Conservation Acceleration Fund – Frequently Asked Questions

November 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 conservation projects within the Midwest.
- How does the fund work?
  - The CAF strategically combines funding from multiple sources, public and private sources 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 financial services 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 investment supported 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?
    - We currently have separate applications for projects in Iowa and projects in Missouri and Indiana.
      Indiana and Missouri applicants: Request for Information
      Iowa applicants: Project Intake Form
- When are applications due?
    - Missouri and Indiana applications are accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis.
      Iowa applications are accepted year-round, but projects are reviewed twice per year, in the spring and fall. For specific dates, refer to the application form.
- When should I expect to hear if my project is funded?
    - Projects are reviewed after submission to gauge alignment with current funding opportunities. If no alignment is identified, projects will still be considered during our twice-yearly funding reviews in the spring and fall. Applicants will be notified and funding decisions as reviews are completed.
- 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 organizations 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(s)?
    - 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 or in multiple areas, please submit a separate application for each project.
- What happens if my project is selected for funding?
    - A conservation team member 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. Even if a project is not selected for funding through the CAF, we are working to connect projects with other funding opportunities.
- Does the Great Outdoors Foundation require reporting on projects?
    - Yes, reporting is a contract requirement for the grant. Where the project is located will determine specific reporting needs.

Project Specific Questions

- Does the CAF prioritize funding for certain watersheds?
    - Iowa - There are no priority watersheds identified for funding projects. Missouri and Indiana - The primary areas of interest are projects around Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Fort Wayne.
- Do we need cost-share funding?

    - While not required to apply, having additional cost-share 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 a portion of the project.
- 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. It is preferred to have partial designs which can help with cost estimates.
- When does the project need to be completed?
    - Eligible projects need to have an anticipated construction completion date prior to 2030.
- What is the ideal project?
    - While there are no specific requirements for a project, we do look for water quality and quantity metrics. These metrics include acres of drainage area and treatment volume, nitrate load reduction, number of partners involved, leveraged funding, and plans for maintenance 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 in 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