Terms and Conditions
of the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund Grant (RCF) Program
Round 2, 2018-2019

Using a $100,000 grant from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust Donated Land and Easement Program to encourage the permanent conservation of ecologically significant land, the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund will provide funding for the transactional costs associated with the donation of land (including 50% or more partial interest) or a permanent conservation easement/restriction, to permanently protect qualified parcels of land.

Applications:
Are available from the MassConn Web site, http://www.opacumlt.org/massconn/rcf/, along with the supporting documentation and MassConn Mapper GIS.
For questions about the program, please contact the MassConn Coordinator, Ed Hood, at ehood@opacumlt.org.

Allowable Project Types:
Only projects where 50% or more of the value of the fee interest in the land, or 50% or more of the value of the conservation easement, is being donated to a qualified organization or municipality, with legally binding, permanent, conservation restrictions, will be supported through a MassConn RCF grant.

Land that is already owned by a conservation organization, or municipal body, government agency or body, or already held by any organization that has land conservation as part of its mission, will not be eligible for funding.

Qualified Organizations for receiving land or easements funded by the MassConn RCF:
Project grants will be made only to organizations that meet certain criteria demonstrating their ability, and legal authority, to hold, monitor and enforce a conservation easement. Eligible organizations must demonstrate legal standing through up-to-date documentation of their 501(c)3 or comparable organizational status, or other proof of their legal ability and authority to own land or hold a Conservation Easement. Municipal entities must provide a letter of approval from their town or city’s governing body (be it Selectmen or the Mayor’s office), to undertake a specific project, and confirming that the land will be placed into permanent conservation status.
Allowable Costs that can be covered by the MassConn RCF:
Transaction expenses including appraisal, survey, legal fees, including attorney’s fees on behalf of the participating organization, such as title exam and closing costs, baseline documentation and other professional services directly related to donating a CR or title. Note that organizations may do a BDR internally and count that as an eligible expense through clear documentation of the hours worked and rate, for up to 10% of the total Transaction Costs to be reimbursed. The legal costs for passing a CR to a second organization in the case of fee title donations.

Non-allowable costs for the MassConn RCF:
Organizational staff and overhead expenses. Tax or accounting services for donor, separate from legal fees directly related to transference of title or conservation easement. Stewardship Funding. Any cost of direct purchase of land or an easement. Reimbursement / replacement for transactional costs already expended prior to approval of a project for RCF funding.

Guarantee of Permanent Protection:
Applicants to the MassConn RCF must make clear how the conservation project they are seeking funding for will be permanent, such as a recorded Conservation Easement/Restriction approved by the appropriate State and Local authority. Fee ownership or partial fee interest in land is in and of itself not a permanent protection and needs to be made binding through an appropriate legal mechanism such as the donation of the CR to another conservation organization, or a legal agreement with the donors that the donated land will be protected in perpetuity by the receiving organization and its subsequent successor or assigns.

Stewardship
To facilitate the successful long-term stewardship and legal defense of conservation projects funded through the MassConn RCF, applicants projects are encouraged, to set aside during the project, or provide for some binding way to do so in the future, an amount of restricted stewardship funding equivalent to the RCF grant received, up to a maximum of $10,000.

Applicants are encouraged to submit a plan for the provision of long-term monitoring and stewardship funds for a project. Projects that have such a plan will be given preference over those equivalent projects that lack them.

Stewardship Funding plans can take a variety of forms, including having the owner/donor sign a legally binding Transfer Fee agreement, stipulating that upon any future sale of the property, that the seller will pay from the proceeds of the sale a pre-determined amount to the CR holder, equivalent to the original RCF funds committed to the project (up to $10,000). Another possibility can include anticipating revenue from future timber harvesting done in accordance with the CR, where the donor is willing to allow for them. When the donor is not willing to allow for forestry on their donated land, the partner is encouraged, but not required, to show a plan for the provision of future stewardship funds. Other methods can be discussed with the MassConn Steering Committee.
Project Timelines:
- Round 2 Grant Deadline: March 29th, 2019.
- Announcement of Round 1 Grant Recipients will be made in mid-April 2019.
- Projects are expected to be completed and meet the “Recording and Accountability” requirements within two years of the grant award being made. However, recognizing the complexity of conservation projects, an additional 1-year extension may be made if there is evidence of good-faith effort and some progress on the project. Requests for extensions should be made in writing to the Steering Committee well in advance (at least one month) of the original 1-year deadline.
- Grant funds will be distributed only after full reporting and documentation have been provided (see “Recording and Accountability”, below).
- Organizations with a RCF funded project still in progress will not be ranked lower against qualified new RCF grant applicants.

Distribution of RCF Grant Funds:
Grant funds are to be paid as a reimbursement of qualified funds expended after project approval, and following receipt of documentation for the recording of the CR or land title, and provision of full documentation of all expenses (legible receipts and other documentation for expenses paid).

Recording and Accountability
The minimum reporting requirements for grant recipients to receive reimbursement include:
- A narrative report documenting the completion of the project, including a map.
- A copy of the recorded land title and/or CR, with registry of deeds notation. For Fee title projects, documentation of a legally binding mechanism for permanent protection must be provided.
- A copy of all project expenses that are to be reimbursed, in the form of clearly identified receipts, paid invoices or other documentation of expended transactional costs, and an itemization of those expenses.

