



# 2021 SFI CONSERVATION GRANTS PROGRAM REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) INSTRUCTIONS AND CRITERIA

## BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Conservation Grants Program supports collaborative projects that engage non-profit organizations, SFI-certified organizations and other stakeholders, and that advance SFI's mission of advancing sustainability through forest-focused collaboration. Since 2010, SFI has awarded 66 SFI Conservation Grants totaling more than \$4 million to foster research and pilot efforts to better inform future decisions and best management practices for our forests. When leveraged with project partner contributions, total investment exceeds \$15 million.

In addition to our conservation work, SFI's four pillars of work include education, community, and standards. SFI's certification standards have become the fastest growing, highly trusted solution supporting the growing need for sustainable forest products. SFI completed a revision of the [SFI Forest Management Standard](#) and the [SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard](#) in early 2021, including new requirements for climate-smart forestry practices, fire resiliency and awareness, and enhanced requirements for biodiversity, water outcomes, Indigenous relations, and much more.

The [SFI Conservation Grants Program](#) strives to quantify and demonstrate the value of SFI-certified forestlands, and lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard, toward mitigating climate change impacts, enhancing biodiversity, and protecting water resources. SFI Conservation Grant projects, as part of the [SFI Conservation Impact Project](#), help quantify the impact of the standards and support continual improvement through the identification and implementation of best management practices at scale.

The 2021 SFI Conservation Grants program will seek to address gaps in [past Conservation Impact work](#), identify best management practices toward attainment of existing and new requirements in the SFI standards, and find opportunities to expand or deepen understanding gained from previous project outcomes.

Grants typically range from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per project annually, but more extensive projects may be considered based on merit. Projects can be up to three years in duration. Projects will commence in the 2022 calendar year. Successful applicants will be contractually obligated to specify reporting timelines, project deliverables (and other specifics regarding project implementation and delivery) and agree to work closely with SFI to promote and communicate project outcomes.

## CRITERIA, ELIGIBILITY, AND REQUIREMENTS

The SFI Conservation Grants Program seeks to build understanding of the value of SFI certification relative to climate change, biodiversity, and water. Proposals should be structured to test the validity of the hypotheses outlined in this RFP instructions and criteria document, and/or survey to identify best management practices in support of these hypotheses, or build on past Conservation Impact work, relative to lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard.



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## CRITERIA:

Projects should endeavor to test and prove the specific hypotheses below. However, **SFI will entertain conservation grant submissions that seek to expand or build upon past conservation grant projects** and SFI Conservation Impact research to deepen understanding of critical outcomes or practices relative to the SFI standards on climate-smart forestry, fire resiliency and awareness, biodiversity maintenance and recovery, and water quality.

Potential applicants are encouraged to review the [2022 SFI standards](#) (for both Forest Management and Fiber Sourcing) to fully understand the context of the standards, and potential role of the standards toward promoting conservation outcomes and practices. Several of the most critical objectives in the SFI standards are also provided in [SFI Certification References to Aid in Proposal Development](#).

Projects that compare outcomes or practices on lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard, or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard, to lands not affected by SFI certification, **are encouraged to use creative and efficient means to generate comparisons, including the use of aggregated data, publicly available information, comparison of SFI-certified forests to all forests, and similar approaches**. Projects which focus on enumerating long-term results or practices associated with past implementation of the SFI standards should consult the [SFI 2015-2019 Standards and Rules](#).

**Climate Change:** With respect to climate change, this year's RFP seeks to support research to investigate the resiliency of lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard, and the best management practices that can aid in forest and ecosystem adaptation to climate change and/or mitigate the risks associated with climate change. Project results will serve to support implementation of the Climate Smart Forestry Objective within the newly revised SFI Forest Management Standard.

**Hypothesis 1:** Implementation of the SFI Forest Management Standard and/or SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard, or best management practices that support the new Climate Smart Forestry Objective (2022 SFI Forest Management Standards, Objective 9) and/or the SFI Fire Resiliency and Awareness Objective (2022 SFI Forest Management Standards, Objective 10) **result in forests that are more resilient to climate change impacts**.

