

Ski Conservation Fund – Lincoln National Forest 2025 Request for Proposals

November 18, 2024

Key Information

- Geographic Restrictions:** Projects must benefit the Lincoln National Forest
- Application Deadline:** February 14, 2025 at 11:59 pm MST
- Funding Type:** Nonfederal funds from guests of Ski Apache, and federal funds via the U.S. Forest Service (CFDA: 10.682)
- Eligible Organizations:** Nonprofit organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, state and local governments, and universities
- Matching Requirements:** 50% nonfederal match required. Match may be cash and/or in-kind contributions. Match must be expended contemporaneously with NFF grant funds and towards completion of the same project. Federal contributions are ineligible for use as match.
- Performance Period:** Projects funded in this round will begin in March 2025 and may run for up to 18 months.
- Applicant Resources:** The Ski Conservation Fund (SCF) is a competitive program and the NFF only funds projects that align exceptionally well with programmatic criteria. To ensure that the applicant's time is well spent, use all the resources available to determine whether the project is eligible, including:
- This Request for Proposals
 - SCF Application Tips and Financial Plan Guidance
 - Guidance on Forest Service Letters of Support
- Program Contact:** NFF Conservation Awards staff are available to answer questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process.
- Allison Powell, Conservation Awards Coordinator
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Overview

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION

The National Forest Foundation is the leading organization inspiring personal and meaningful connections to our National Forests, the centerpiece of America’s public lands.

Working on behalf of the American public, the NFF leads forest conservation efforts and promotes responsible recreation. We believe these lands, and all they provide, are an American treasure and are vital to the health of our communities.

SKI CONSERVATION FUND PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In partnership with Ski Apache, the NFF is currently soliciting proposals for its Ski Conservation Fund™ (SCF) grant program on the Lincoln National Forest. SCF combines Federal funds provided through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service with individual donations voluntarily made by guests of partner resorts. This leveraged funding measurably multiplies the resources available for partners to implement projects that directly benefit the Lincoln National Forest.

All SCF awards require a 50% nonfederal cash or in-kind match. Federal funds are not eligible to serve as match, but should be noted to show project leverage. Award recipients cannot provide SCF funds to the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal entity.

Eligible Project Types

PROGRAM FOCUS AREAS

The NFF requires that all projects proposed for funding must include community engagement and hands-on stewardship activities that are completed by project participants and benefit the Lincoln National Forest.

Community Engagement

Community engagement, defined as in-person involvement of the public, must be the primary focus of every project funded under SCF. The National Forest Foundation recognizes that communities have varied histories and experiences with public lands and expects that effective and appropriate engagement experiences will vary.

Eligible occasions for community engagement in public lands include, but are not limited to:

- Public lands days, cleanup days, and similar events
- Field trips for schools or collaborative groups
- Outdoor skills training
- Indigenous ecological practices
- Ceremonies or celebrations related to natural resources
- Trail or site ambassador programs
- Community science projects
- Implementation by community members of natural resource stewardship projects as defined below

Eligible public involvement in those opportunities may be paid or volunteer. Youth conservation corps, other types of paid service crews, event attendees, and volunteer participation are all considered public engagement.

Projects that are the result of, or contribute to, longer term relationships will be prioritized in proposal evaluation. In addition to describing involvement of people in project implementation, proposals should describe whether the project's design and planning stages include leadership or direct involvement of the populations they will benefit. Proposals should specify the populations they aim to engage in the opportunity, and how the opportunity is designed to benefit them. Applicants should demonstrate knowledge of and any existing relationships with the populations.

Stewardship Activities

In addition to a focus on public engagement, stewardship activities must be a component of every project proposed to SCF. Specifically, the participants of the groups engaged must complete eligible stewardship-oriented activities that result in benefits to the Lincoln National Forest. Benefits may be direct, such as trail maintenance or trash cleanup, or indirect. Examples of stewardship activities with

indirect benefits include collecting monitoring data which the Lincoln National Forest will use to inform management decisions, or educating other trail users to prevent resource damage. The NFF recognizes that different activities are appropriate for different types of participants, therefore a variety of activities are allowed, resulting in either large- or small-scale stewardship benefits.

Eligible participant stewardship activities include, and are not limited to:

- Recreation area cleanup
- Native tree and shrub planting
- Trail maintenance
- Invasive species control
- Forest and watershed restoration
- Hazardous fuels reduction
- Ecological or social monitoring to inform management decisions
- Educating other people using public lands about sustainable recreation principles

The NFF will consider proposed stewardship activities based on the applicant’s ability to connect the particular populations the project is seeking to engage to public lands, not only on their scale of impact on the ground.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Long-Term Benefit

Through SCF, the NFF is reaffirming its interest in expanding environmental and conservation work and who participates in this work, acknowledging that Tribes and many underserved communities have historically not benefited from investments on public lands. The selection committee will prioritize projects that aim to create opportunities to advance equitability and the diversity of beneficiaries, whether during the SCF-funded performance period or in the future. Projects that are part of a long-term strategy to create or inspire connection to public lands will also receive priority.

