



Conservation Acceleration Fund – Frequently Asked Questions

August 2026

About the Fund

The Conservation Acceleration Fund (CAF) is an Initiative of The Great Outdoors Foundation (GOF).

- What is the mission of the fund?
 - The CAF deploys thought leadership, catalytic capital, and outcome-driven infrastructure, to safeguard our land, water, and future. We aim to fund meaningful and impactful conservation projects within the Midwest.
- How does the fund work?
 - The CAF strategically combines funding from multiple sources, public and private, to stretch every dollar further. Across all CAF-funded projects, this approach has historically leveraged about \$4 in public funding for every \$1 of private investment. That said, funding does not need to be secured to apply.
- What is the history of the fund?
 - The fund was established in 2023 with a generous investment from Athene, a global finance service company. One of the first, and largest, projects was the preservation of over 1,000 acres of natural habitat including wetlands, oak savanna, prairie, and riparian buffers. This 3,000+ acre drainage area will have an annual nitrate reduction of 30,000 lbs. Another project investment was the creation of the Sustainability Linked Loan for a Midwest co-operative that is installing edge-of-field practices and cover crops on farmland.
- What projects can the fund support?
 - Previously funded projects have included wetland and oxbow restorations, agricultural practices, urban stormwater management,





habitat improvements, dam mitigations, stream restorations, water replenishment efforts, conservation programs, and more.

- What has been the overall impact of the fund?
 - Since 2023, over \$69M has been leveraged for conservation projects which have impacted over 76,000 acres of drainage, treating over 80M pounds of nitrate.

Application Process

- How can I apply for funding?
 - You can find the application at our website: greatoutdoorsfoundation.org. You can access it under the Conservation Acceleration Fund section on our website under Partners. You can also access the application here: [Conservation Acceleration Fund Project Intake Form](#)
- When are applications due?
 - Applications are accepted twice per year – Spring and Fall. For specific dates, refer to the application form.
- When should I expect to hear if my project is funded?
 - After the application deadline, internal and external teams will review the project to identify the project's metrics and determine if anything is missing. It will take about two months for review by all committees, and the GOF Board will have final approval at their quarterly meeting. Either way, you will be notified of decisions and the next steps.
- Who can apply?
 - Typical applicants are cities, counties, county conservation boards, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, drainage districts or other units of government; not-for-profit or NGO's authorized by the secretary of state; public water supply utilities; engineering or consulting firms; and watershed management authorities as well as landowners.





- How long will it take me to fill out the application?
 - It should take 30 minutes or less. You can leave, come back, and pick up where you left off.
- Can I apply to the fund more than once?
 - Yes, if you are requesting funding for multiple projects, please submit a separate application for each project.
- What happens if my project is selected for funding?
 - Our Conservation Coordinator will be in touch to discuss the next steps. Typically, we will meet to discuss the contract details, award amount, review any project updates, invoicing, and proposed timelines. We will also discuss reporting requirements.
- What happens if my project is not selected for funding
 - All submitted projects stay in our project database for potential future opportunities. GOF is tirelessly looking for ways to source funding for projects and even if the project is not selected for funding through the CAF we are working to connect the projects with funding opportunities. All projects not selected can re-apply to the next round of the CAF, and we will be in touch when that application opens.
- Does the Great Outdoors Foundation require reporting on projects?
 - Yes, reporting is a contract requirement for three years after the award money has been received. A reporting form (similar to the CAF application) will be emailed to the project's lead for completion. We ask for before/during/after pictures, design plans, as-builts, and other details pertaining to the process, design, and results of the project or program. Reports can be filled out while the project is still in progress. Project data is used to compile yearly metrics for reports to stakeholders and information to the public.





Project Specific Questions

- Does the CAF prioritize funding for certain watersheds?
 - There are no priority watersheds identified for funding projects.
- Do we need cost-share funding?
 - While not required to apply, having some other funding secured is preferred.
- What is the minimum or maximum amount the fund has provided per project?
 - There is no minimum or maximum amount you can ask for. You can ask for the amount you need to complete the project. If the amount cannot be funded entirely, we will try to fund some of the project needs.
- Does my project need to be on public property?
 - No. While public access to the project is a benefit, it is not a requirement for funding.
- Do I need to have engineering designs before applying?
 - No. We accept projects in any phase: conception, design, and construction.
- When does the project need to be completed?
 - Eligible projects need to have an anticipated construction completion date prior to June 30, 2030.
- What is the ideal project?
 - While there are no specific requirements for a project, we do look for water quality and quantity metrics. Some of those metrics include acres of drainage area and treatment volume, nitrate load reduction, number of partners involved, total amount of other funding, and plans for after construction.





Supporting the Conservation Acceleration Fund

- How can I, or my company, invest in the fund?
 - If you or your company are interested in making a substantial difference for water quality the Midwest, please contact the VP of Strategic Partnerships, Jen Cross at jen@greatoutdoorsfoundation.org

Other Questions

- I have more questions that are not in this FAQ document. Who should I contact?
 - Please email the conservation team at conservation@greatoutdoorsfoundation.org