**Hypothesis 2:** Implementation of the SFI Forest Management Standard and/or SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard (2015-2019 or 2022 standards) **employ best management practices toward climate change adaptation and/or mitigation**. Projects should specify the best management practices relative to climate change that are employed in these forests.



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**Biodiversity:** With respect to biodiversity, this year’s RFP seeks to support research on the degree to which the SFI Forest Management Standard and/or the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard have promoted climate change resiliency for species at risk, and/or employed specific practices toward biodiversity conservation and species recovery.

**Hypothesis 3:** Implementation of the SFI Forest Management Standard and/or the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard **result in greater climate change resiliency for species at risk, and/or promote attainment of the biodiversity objectives of the SFI standards** (SFI Forest Management Standard, Objective 4, and SFI Fiber Sourcing Objective 1), including recovery and maintenance of species at risk. Projects that enumerate the results of past certification activities should consult the 2015-2019 SFI standards.

**Hypothesis 4:** The SFI Forest Management Standard **promotes best management practices that contribute to the maintenance and recovery of species at risk**—projects should seek to enumerate the degree to which such practices support species at risk, and the specific practices that contribute to biodiversity outcomes. Projects may enumerate past practices (2015-2019 SFI standards) or seek to inform best management practices under the new standard (2022 SFI standards).

**Water:** With respect to water, this year’s RFP seeks projects to investigate the value of lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard to water quantity, identification of best management practices toward maintaining water quantity, and best management practices toward mitigating the potential impacts of climate change on water resources. Project results will serve to support implementation of the water quality and quantity requirements of the SFI standards (SFI Forest Management Standards Objective 3; SFI Fiber Sourcing Standards, Objective 2).

**Hypothesis 5:** Implementation of the 2022 SFI Forest Management Standard will **better ensure the maintenance of water quantity as compared to forestlands not certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard**, or as compared to aggregated data across all forestlands.

**Hypothesis 6:** Lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard and/or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard **effectively mitigate climate change impacts on water quality and quantity**—projects should seek to enumerate specific practices and their anticipated or proven impact on water resources. Projects may enumerate past practices (2015-2019 SFI standards) or seek to inform best management practices under the new standard (2022 SFI standards).

## SELECTION CRITERIA

Grant applications will be evaluated against a variety of criteria, including:

- Degree of alignment with the criteria and requirements, and particularly building understanding of the value of past SFI certification activities, and/or specifying best management practices toward implementation of the newly revised SFI standards.
- A variety of relevant partners
- Level of involvement of SFI-certified organization (s) or SFI Implementation Committee (s)
- Value and relevancy to the goals of the SFI Conservation Impact Project



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- Clarity and achievability
- Reasonableness of budget, and efficiency of approach
  - Efficiency of project design is important. Where comparisons might be made between lands affected by SFI certification and other lands, projects are encouraged that make creative and efficient use of aggregated or publicly available information. For example, SFI-certified forestlands could be compared to all forestlands, if the approach is informative and cost-efficient.
- Degree to which the project engages and leverages resources beyond SFI funding
- Specificity of deliverables
- Scalability of the project to inform impacts at larger scales and additional geographies
- Enthusiasm for clear messaging and translatable outcomes and/or recommendations to facilitate continual improvement and sharing of best management practices

## ELIGIBILITY:

1. Lead applicants must fit into one or more of the following categories:
  - Registered tax exempt, not-for-profit organization (e.g., a 501(c) (3) in the U.S. or registered with the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency in Canada)
  - Indigenous organization and/or association
  - Research, academic, or educational institution
  - Conservation, environmental, or community organization
  - SFI Implementation Committee
2. Projects must be primarily located within the United States and/or Canada; projects that reach beyond that geography must demonstrate direct relevancy to the stated hypothesis and requirement, and the project potential to inform understanding of conservation outcomes on lands affected by SFI certification.