Proposals should include a description of the benefits to the community engaged, including whether the project benefits or engages Tribes or underserved communities. For the purposes of SCF, the NFF uses the following definitions which align with the underserved communities identified in the [U.S. Forest Service Equity Action Plan](#):

Underserved Communities: Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

Equity: The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

In line with the SCF focus on community engagement in stewardship, applications are not accepted if the primary costs are for development or improvement of hardened infrastructure via purchases or contractors. This includes development of or major improvements to campgrounds, parking lots, restrooms, or visitor centers. The NFF will consider smaller scale activities at these locations completed as part of community engagement programming and if the majority of the proposed budget is for

engagement-related costs. SCF funding is not intended to support wildland firefighting efforts, nor may it be used to support subcontracted stewardship efforts completed primarily by for-profit entities.

Funding and Match Requirements

SCF funds include funds provided to the NFF by the USDA Forest Service and recipients must treat the funds as Federal Awards under Federal Assistance Listing 10.682. SCF awards require a 50% nonfederal cash or in-kind match. Federal funds are not eligible to serve as match but should be noted to show project leverage. Matching funds must be expended within the dates of the NFF grant (see project timing section below), and toward completion of the same project activities proposed for NFF funding.

Both NFF and matching funds:

- Must be received by the same organization;
- Must support the same project activities and be expended within the same one-year project period;
- Cannot support general administrative purposes beyond recovered indirect costs;
- Cannot support litigation or advocacy;
- Cannot be directed to the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal entity;
- Cannot meet the matching requirements of any other federal funding program.

Project Administrative Considerations

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Nonprofit organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, state and local governments, and universities are eligible to receive SCF grants. If an organization does not meet this eligibility requirement, it must utilize an eligible fiscal sponsor consistent with the [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#). The NFF does not consider SCF applications from federal agencies, individuals, or for-profit organizations.

Funds are intended to support community engagement and stewardship activities on the Lincoln National Forest. If a project is proposed within Ski Apache's special use permit area, the proposed project must have either clear ecological benefits or benefit the general public. As the owner of Ski Apache, neither the Mescalero Apache Tribe nor any of its direct legally owned and/or operated affiliates may be the principal beneficiaries of funded projects, or receive any award funds either directly or indirectly. Individual Mescalero Apache Tribal members may be hired directly by other organizations.

PROJECT TIMING

Proposed project periods may be no more than 18 months long. For this round, grant performance periods will begin in March 2025, and extend for no more than 18 months depending on grantee preference. One extension of up to 6 months may be considered on a case-by case basis.

All activities directly supported by SCF and the expenditure of associated match must occur within the performance period. If project completion cannot confidently occur within the period specified above, please contact the NFF well in advance of the application deadline to discuss.

AWARD SIZE

There is not an official minimum or maximum award amount for the SCF program and successful proposals vary in budget size. Historically, NFF has considered applications ranging from less than \$35,000 to over \$100,000.

FUNDING OVERLAP RESTRICTIONS

There are limitations on overlap of SCF and other NFF awards to foster distribution of funds nationwide:

- A single project, as defined by its location, goals, and objectives, may have only one active NFF grant at a time.
 - When multiple organizations are partnering on the same project, they must coordinate to submit only one application.
 - A project that is receiving funding from another NFF funding program may not receive SCF funding covering all or part of the same performance period.

NATIONAL FOREST PERMITEES

Award Recipients cannot use NFF funds to support work that is a requirement of National Forest Special Use Permit Operating Plans.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

The NFF will not consider proposals unless all environmental compliance work is complete at the time of application. This includes, but is not limited to, NEPA decisions and categorical exclusions, archaeological clearances, and any other mandatory Tribal, federal, state, or local clearances. No exceptions.

FOREST SERVICE LETTERS OF SUPPORT

All applications must include a letter of support from the District Ranger of each Ranger District included in a proposal. Tribal entities are encouraged to contact the NFF in advance to discuss alternative options for letters of support.

- Applicants must upload letters of support with their online grant proposal when possible.
- In cases where the applicant does not receive their letter(s) of support prior to the application deadline, applicants may email letters of support to grants@nationalforests.org promptly.
- Proposals that include activities in multiple districts on one National Forest System unit may choose to obtain a single letter of support from the Forest Supervisor rather than a letter from each District Ranger.

- Support letters should be no more than a few months old and addressed either to the National Forest Foundation Ski Conservation Fund or to the applicant organization.
- Do not send letters of support via hard copy, fax, or any method other than direct upload or email.
- Do not submit any additional letters of support.

