



Process and Criteria for Land Protection Grants

Sebago Clean Waters (SCW) has secured funds for land protection from a variety of sources, including the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), business partners, and individual donors. Portland Water District (PWD) controls distribution of RCPP funds, while other donations are housed in a water fund account at the Open Space Institute (OSI). SCW has developed the following equitable and accessible process to evaluate eligible land protection projects in the watershed and distribute these funds.

Application and Review Process

Application

SCW has a standard proposal form for all applicants. SCW accepts and reviews applications on a rolling basis so organizations can submit their proposal at any time. The application includes narrative questions, a project budget, maps, photos, and shapefiles. Contact SCW Partnership Director [Karen Young](#) for a proposal form.

Organizational Eligibility

Any not-for-profit organization or watershed municipality conserving and stewarding land in perpetuity in the watershed may apply for funding, regardless of whether the entity is an SCW member.

Water Fund Review Committee

SCW has created a Water Fund Review Committee to evaluate all proposals and make funding recommendations to the relevant fiscal sponsor (OSI and/or PWD). The Water Fund Review Committee (Review Committee) is comprised of a representative from those SCW Steering Committee organizations that do not intend to ever apply for funding from the water fund. SCW's Steering Committee may add additional members to the Review Committee so long as these new members will not be project applicants. The Review Committee is charged with reviewing all proposals to recommend 1) whether to support the project, 2) the funding level, and 3) the sources of funding (e.g., RCPP and/or OSI-held funds).

Proposal Submission and Review

Applicants submit proposals via email to the SCW partnership director (director). Applicants are welcome to [contact the director](#) with questions about their application. The director will

screen each proposal for eligibility and completeness. S/he/they may reach out to applicants with any questions or for clarification and will conduct a site visit with at least one member of the Review Committee (unless the project is on an expedited timeline). The director will present the project to the Review Committee. SCW will make its recommendation within three months of receiving the application. SCW will strive to expedite the review process if needed to complete the project.

Eligible Use of Funds

Grant funds will be used to acquire land in fee and/or permanent conservation easements. Grant funds cannot be used for due diligence expenses, staff time, travel, land management, and/or stewardship costs. Note that SCW has other funds to which eligible organizations can apply to cover due diligence expenses.

Due Diligence Requirements

Grantees must provide standard due diligence documents for their project, including an appraisal, title commitment, Phase I environmental assessment (or equivalent), and survey with property description. SCW typically accepts the same due diligence documents that other funders (state, federal, and private) require, so no special documents are necessary. For projects that will receive RCPP funds, SCW will work with the grantee on specific RCPP requirements.

Release of Funds

The Review Committee will make grants recommendations to PWD and/or OSI. OSI has the fiduciary responsibility over the funds in the temporary water fund and PWD has oversight for the RCPP funds. PWD staff has the authority to give final grant approval, as do OSI staff, for grants under \$500,000. Land conservation funds will be released to the grant recipient at project closing.

Project Eligibility and Criteria

The primary purpose of the SCW water fund is to support permanent conservation of lands that contribute to protection of clean water within the Sebago Lake watershed. In addition, SCW seeks to conserve a diversity of plants, animals, and ecosystems; mitigate climate change impacts; and protect places that are valued by people who live in, and care about, the region—particularly those communities that have been excluded from equal access to nature's benefits.

Project Eligibility

To be eligible for funding, projects must:

- Lie wholly or partly in the Sebago Lake watershed
- Achieve permanent protection of land and/or a perpetual conservation easement
- Be spearheaded by an organization with the capacity and financial ability to successfully complete the project and steward the land

Criteria

Eligible projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Contribution to protecting clean water (Note: SCW will use its mapping tool to assess this value)
- Contribution to protecting biological diversity, including extent, status, and condition of plant and animal species and natural communities found on the property, and climate change resilience characteristics (Note: SCW will use mapper to assess)
- Contribution to uptake of atmospheric carbon (Note: SCW will use TNC Resilient Land Mapping tool to assess)
- Threats to the land's conservation and community values, such as incompatible development, mining, forest conversion, and/or loss of public access
- Ability of the landowner and/or conservation easement holder to ensure long-term protection of the land's ecological and cultural values
- Scale of the property, proximity to other conserved lands, and/or contribution to a larger conservation plan
- Accessibility and type of public access, including consideration for working lands and sites of cultural significance
- Extent and type of recreational values, including trails, trail heads, and water access
- Benefit to—and active engagement in—the evaluation, design, and/or implementation of conservation projects by communities, including host towns, and people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and others who have historically been excluded from equal access to nature's benefits