

Wetland Conservation Program – Partner Projects

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS



About Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Founded in 1937, Ducks Unlimited's (DU) mission is to "conserve, restore and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people." For over 85 years, DU has worked cooperatively with landowners, federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporate partners to deliver more than 15 million acres of habitat conservation across the continent. DU has worked with a diversity of partners to complete thousands of projects conserving over 170,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitats in the Great Lakes basin. The Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office (GLAR) of Ducks Unlimited (DU) is in Dexter, MI, and services a 21-state region. The GLAR has an annual operating budget of approximately \$40 million with over 90 full-time staff including biologists, engineers, land surveyors, CAD technicians, construction managers, GIS specialists, conservation planners, project coordinators, accountants, contract compliance managers, communications managers, graphic designers, and administrative assistants. In Michigan, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 91,000 acres of habitat and invested over \$55 million in wetland conservation. Since 1984, DU and Michigan DNR have partnered to develop, manage, and adapt wetland conservation programs based on international and regional conservation planning and science. Our partnership is continuously adapting to keep up with the ever-changing habitat threats and needs of breeding and non-breeding waterfowl and other wildlife.

DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC. IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

It is the policy of Ducks Unlimited, Inc. to afford equal employment opportunity to all qualified persons regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, military status, disability, age, or genetic information except where age or gender is a bona fide occupational qualification as allowed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It is the policy of Ducks Unlimited, Inc. to afford equal employment opportunity to all qualified persons regardless of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ancestry, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and related medical conditions), sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age (40 or over), disability (physical, mental or visual), genetic information, marital status (including registered domestic partnership status), military and veteran status, immigration status, or any other category protected by federal, state or local law.

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Project Schedule

Request For Proposals.....	05 August 2024
Grant Application Due.....	30 August; 11:59 PM 2024
Project Selection.....	Fall 2024
Project Period Begins.....	Fall 2024
Partner Final Report Due to DU.....	30 September 2026
DU Final WCP Report Due to DNR	31 October 2026

Program Context

Program Purpose

Ducks Unlimited is seeking applications for 4-8 projects to be completed as part of the Wetland Conservation Program in the watersheds of Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie that will enhance, restore, or conserve wetlands to benefit water quality and wildlife and aquatic habitat, and to support and enhance Great Lakes tourism and related economic sectors that have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Wetland Conservation Program is being managed by Ducks Unlimited on behalf of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division (DNR) in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE); and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). This project has been funded in part by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Per Federal guidance, ARPA funds must be completely spent by December 31, 2026, and no extensions will be granted; therefore, funds granted through this Wetland Conservation Program must be completely spent prior to the final project due date, **September 30, 2026**.

Introduction

The Wetland Conservation Program is aimed at advancing wetland conservation projects in the Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay watersheds. The western basin of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay experience frequent recurring harmful algal blooms. Harmful algal blooms in ponds and lakes are primarily driven by too much phosphorus entering the lakes through runoff from rainfall and snowmelt moving phosphorus through the watershed and into the lakes. Harmful algal blooms can be toxic and cause severe illness in dogs and humans. When harmful algal blooms are detected, drinking water facilities, boating areas, fishing events, and beaches can all be closed. Restoring wetlands on the landscape to catch the runoff and filter out phosphorus is one potential solution to this problem.

Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed a supplemental appropriations bill (Public Act 5 of 2023) securing \$10 million of **American Rescue Plan Act** funding for wetland restoration, enhancement, and acquisition to aid in the reduction of phosphorous, nitrogen, and sediment entering Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay. This supplemental funding will improve the water quality of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay to support communities and Great Lakes tourism and related economic sectors that have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michigan DNR developed the Wetlands Conservation Program to guide expenditure for a portion these funds, and selected Ducks Unlimited through a competitive process to manage the program as a fiduciary agent. Ducks Unlimited is a non-profit company that has preserved, enhanced, or restored 16 million acres of wetlands in North America since 1937.

