Proposal has cost share from 1-5% of project cost	
	0 pt. = No cost share	
5	**Can project site be irrigated prior to nesting season**	**2**
	2 pts. = Yes	
	0 pts. = No	
6	**Does the habitat project have a DEDICATED pollinator component?**	**3**
	3 pts. = Dedicated pollinator plot on boarders/edges	
	0 pts. = No pollinator component or interseeded pollinator component	
7	**Does the habitat project include larger contiguous acreage?**	**6**
	6 pts. = 50 or more acres	
	4 pts. = 25 to 49 acres	
	2 pts. = 10 to 24 acres	
8	**Is the habitat project in a high priority region for upland habitat restoration?**	**3**
	3 pts. = Yes	
	0 pts. = No	
9	**Summer water management for brood habitat (Apr 1 - Aug 1)**	**6**
	6 pts. = Property manages greater than 15% of wetlands as summer water	
	3 pts. = Property manages greater than 10-15% of wetlands as summer water	
	0 pts. = Property manages less than 10% of wetlands as summer water	
10	**Size of the largest summer water unit on the property**	**4**
	4 pts. = 60 or more acres.	
	2 pts. = 30 to 59 acres.	
	0 pts. = 15 to 29 acres.	
11	**What type of summer water unit(s) will be maintained for brood habitat on the property?**	**4**
	4 pts. = Reverse cycle wetland	
	3 pts. = Seasonal wetland rotated into summer water	
	2 pts. = Semi-permanent wetland	
	1 pts. = Flooded rice	
	0 pts. = Permanent wetland	
12	**Is the habitat project area open to public hunting opportunities?**	**3**
	3 pts. = Yes	
	0 pts. = No	
13	**Potential for Net Gain in Resource Availability**	**4**
	4 pts. = Project would significantly improve nesting habitat quality in the region	
	2 pts. = Project would slightly improve nesting habitat quality in the region	

	1 pts. = Project will maintain status of nesting habitat quality in the region	
	0 pts. = Project will not improve nesting habitat quality in the region	
	Total High Score	**49**

Note: for projects with a perennial nesting habitat component in the Central Valley that include seeding of uplands, only native perennial grass and/or forb mixes, including species such as creeping wild rye (***Elymus triticoides***), blue wild rye (***Elymus glaucus***), purple needle grass (***Stipa pulchra***), and meadow barley (***Hordeum brachyantherum***), will be considered. NBHIP will not support the planting of non-native perennial grasses on public lands.

Project Recommendation and Approval

If a project is funded, the grantee/contractor must submit additional information before an agreement is prepared and executed. The applicable forms described are for informational purposes only. **Do not submit these forms with your proposal.** Successful applicants are required to complete, sign, and return the forms provided if not already on file. These additional forms include:

- Certification of Nonfederal Contributions: In-kind/Third Party (GMB Form D.)
- Payee Data Record form (STD. 204)
- Federal Taxpayer ID Number
- Nondiscrimination Compliance Statement (STD. 19) (required for grants of $5,000.00 or more per Title 2, California Code of Regulations, Section 8113)
- Drug-Free Workplace Certification (STD. 21)

Agreements are not executed until signed by both the authorized representative of the recipient and Department. Work performed prior to contract execution date of an agreement will not be reimbursed.

NOTE: Grant/Contract recipients will be responsible for all environmental compliance requirements necessary to implement and complete their proposal.

Citations

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2021. California Department of Fish and Wildlife Draft Environmental Document: Migratory Game Bird Hunting (Waterfowl, Coots, Moorhens) Sacramento, CA, USA.

Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture (CVJV). 1990. Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture Implementation Plan – A Component of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento, CA.

Central Valley Joint Venture (CVJV). 2020. Central Valley Joint Venture 2020 Implementation Plan. Sacramento, CA: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento, CA.

Coates, P.S., Brussee, B.E., Howe, K.B., Fleskes, J.P., Dwight, I.A., Connelly, D.P., Meshriy, M.G. and Gardner, S.C.. 2017. Long-term and widespread changes in agricultural practices influence ring-necked pheasant abundance in California. *Ecology and Evolution*, *7*(8), pp.2546-2559.

Cristina, N., Sobrino, C.L.F. and Todd, W.A., 2017. Distribution and derivation of dabbling duck harvests in the Pacific Flyway. *California Fish and Game*, *103*(3), pp.118-137.

Duebbert, H.F. and Lokemoen, J.T., 1976. Duck nesting in fields of undisturbed grass-legume cover. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, pp.39-49.

Earl, J.P., 1950. Production of mallards on irrigated land in the Sacramento Valley, California. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, *14*(3), pp.332-342.

Exhibit A

Public Lands Application Template

Keep your habitat project submittal to a maximum of three pages in length, budget tables and maps may be additional. If you have any other questions, please contact the grant administrator as identified on the Request for Proposal.

Project Title With Property Name: (Field/Unit and Property)

Applicant Contact Information: (Organization, name, phone, e-mail)

Area Contact Information**:** (Organization, phone, e-mail)

Issue Statement: Clear and succinct statement about why this project is needed or what it will achieve.

Project Description: Clear and succinct description of the project.

Expected Benefits: Clear and succinct; include types of acres benefiting from work.

Map: Size of map must be 8 ½ x 11 and it must include both the upland field and summer water locations.

Itemized Budget: Include separate line items for the following budget categories - Personnel (including benefits and admin); Operating Expense (materials); and subcontractors.

Example Itemized Budget:

Line-Item Budget for <Insert Project Name>	**Project Totals**
Personnel	
Staff (lump sum for hours and benefits)	$
Total Personnel Expenses	**$**
Operating Expense	
Materials - show units needed and cost per unit (e.g. seed or irrigation infrastructure)	$
Subcontractor (lump sum)	$
Total Operating Expenses	**S**
Subtotal Personnel Operating Expenses	**$**
Overhead	**$**
Total Project Cost	**$**