MassConn RCF Funding Priorities
The priority for implementation of the MassConn RCF derives directly from the new Conservation Priority / Focus Area map (the MassConn Mapper) created by MassConn in 2016 with a Cox Foundation RCP Innovation Grant. The goal is to emphasize the protection of the land determined to be of the “highest conservation value” based on the following five criteria of the MassConn Strategic Conservation Plan, and geographically located through a co-occurrence analysis on the MassConn Mapper:
1. Index of Ecological Integrity.
2. TNC’s Measure of Terrestrial Resilience.
3. TNC’s Measure of Regional Flow.
4. Presence or relative proximity to habitats of known endangered species or species of special concern.
5. Adjacent to, or near, existing protected open space.
Additionally, MassConn will prioritize the maximum number of possible projects across the largest number of organizations possible. Funding will be tiered based on acreage, with smaller projects qualifying for less funding, but not disqualified because of their small size if they meet ecological guidelines from the MassConn Mapper. Funding more projects across a greater number of organizations will be prioritized over supporting multiple projects from a single organization.

Grant Sizes
Grant awards will be based on a sliding scale of acreage, and the amount of high-conservation priority land to be protected with the maximum award for a project being $20,000.

Small grants in the $2,500 to $5,000 range are encouraged (see “Terms and Conditions” for project size and ranking guidelines), and the Steering Committee reserves the right to prioritize some smaller projects that meet minimum conservation priority criteria, and provide partial funding to larger projects.

The Steering Committee reserves the right to distribute smaller grants than outlined in the “Project Funding Eligibility and Ranking Criteria” section if there are more qualified projects than maximum funding of each will allow

Project funding ranking guidelines (which will be flexible in context of the total pool of applications):
Projects will be ranked and funded based on their meeting these conservation priority criteria (discussed above in “Funding Priorities” section), and project size as follows:

- 20 to 50 acres in top 20% Conservation Priority: Max grant = $5,000
- 20 to 50 acres in top 40% to 20% Conservation Priority: Max grant = $2,500
- 50 to 100 acres in top 40% Conservation Priority: Max grant = $10,000
- 100 to 150 acres in top 40% Conservation Priority: Max grant = $15,000
- 150+ acres in top 40% Conservation Priority: Max grant = $20,000.

Projects where the land is being donated in fee, or the full value of the conservation easement is being donated, will be ranked higher than projects where only partial fee ownership or part of the value of the easement is being donated.

Projects that have a clearly defined plan of action, with documented agreement, or active negotiation with the land or CR donor, will be prioritized above those that do not – see “Project Readiness” in the RCF application.

Multiple projects from a single organization will be deferred to ensure as many organizations as possible can execute eligible projects.

Projects that have firmly established mechanism for providing stewardship funding will be preferred over equivalent projects that do not.

Authority of the Steering Committee:
Decisions about the MassConn Regional Conservation Fund will be made by the MassConn Steering Committee, at their discretion, guided by the ranking system and criteria identified in this “Terms and Conditions” document. Sole authority for the implementation of the MassConn RCF rests with the Steering Committee and all decisions by the MassConn Steering Committee regarding the Regional Conservation Fund will be final.
The Steering Committee reserves the right to alter the eligibility and ranking requirements and criteria if it is found that existing elements of the program are limiting the number of qualified projects or creating other unforeseen difficulties for the program and its applicants.

**Governance and Management Plan**

The seven members of the MassConn Steering Committee and the MassConn Coordinator have oversight of the MassConn RCF. The MassConn Coordinator would will manage implementation the RCF, but all final funding or other project decisions will be made by a majority vote of the Steering Committee. The Coordinator serves the Steering Committee as a non-voting member. The quorum for voting will be 4 members plus the coordinator, to record all votes.

The steering committee has three members from Connecticut based organizations and three members from Massachusetts based organizations, and one member working for a Massachusetts based organization (Norcross) with large, continuous land holdings in both States, and who is also a resident of Ct.

When a Steering Committee member has a project under review, they may discuss the project with the full Committee, but then should fully recuse themselves from the voting, accomplished either by anonymous ballot, or by the physical exit of the party from the room during the vote.

**PROJECT PARTNERS**

- Opacum Land Trust – Financial Host for MassConn and the Cox DLEG / MassConn RCF project.
- Norcross Wildlife Foundation – Physical host for MassConn, and primary financial supporter of MassConn Coordinator.
- Organizations with voting representatives on the MassConn Steering Committee, who will oversee the program and select grant recipients:
  - Connecticut Forest & Parks Assoc. (CT)
  - East Quabbin Land Trust (MA)
  - Joshua’s Trust (CT)
  - Monson Conservation Commission (MA)
  - Norcross Wildlife Foundation (MA & CT)
  - Northern Connecticut Land Trust (CT)
  - Opacum Land Trust (MA)

- Other active partners with MassConn regional conservation efforts:
  - American Forest Foundation
  - Connecticut Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection
  - Highstead Foundation
  - Kestrel Land Trust
  - Mass. Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
  - New England Forestry Foundation
  - U.S.D.A. U.S. Forest Service
Contact information and deadlines:

Please send all applications to Ed Hood, MassConn Coordinator, at ehood@opacumlt.org (please put “MassConn RCF Application, Your organization name” in the subject line), or by mail to Ed Hood, MassConn, c/o Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, 30 Peck Rd., Monson, MA 01057.

Please address any queries about MassConn and the MassConn RCF to Ed at above contact information. Please put “MassConn RCF” in your subject line.

2nd round applications will be accepted through the end of business, March 29th, 2019.

Grant Awards will be announced in mid-April 2019.