The Wetlands Conservation Program is funded by ARPA and will not have any opportunity to be extended. **We encourage ALL applicants to reach out to DU staff to schedule a pre-application meeting** to review project activities, methods, and contracting before submitting a proposal. Ducks Unlimited reserves the right to reject all applications.

Grant Program Eligibility and Requirements

Eligible Grant Applicants

Eligible partners include local and federal governments, tribal, and non-profit organizations. Eligible partners must not be debarred, suspended, declared ineligible or voluntarily excluded from doing business with the state of Michigan or any federal department or agency. Eligible applicants may submit multiple applications.

Grant Limits and Commitment Requirements

The expanded WCP has up to \$2.5 million to grant to partners through this RFP process. The funds are expected to support 4-8 projects, with a range of \$250,000 to \$750,000 per project.

All project applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their potential projects by contacting Ducks Unlimited during the informational webinar or by request. If your project falls outside this cost range, the project will only be considered if you have a preliminary conversation with DU.

Projects will be screened for eligibility based on geography, actions, and timelines. Eligible projects will be reviewed according to the points laid out in the Project Review section, by a panel of expert reviewers. Projects will receive 5 bonus points for either working with firms registered as disadvantaged business enterprises in the state of Michigan [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program](#), other recognized socially or economically disadvantaged entities, or for providing optional leverage funds. Leverage is not required for an application.

Program Eligibility

Proposed projects must meet the following eligibility criteria to be considered for funding, including but not limited to: projects must be located in an eligible geography, the project site must be either a current wetland or have primarily hydric soils, the proposed projects must demonstrate a strong likelihood of being completed by September 30, 2026.

The WCP eligible geography is limited to the Saginaw Bay Watershed and Michigan's portion of the Lake Erie Watershed (Figure 1). Eligible watersheds for Saginaw Bay include the entirety of the following 8-digit hydrologic unit code (HUC) subbasins: Au Gres-Rifle (04080101), Cass (04080205), Flint (04080204), Kawkawlin-Pine (04080102), Pigeon-Wiscoggin (04080103), Pine (04080202), Saginaw (04080206), Shiawassee (04080203), and Tittabawassee (04080201). Areas eligible near Lake Erie include the entirety of the following 8-digit unit code (HUC) subbasins: Clinton (04090003), Detroit (04090004), Huron (04100013), and St. Clair (04090001); and portions of the following HUC-8 subbasins that occur within Michigan: Lake St. Clair (04090002), Ottawa-Stony (04100001), Raisin (04100002), St. Joseph (04100003), and Tiffin (Bean Creek; 04100006) with a priority focus on five HUC-12 sub-watersheds (Figure 2).

Funded projects will be required to 1) complete quarterly progress reports to Ducks Unlimited, 2) submit photographs of the project site before and after completion, 3) share project location details via map or shapefile, 4) submit final project documentation as appropriate for the project type including either the plan set or as-built drawings for engineering and construction projects, and/or a one-page summary with a map of the completed project with key details, including land modifications made, vegetation species lists, achieved wetland type for acquisition or easement projects.

