ACPF in the Great Lakes
Availability of microgrants for conservation districts through a 2024 pilot program

The Great Lakes Commission (GLC) is offering funding to facilitate conservation district project planning for precision sediment and nutrient pollution reduction within the Great Lakes basin. Eight proposals will be funded. The maximum request is $10,000 with an initial payment of 50% available upon execution of a grant contract between the applicant and the GLC and the remaining 50% paid upon satisfactory completion of grant deliverables.

How to Apply:
To apply, send proposals via the application link available on the "Apply for ACPF Planning Funding" page found at nutrientreduction.org by 5:00 p.m. (Eastern) on Friday, June 14, 2024. A webinar for applicants will be offered and recorded on May 17, 2024 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern to discuss the application process, provide information on the ACPF, and ask questions of GLC staff. To register for the webinar, go to: https://bit.ly/acpfwebinar.

For questions regarding the proposal and eligibility, please contact Connor Roessler (croessler@glc.org).

Guidelines:
Conservation districts within the Great Lakes basin demonstrating a need for enhanced conservation planning to achieve sediment and nutrient reduction goals are welcome to apply for funding. Funds from this pilot program are intended to grow district capacity in the use of the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF) for conservation practice siting. Applicants must demonstrate their history of successful outreach to landowners for erosion and nutrient control projects. Applicants will be expected to produce an ACPF-informed outreach plan to engage landowners within one priority HUC-12 watershed in the district as their grant deliverable. In addition, at least one district staff person will complete the ACPF training offered by the ACPF National Hub and its partners.

Grant deliverables can include the following elements; however, the degree of completeness will vary based on the proposed usage of grant dollars and availability of ACPF data for the selected watershed:

- ACPF result data for selected watershed
- A list of precision conservation practices or structural projects to improve local water quality
- The locations where these practices will be sited (protecting the privacy of any landowners)
- Anticipated timeline to implement these sited practices
- Strategies to engage landowners for the installation of the practices
- A description of how these sited practices would relate to existing government endorsed watershed plans or aid in the development of a plan

Funding may be spent on technical assistance for conservation staff to develop focused outreach plans and materials to optimize reduction of sediment, phosphorus, and nitrogen runoff from agricultural land by engaging with landowners. Funding may also be spent on GIS licensing, software needs, or equipment costs (e.g., tablets or laptops, etc.) for districts and costs associated with ACPF training or consulting.

Each proposal must utilize the application form provided. A budget and timeline should be included in the proposal to identify how up to $10,000 will be utilized over one year (October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025).

General criteria for review:
Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Need for conservation planning assistance
- Water quality needs in the selected HUC-12 watershed
- Feasibility of completing proposed deliverables on time and within a reasonable budget
- Knowledge of GIS platforms commensurate with the selected grant option (see Additional Information section below)

Eligibility:
Conservation districts and groups of conservation districts (i.e., conservation district associations and coalitions) within the Great Lakes basin are eligible for this funding opportunity. Lead applicants must be authorized to enter into a contract with the GLC and provide mid-year and final reports on project expenses, activities, and other supporting documentation assuring achievement of the pilot program's goals.

In applying for funding, applicants also affirm their willingness to commit one representative to virtual meetings with GLC staff and other grantees at the start and end of the performance period.

Additional Information:
In deciding whether to apply for the ACPF in the Great Lakes pilot, applicants should explore the following three options to obtain ACPF outputs for their chosen HUC 12. Applicants can use ACPF outputs already available from the ACPF database if applicable; can contract with professionals to obtain ACPF results; or district staff can utilize the training and materials to run the ACPF model for themselves. The selected option will control the type and level of completeness of proposed deliverables. Please see more details about each of these options below (note that applicants receiving funding will be eligible for technical assistance from GLC geographic information systems staff as they proceed under any of the three options):

1) Use existing data to identify conservation practices:
The ACPF National Hub provides a database of watersheds with existing ACPF model outputs. If your chosen HUC 12 is available from this dataset we encourage the use of these outputs in your conservation work. Also check with local and state agency partners to determine if existing data or ACPF model outputs have been developed for your watershed. GLC staff have collected some additional watersheds with available ACPF data not yet incorporated into the ACPF National Hub available here.

2) Contract with a consultant to produce ACPF model outputs:
If your watershed is not available in the existing database and your district lacks GIS capacity to create your own set of data, we encourage the use of this list of consultants for contract work. Funding may be used to pay a consultant to produce ACPF outputs. While a selected consultant does not need to be identified within the application for funding, applicants should make appropriate inquiries to understand contract costs in the event GLC funds are awarded.

To reduce the cost of consulting, we encourage applicants to provide the chosen consulting company with their HUC 12 core data. The ACPF Hub provides a Core Data Download Mapper with pre-existing watersheds that have core data available.

Core data make up the building blocks of the ACPF model and are needed to properly run the model. It includes layers such as the watershed boundary, farm field boundaries, and soil type in the area. The core dataset does not include the Digital Elevation Model (DEM), which must be obtained separately by the grantee. The ACPF National Hub provides information on the requirements for your DEM detailed at the bottom of this webpage in the "Elevation Data" section. If your watershed is not available in the ACPF core data download, then please be aware that this may increase costs for contracting the work.

3) Build GIS capacity and expertise to produce ACPF model outputs:
If your district is interested in building GIS capacity and ACPF expertise in-house, we encourage the use of funding for ArcGIS licensing and software needs, equipment, and staff technical assistance or training. Please be aware that a proficient understanding and use of GIS is required to properly run the ACPF toolbox and interpret its results.

To run the ACPF an Advanced version of ArcGIS Pro with the Spatial Analyst Extension is required. Please consider the cost of this version if running ACPF in house (see here for ArcGIS licensing information). Districts are encouraged to download and use the most recent version of the ACPF toolbox, which is Version 5. The Version 5 toolbox is compatible with ArcGIS Pro Versions 3.0 and above. If districts are running ArcGIS Pro versions 2.7-2.9, they should use version 4 of the toolbox. **Please be advised that ESRI is phasing out ArcGIS Desktop (ArcMap), so only ArcGIS Pro will be used in the future!**

To properly run the ACPF toolbox districts will also need to download TauDEM, which is a free software provided by Utah State University. TauDEM is a suite of tools for the extraction and analysis of hydrologic information from topography. The ACPF is compatible with TauDEM 5.3.7. See this page for more software details provided by the ACPF National Hub.

The ACPF has core data for Wisconsin and Illinois with some watersheds in Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. There is no core data in Pennsylvania or New York. Visit the ACPF Core Data Download center to download the core data set for the watershed of your choice. If you find that your watershed is not available, the ACPF National Hub provides training on how to create your own set of core data for your watershed (ACPF training for creating core data).