



Proposal Request Instructions:

In order to ensure each project (including renewals) can be evaluated equally, the following questions 1-15 must be answered individually and completely using the provided format. Please do not delete the questions from the document. You may delete these instructions for space.

- **Submissions that do not follow this template format will not be evaluated.**
- Responses must be provided within a 10-page maximum.
- Question 4 asks for information from the CAP/Tactical Basin Plan. **Provide the CAP/Tactical Basin Plan as a separate document for reference.**
- Appendix D.1 Ranking Pool Request Form should not be submitted with the proposal. Only proposals selected for funding will submit Appendix D.1.

USDA-NRCS Locally Led Conservation Delivery

Proposal Request for Fiscal Year 2027-2028

(10-page max)

Vitalize Vermont's Forests

Windham County NRCD





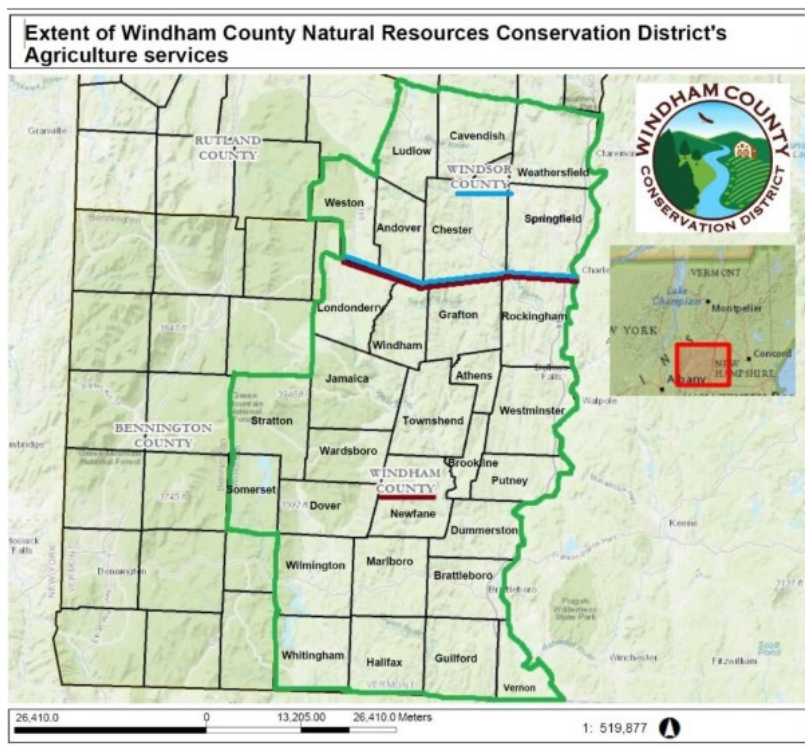
2/20/2026

Windham County

Heather Blunk, blunk.wcnrcd@gmail.com, 802-212-9454

Project Proposal Goal (1-2 sentences): Support native and naturalized habitats by treating invasive species and encouraging wildlife habitat. We also aim to support the one farmer one application format.

Project Area: Our project area will include all the towns in Windham County as well as the southern portion of Windsor County which we assist with providing technical assistance to.



High Level Project Proposal Summary (1 paragraph):

The presence and spread of invasives represents a huge pressure on the ecological and economic viability of our state's forests. They degrade wildlife habitat and can interfere with forest management by limiting opportunities for harvesting and regeneration. They also make management more costly. Windham County is on the frontline of invasive species arriving in the south end of Vermont. It is crucial to have a handle on the spread of



these new and aggressive plants to stop the spread up north. By offering a local fund pool that is targeted at terminating invasive species and promoting wildlife habitat we will be able to strengthen our natural landscape.

Impact of Proposal- this section will further explain the background, conservation need, goals and objectives, desired future conditions, and solutions for the proposed project.

1. Why is this work needed/important to further the goals of conservation in Vermont?
 - a. By addressing the resource concerns, specifically invasive species, affecting forested land in Windham County, we can buffer and delay the spread of these issues statewide.
2. What are the project goals and desired outcomes? The outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.
 - a. The main objective of the forestry local fund pool is to prevent the spread of invasives and strengthen local forest management. It is most cost effective and efficient to identify invasive plants early and remove them before they are well established (Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR)). The eradication of invasive plants before they become well established is an important component of any invasive plant control plan. In addition, the control of invasive plants in forests can release desirable regeneration from competition. Maintaining species diversity is a key component to a strong weather adaptation strategy.
 - b. To determine the success of this LLCP we will be evaluating post-treatment regrowth of target species after sufficient time has passed to monitor the situation and gather reliable data. Length of evaluation periods will depend on the woody species being monitored, proximity of propagules (seeds, branches, and roots) to the site, transport mode of seeds (water, wind or animals), and methods and materials used. Following initial application, some regrowth, resprouting, or reoccurrence of brush may be expected. Spot treatment of individual plants or areas needing retreatment should be completed as needed while woody vegetation is small and most vulnerable to desired treatment procedures.
3. Please briefly describe the practices, resource concerns, and land uses that will be targeted to reach your project goals and outcomes.
 - a. In this year's Resource Concern Survey, we received 88 responses. Those responses identified that their biggest resource concerns were Invasive Species, Wildlife and Ground Water Quality.