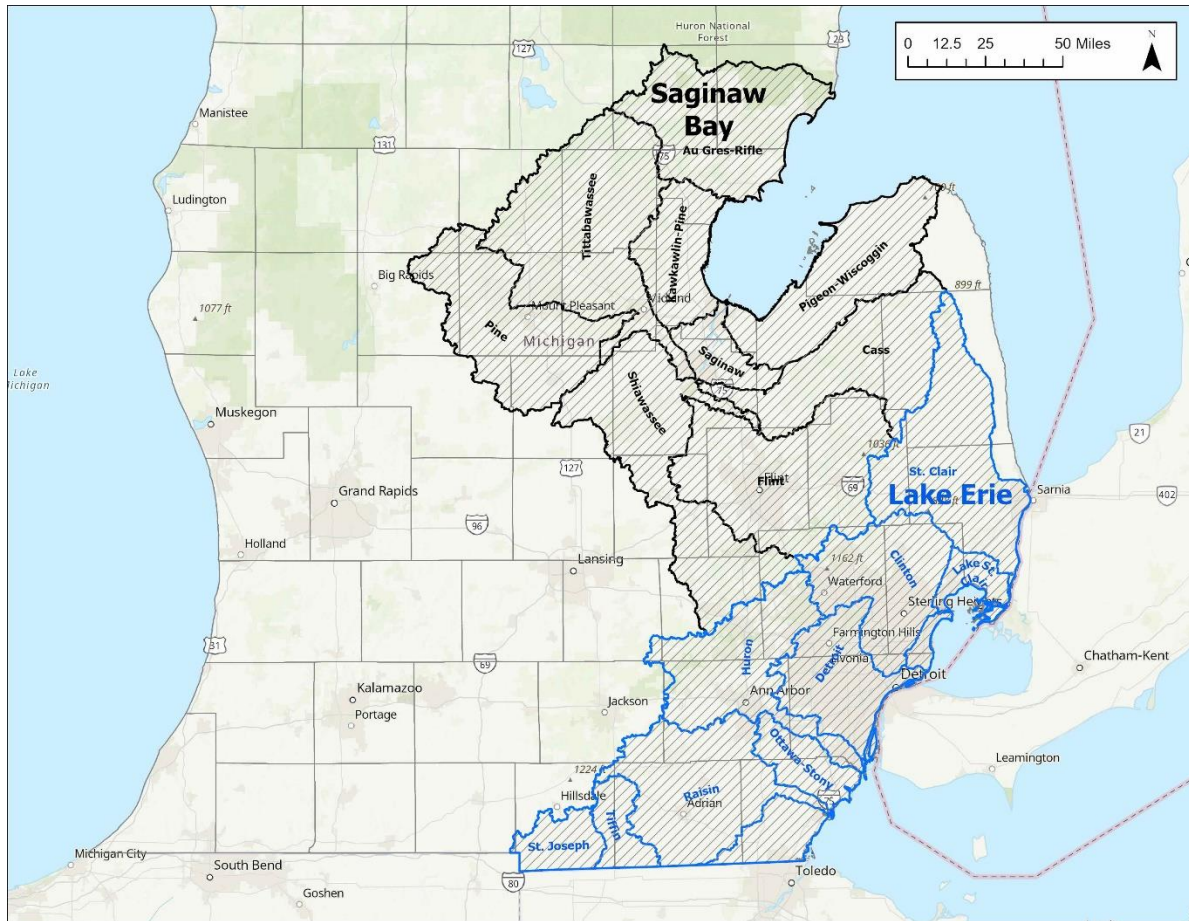


Figure 1. Priority areas for this RFP are the Saginaw Bay Watershed and Michigan’s portion of the Lake Erie watershed, with emphasis on the specific areas noted for the Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan. Eligible subbasins in the Saginaw Bay watershed include Au Gres-Rifle, Cass, Flint, Kawkawlin-Pine, Pigeon-Wiscoggin, Pine, Saginaw, Shiawassee, and Tittabawassee. Eligible subbasins in the Lake Erie watershed include Bean, Clinton, Detroit, Huron, Lake St. Clair, Ottawa-Stony, Raisin, St. Clair and St. Joseph.