GEOGRAPHIC RESTRICTIONS

SCF funding is available for projects that take place on the Lincoln National Forest. Additionally, projects taking place on public lands adjacent to the Lincoln National Forest, and that can demonstrate clear National Forest benefit, are eligible. Work that does not physically take place on Lincoln National Forest lands or adjacent public lands is ineligible for funding.

Proposal Review Process

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

A committee made up of individuals from the National Forest Foundation staff and Board, participating resort staff, and U.S. Forest Service representatives are invited to review proposals and make funding recommendations. Following evaluations, the NFF Board reviews the funding decisions recommended by the committee, in accordance with NFF Policy. The review process is usually completed within two months of the application deadline.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each participating member of the SCF review committee quantitatively evaluates applications based on the following criteria. Applications that receive funding generally receive high scores on every individual criterion.

Strength of Engagement

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the engagement activities proposed, the population the project seeks to engage, and how the activities were designed:

- The extent to which the project increases capacity for participation and engagement in a measurable, active manner.
- The extent to which the population engaged had a voice and/or a leadership role in designing the program.
- The extent to which the engagement opportunity is well aligned with the population the applicant seeks to engage.

Potential for Diversifying Beneficiaries

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the groups of people that currently benefit from public lands, and whether the proposed project will advance that diversity. A project may

advance diversity through the participants engaged during the project period, for example by supporting an affinity-based conservation crew for neurodivergent youth. Additionally, it may advance diversity because of the outcomes of the project activities, for example completion of an ADA-accessible trail. The criteria are:

- The extent to which the participants engaged in the proposed activities diversify the populations benefiting from public lands.
- The extent to which the proposed activities create opportunities or increase accessibility to diversify future beneficiaries of public lands.

Stewardship Benefit

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the stewardship activities that will be completed by the project participants, and the relevance and outcomes of those activities:

- The extent to which the proposed stewardship activities are well aligned with the described conservation or management needs.
- The extent to which the proposed stewardship activities provide measurable benefit to the National Forest System or adjacent public lands.

Potential for Long-term Impact

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the methods for understanding and sharing the project results, and the degree to which those results may have long-term impact:

- The extent to which the project readily and effectively transfers wise practices or shares lessons learned.
- The extent to which the project encourages, connects, or inspires participants to be personally involved in the National Forest System or adjacent public lands resources.
- The extent to which the means of evaluating and monitoring project outcomes are well defined and appropriate for the stated project goals.

Feasibility and Strength of Proposal

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the planning elements of the proposal, whether a project is logistically possible, and whether it is responsive to the stated needs:

- The extent to which the NFF-funded portion of the project can reasonably be accomplished within the proposed timeframe.
- The extent to which project goals and objectives are consistent with the identified needs.
- The extent to which the amount requested is appropriate.

How to Apply

Applicants complete and submit SCF applications through an online application platform. Refer to this RFP document and the following appendices as you complete the online form.

HOW TO START A NEW APPLICATION

1. Use this link <https://form.typeform.com/to/VWaTat5Y> to complete an approximately 10-question quiz that ensures the project and organization are eligible to receive SCF funding.
2. Upon successful completion of the eligibility quiz, you will receive an email with an access code and instructions that will allow you to initiate an application.

HOW TO RETURN TO THE APPLICATION YOU STARTED

If you have already completed the eligibility quiz and initiated an application, you can return to the application form by following these steps:

1. Go to the application login page at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=nationalforests>
2. Log in with your existing account
3. Click "Edit Application" to the right of the name of your saved application

PROPOSAL ATTACHMENT FORMS

The NFF regularly updates its standard forms and applicants must download and use the current forms each grant round. Do not re-use NFF forms saved on your computer from previous rounds.

- [NFF Master Financial Plan form](#)
- [NFF Expanded Budget form](#)

Applicant Resources

SCF is a competitive program, and the NFF only funds projects that align exceptionally with programmatic criteria. To ensure that your time is well spent, use all the resources available to determine whether your project is eligible, and make sure you have fully addressed the application requirements.

PERTINENT POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

Prior to developing an SCF application, applicants should review and understand this RFP and the following policies:

- [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#)
- [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#) (if applicable)

Additional guidance on how to complete the NFF SCF application and budget forms are provided in these documents:

- [Lincoln SCF Application Tips](#) – This document contains detailed guidance on certain application questions and components including instructions, tips, and checklists. This section is intended to help applicants develop and submit a competitive proposal.
- [How to Complete the NFF Master Financial Plan](#) – This document covers definitions of expense categories and match sources, and provides detailed examples of both the Master Financial Plan and Expanded Budget forms.
- [Guidance on Forest Service Letters of Support](#) – This document provides guidance on obtaining a USFS a Letter of Support.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND PROGRAM CONTACT

NFF Conservation Awards staff are available to answer questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process. If you have read through the resources listed above and have additional questions regarding SCF or the grant application process, you are encouraged to reach out to NFF staff for guidance.

Requesting and receiving help will not affect an organization's competitiveness for the program.

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