- b. The practices we would like to include in our Local Fund Pool are, 647 (Early Successional Habitat Development/ Management) 612 (Tree and Shrub Establishment), 666(Forest Stand Improvement), 512(Pasture/Hay planting), 391 (Riparian Forest Buffer),
 - c. In alignment with NRCS’s “One farm one application” we will be targeting applications for all land uses.
4. How does this proposal relate to your District’s Conservation Action Plan or Tactical Basin Plan? Reference page numbers from these documents to highlight the relation/overlap.
 - a. On page 2 of our CAP we review two of the fifteen resource concerns the Local Workgroup Identified. One being, Threats to Forest Health and the other Threats to Wildlife Habitat.
 - b. “Windham county is heavily forested and much of that land is privately managed. Achieving landscape scale management that supports forest health and wildlife habitat is a challenge and requires significant outreach, education and technical assistance to private forest land owners. Windham county’s forests have been impacted by increased development, particularly in higher elevation areas around ski resorts. Subdivision and development of forest lots results in fragmentation of forests, which negatively impacts edge-sensitive wildlife species and provides dispersal corridors for invasive species. These invasive species then further threaten forest health, impacting wildlife and forest products businesses alike.”
 - c. “A wide variety of wildlife species rely upon the matrix of fields and forests that give Windham county its idyllic nature. Unfortunately, under managed fields and ever-spreading invasive species threaten the health of both forests and fields. Earlier springs and later falls have resulted in phenotypic mismatches between key plants, pollinators and birds. Windham county’s fields are a key component of protecting our biodiversity, both for pollinators and grassland birds. Iconic species like Bobolink and Meadowlark need these fields for nesting habitat.”
5. What is your District’s experience working with NRCS planning, programs and employees on private lands?
 - a. Heather Blunk was hired in July 2021. Later that year she began going through Conservation Planner Training and since then has completed levels 1 and 3. For the past three years she has assisted the Brattleboro office with Conservation Planning including the past three Locally Led Fund Pool Proposals Windham county has been awarded. Emma Gregg was previously



and NRCS employee and has a year experience of Conservation Planning. She will be a huge asset to the District.

6. How much funding is being requested for FY27? How did you determine this value? This value should be tied to your identified goals and outcomes.
 - a. We are requesting our Local Fund Pool to have \$900,000. This has been determined from referencing the previous years fund pools and application requests. Since our first Local Fund Pool back in 2022 we have always had more applications than funding for forest health assistance.

Partnership and Project Management- this section will further explain the partners involved, the considerations for planning and implementation, past success in managing projects, and measuring progress/success.

7. In what capacity will your District contribute unique and qualified expertise or resources to enhance project outcomes?
 - a. Heather Blunk has worked at the WC NRCD for over four years and has been assisting with conservation planning for three years. She has completed all the course work for levels 1-3 conservation planning. In October we hired Emma Gregg who previously worked for NRCS. She also has two years of conservation planning experience and has completed the majority of conservation planner training.
8. Has your District worked on projects of similar size and scope, including a history of engagement with proposal's targeted private landowners? If yes, please provide examples.
 - a. Heather has been apart of the Local Fund Pool application, ranking and obligation process since 2022. Emma assisted with this process last year, 2025, and will be a huge asset to the office again this year.
9. What is the communication strategy for collecting interest and applications for this project? What is your target number of applicants?
 - a. The team will be composed of district planners Heather Blunk and Emma Gregg, and NRCS staff Emma Kuester and Brenna Christenson. We have a shared documents and folders where all the workload for the office is held. We all work in the same office and regularly collaborate and discuss applications and expectations.
10. What is the proposed project timeline for outreach, planning, implementation, and evaluation? Include how you have considered permitting, engineering, cultural resources, endangered species, and NRCS program deadlines.



- a. We hope to start advertising in June 2026 to have as many customers ready for the application deadline in August. District staff can assist with applications and ranking. Outreach will be conducted through the district's website, social media pages, newsletters and email list. The Windham County NRCD will cover our staff's time to do the outreach, application assistance and then conservation planning. Heather will take the lead on overseeing her and Emma's workload and ensure that communication happens early and often with NRCS staff. We will have contracts ready for implementation in Spring 2027. We have spoken with Toby Alexander to make sure that the five requested practices are feasible to achieve with minimal requirements from engineering and cultural resources.
11. Are there other partners or resources that will be leveraged to further the success of your project? Describe each partner's roles and responsibilities including the District and NRCS.
- a. NRCS will contribute \$900,000 of financial assistance in the local fund pool for landowners to meet local needs. We will also need limited support from NRCS staff at the zone level advising district planners on conservation planning. The Windham County NRCD will cover the cost of their staff members promoting, education, conservation planning and implementation of the plans.
12. What does success look like for your project and how will progress be monitored and evaluated?
- a. To determine the success of this LLCP we will be evaluating post-treatment regrowth of target species after sufficient time has passed to monitor the situation and gather reliable data. Length of evaluation periods will depend on the woody species being monitored, proximity of propagules (seeds, branches, and roots) to the site, transport mode of seeds (water, wind or animals), and methods and materials used. Following initial application, some regrowth, resprouting, or reoccurrence of brush may be expected. Spot treatment of individual plants or areas needing retreatment should be completed as needed while woody vegetation is small and most vulnerable to desired treatment procedures.

Additional Supporting Documents



13. Are there other details you would like us to consider not captured in the previous questions?
14. Provide a copy (or screenshot) of support from your District Conservationist- required to be eligible for funding.
15. Provide a copy (or screenshot) of support from your District Board