## REQUIREMENTS:

1. The proposal must detail the anticipated connection between the selected hypotheses and/or past Conservation Impact work and lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard. To the extent possible, projects should seek to specify the related values and/or practices resulting from implementation of the SFI standards.
2. Projects that can be scaled to multiple geographies are preferred, as are projects that improve our understanding of best management practices to address these emerging challenges. Though innovation is welcome, SFI also welcomes submissions that leverage past work to deepen understanding.
3. Projects must include project partners:
  - a. Projects must be collaborative and involve at least one project partner, in addition to the Applicant. Additional partners may strengthen the proposal.



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- b. Projects must include an SFI-certified organization or include an SFI Implementation Committee as a project partner (provided that an SFI committee is not the Lead Organization). Projects involving multiple SFI-certified organizations or multiple SFI Implementation Committees are encouraged.
  - c. Projects should engage government agencies wherever possible, and particularly in projects involving public lands, and/or agency-derived data.
  - d. As applicable to the project, research should take place in part or in whole on lands certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard or lands providing fiber through the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard.
    - o Find SFI-certified organizations with [Forest Management Certification](#)
    - o Find SFI-certified organizations with [Fiber Sourcing Certification](#)
    - o Find SFI-certified organizations with [Chain-of-Custody Certification](#)
    - o Find [SFI Implementation Committees](#) and contacts
4. Applicants are required to provide details of the project as outlined in the [full proposal application](#).

## APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

### 2021 SFI CONSERVATION GRANTS TIMELINE



**August 16:** RFP opens. Review this entire 2021 SFI Conservation Grants Program RFP Instructions and Criteria document. Please note that ALL applicants seeking funds must submit a full proposal by October 22, 2021 for consideration. However, applicants can submit an optional Letter of Inquiry to seek guidance toward that submission.



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**September 15:** Deadline for optional Letter of Inquiry (note: SFI feedback provided within five business days)

- **\*New\* optional Letter of Inquiry (LOI):** This year SFI is offering an optional opportunity to submit a short description, in an MS Word/PDF format, of your intended project for pre-consultation. This can be beneficial in receiving feedback on the appropriateness of your intended project prior to developing a more substantive full proposal. SFI will respond to LOI within five business days of receipt. Note that all applicants, regardless of their submission of LOI, *must* submit a full proposal, as outlined below, to be considered for a grant. LOI must be submitted by September 15, 2021. Applicants desiring to submit a proposal, regardless of feedback to the LOI, will need to submit a full proposal by October 22, 2021, to be eligible for consideration.
  - See [Letter of Inquiry Template](#) for requirements
  - MS Word/PDF document to be submitted via email to Rachel Hamilton, SFI's Senior Coordinator, Conservation Partnerships ([rachel.hamilton@forests.org](mailto:rachel.hamilton@forests.org))

**October 22:** Deadline for Full Proposals/RFP Closes

- **Full Proposal:** Applicants will submit via [SFI's Online Grant Application Form](#) by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on October 22, 2021. If you have any difficulty with the online application process, SFI staff would be happy to assist you, or to provide alternative application options. Such notification of the need for assistance **MUST** be received by SFI no later than October 20. Please contact Rachel Hamilton, SFI's Senior Coordinator, Conservation Partnerships ([rachel.hamilton@forests.org](mailto:rachel.hamilton@forests.org)). Note that applicants are **NOT** required to submit a LOI to submit or receive consideration of their full proposal.
  - See outline of [Full Proposal Grant Application Form](#) for requirements.
  - Create an account and/or apply through the [online application system](#).

**December 2021:** Notification to Grantees

Successful grantees and all other applicants will be notified of the status of their request no later than December 31, 2021. Grant recipients of the 2021 conservation grant RFP will commence their projects in the 2022 calendar year.

[Sign up for our mailing list](#) to receive the latest RFP announcements and updates.

## INQUIRIES

Any additional inquiries related to SFI's Conservation Grant RFP can be directed to:

**Leo Viana**

Senior Director, Conservation Impact

Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Email: [Leonardo.viana@forests.org](mailto:Leonardo.viana@forests.org)