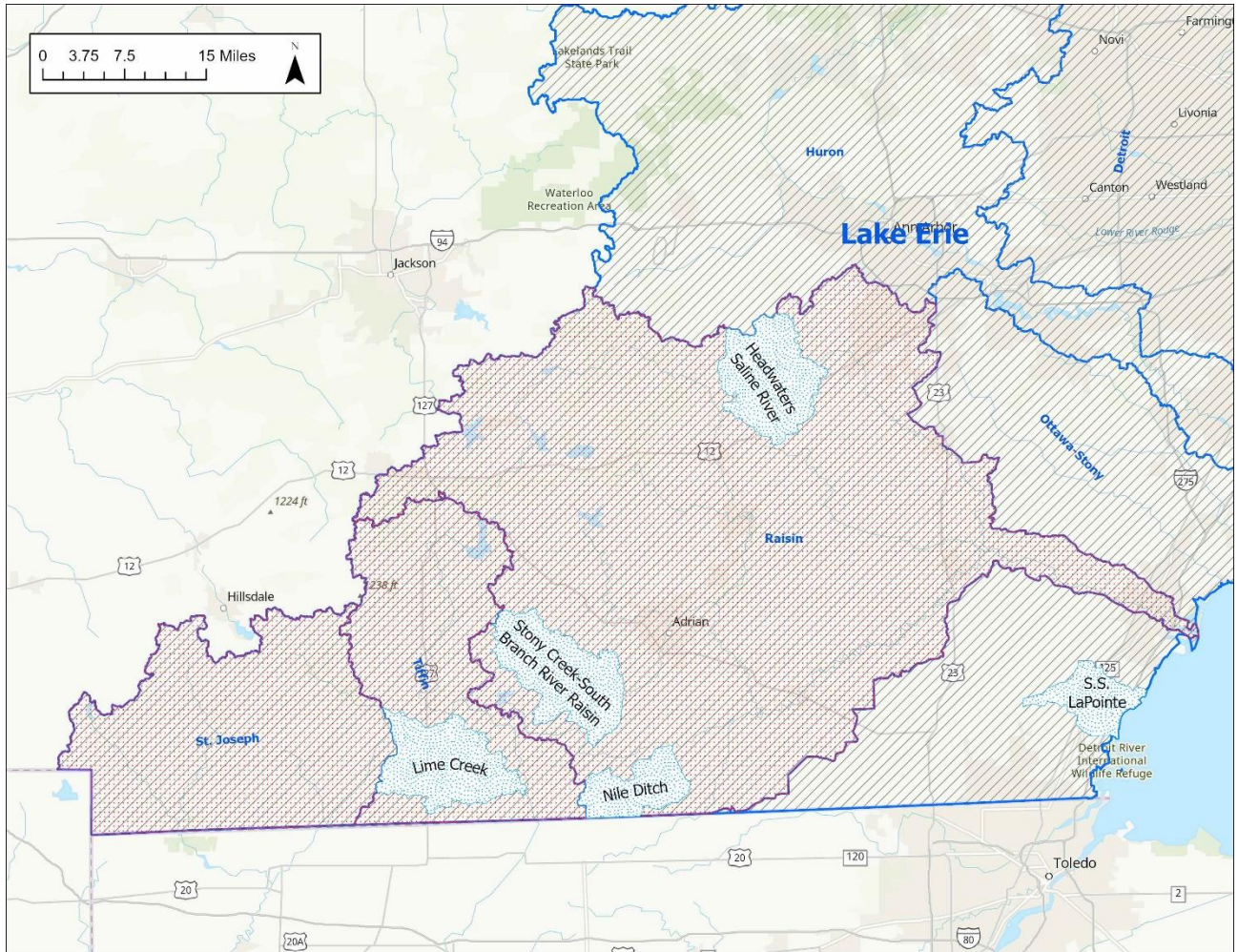


Figure 2. Detailed view of priority areas for Michigan’s portion of the Lake Erie Basin include the specific HUC-8 watersheds for the Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan shown in red. The priority HUC-12 sub-watersheds align with those identified by MDARD and include: Stony Creek-South Branch River Raisin (041000020202), Lime Creek (041000060105), Nile Ditch (041000020303), Headwaters Saline River (041000020401), and S.S. LaPointe (La Plaisance Creek-Frontal Lake Erie; segment of 041000010201).

Allowable Costs and Actions

Eligible Costs

Only those costs directly incurred and associated with completing the delivery of the proposed project during the project period are eligible for reimbursement in addition to indirect administrative costs. No pre-award costs are allowed.

If a recipient has a current Negotiated Indirect Costs Rate Agreement (NICRA) established with a Federal cognizant agency responsible for reviewing, negotiating, and approving cost allocation plans or indirect cost proposals, then the recipient may use its current NICRA. Alternatively, if the recipient does not have

a NICRA, the recipient may elect to use the de minimis rate of 10 percent of the modified total direct costs pursuant to 2 CFR 200.414(f).

Eligible Activities

Eligible activities include wetland restoration/enhancement, wetland engineering, wetland acquisition, or a combination of these activities. Supporting actions associated with these project categories are also allowable costs. This includes staff time, engineering services, appraisal services, necessary supplies, and promotional materials as they are required and related to the primary project. Some equipment for ongoing monitoring of sites may be allowable after conversation with Ducks Unlimited. The applicant is solely responsible for complying with all local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and permits. As mentioned in earlier sections, projects applicants are encouraged to reach out to Ducks Unlimited before submitting an application. Ducks Unlimited and the WCP committee will work with the project applicant(s) to review the project plans.

Acquisition of Existing or Former Wetland for Conservation

- Acquisition's primary purpose shall be to acquire existing highly functioning wetland, existing degraded wetland, or former wetland; adjacent upland may also be included.
- All proposed acquisition projects (fee title and easements) will require appraisal to conform to Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA or *Yellowbook*) standards.
- To demonstrate timeliness, please indicate the current status of negotiations (e.g., willing seller contacted, due diligence, purchase agreement)
- Funds from the WCP will not be available for stewardship endowments or for any work extending beyond project period. Please plan to describe your long-term conservation and stewardship plan to maintain the integrity and quality of your wetland projects.

Wetland Enhancement and Restoration

- Project applicants are encouraged to coordinate with potential contractors on their bid response to include their proposed scope of work and budget. The following list contains suggested categories to describe your proposed project. In all cases, we suggest reducing the number of procurement steps in a multi-phase project to achieve project objectives within the required timeframe.
 - o Engineering Only – survey and “permit-ready” engineering design
 - o Construction Only – “shovel-ready” projects that are designed and partially or fully permitted
 - o Engineering and Construction Projects – abbreviated timeline may make engineering and construction projects difficult to complete within the project period. However, we will consider all eligible projects.
 - o All construction projects are subject to Davis-Bacon Act, as amended (40 U.S.C. 3141-3148).

Application Components and Program Requirements

Submission Timeline

1. RFP released August 05, 2024
2. Webinar hosted August 08, 2024 (*meeting recorded*)
3. Final submissions due August 30, 2024, at 11:59 PM

Project Review

Proposed projects will be screened for eligibility, application completeness, ability to be completed on the timeline shared (with no expected opportunities for extensions). Proposed projects will be reviewed by Ducks Unlimited and a steering committee consisting of state agency leads for the Wetland Conservation Program. DU and the steering committee will apply key performance indicators (KPI's) to track several outcomes of the program, including but not limited to reduction in nutrients and sediments, total acreage impacts, and public access.

Scoring Criteria	Maximum Points = 110
Applicant Experience	AVAILABLE = 10 points
Project Context	AVAILABLE = 20 points
Conservation Plan Relevance	AVAILABLE = 15 points
Water Quality Outcomes	AVAILABLE = 20 points
Recreation & Tourism	AVAILABLE = 10 points
Timeline	AVAILABLE = 15 points
Partnerships & Support	AVAILABLE = 10 points
Budget	AVAILABLE = 10 points
Financial or Social Leverage	BONUS = 5 points

Required Application Materials

Project Proposal Narrative

For each question 1-8, submit a single response document with the same formatting as below (responses for 1 should address a,b,c,d, etc.). For Question 9, include the budget table format below, and provide a narrative summary of each line. This document should have 12 pt font, Times New Roman, single space, normal margins, and a maximum of 8 pages.

1. **Applicant Information**
 - a. **Name of Organization/Entity** – Organization Name and Address
 - b. **Project Contact** – the person who is the main point of contact, represents the applicant, and can answer questions regarding the application
 - c. **Contact Information** – Project contact physical address, email, and phone number
 - d. **Project Partners (if applicable)** - please provide information pertaining, if known, to those that may be additional contributors or partner organizations with the applicant. The role of these organizations/individuals will be addressed in another portion of the application.

2. **Applicant Experience** (up to 10 points available out of 110 points total).
 - a. Describe your organization
 - b. Provide a brief narrative highlighting your organization’s experience in federal contracting, award compliance and reporting
 - c. Describe your organization’s experience planning and or implementing wetland acquisition, restoration, design, and/or enhancement projects in Michigan.
 - d. Please include a brief biography of key staff that will administer this project

3. **Project Summary** (up to 20 points out of 110 points total). Provide a brief summary of your proposed project and be sure to address each point below.
 - a. **Need**: Describe the need and rationale for your project
 - b. **Context**: Describe the ecological functions, and threats at your project site currently and post project.
 - c. **Activities**: Are you proposing a wetland acquisition, restoration, or enhancement project?
 - d. **Monitoring and Maintenance**: Please describe your long-term monitoring and maintenance strategy to maintain the integrity and quality of your wetland projects.

4. **Project Alignment with Existing Plans** (up to 15 points out of 110 points total).
 - a. How does your project relate to local planning documents and priorities (for example, but not limited to: [Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan](#), [Michigan Adaptive Management Plan](#), MDARD’s priority HUC-12 sub-watersheds in the WLEB (i.e., Stony Creek, South Branch River Raisin, Nile Ditch, S.S. LaPointe Drain, Headwaters Saline River; Figure 2).
 - b. How does your project relate to other local, state, and regional conservation planning efforts?

5. Water Quality Context (up to 20 points out of 110 points total).
 - a. What are the surrounding land use/land cover type(s)?
 - b. What are the current land use/land cover type(s) associated with the project footprint?
 - c. What is the acreage of your proposed wetland footprint?
 - d. Is there an existing wetland within the project area (if so, acreage)?
 - e. What are the soil types found within the project area? Soil types can be investigated using the [USDA Web Soil Survey viewer](#).
 - f. What types of water quality benefits (i.e., nutrient and sediment reduction) do you expect from working at this site?

6. Recreation and Tourism Benefits (up to 10 points out of 110 points total).
 - a. Will your project increase or enhance opportunities for recreation and/or tourism?
 - b. Are you establishing or expanding public access?
 - c. If yes to a or b, who do you expect to use the site and what is the primary proposed use (consider proximity to existing publicly available lands, city centers, etc.)?

7. Project Timeline (up to 15 points out of 110 points total).
 - a. What is the timeline of your anticipated project?
 - b. What are the project's major milestones
 - c. What are the post award contracting needs?
 - d. At what point during implementation will the timeline be dictated by potential regulatory or seasonal timelines?

8. Partnership and Community Support (up to 10 points out of 110 points total).
 - a. Who are the project partners and their roles, and what community partners are involved and/or support the project (attach letters of commitment and/or support, if applicable).

9. Budget (up to 10 points out of 110 points total). Please include the budget table and provide a narrative description of the work in each cost category.

EXPENDITURES	WCP Award	Leverage†	Total
PERSONNEL			
FRINGE			
TRAVEL			
EQUIPMENT			
SUPPLIES			
CONTRACTUAL			
CONSTRUCTION			
OTHER			
Total Direct Costs			
Indirect Costs			
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS			
† <i>Optional</i>			

Required Attachments

1. Shapefile or map of the project location and footprint of project activities
2. Partner letters (optional)
3. Letter of permission to perform work on land, if proposed project is outside of applicant's ownership **or** statement of intent to obtain landowner permission
4. Current NICRA letter **or** statement of intent to recover de minimis rates
5. A copy of the most recent A-133 Single Audit. **or** an Audit Statement if applicant organization's audits are uploaded to the federal audit clearinghouse
6. A stated commitment to the reporting requirements outlined in the Project Eligibility section
7. A stated commitment to complete your project by September 30, 2026

Application Instructions

Project Contacts: If you have questions about this RFP, please email them to wcp@ducks.org

Instructions for submission: please send **one PDF** containing answers to all questions above, statements, and relevant attachments.

Please submit all application materials in one PDF to wcp@ducks.org by August 30, 2024; 11:59 PM.