

Watershed Plan Development Grant



2026 Request for Applications (RFA)

Due March 20, 2026

The South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) is seeking proposals for the development of watershed plans. All watershed plans must include, at minimum, the nine elements specified by the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) watershed plan development guidance.

EPA's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) for Source Water Protection (SWP) will fund watershed plan development for source water protection, which includes a wide variety of actions and activities aimed at safeguarding, maintaining, or improving the quality and/or quantity of sources of drinking water and their contributing areas. Proposed watershed plans must address ambient surface water pollutants that can impact source water for drinking water systems or public water supply wells.

I. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

South Carolina public organizations such as state agencies, public drinking water utilities, local governments, Councils of Government, public universities, soil and water conservation districts, regional planning commissions, public water systems, watershed organizations, and nonprofit organizations are eligible to receive this grant.

For-profit entities should not develop proposals for other organizations in anticipation of receiving a future contract. All sub-contracts awarded under a selected grant must be issued in accordance with federal and state procurement guidelines. This cautionary comment does not apply to for-profit entities *already* retained by organizations through such a procurement process. These funds cannot be used to pay for any work performed by consultants prior to the award of this grant.

II. ELIGIBLE PROPOSALS

This solicitation is solely seeking proposals to **develop or update a watershed plan** for future implementation projects within South Carolina. The watershed plan should include elements for implementation and protection of public drinking water sources. A watershed plan can enhance or augment a Source Water Protection Plan because it encompasses both the entire watershed that impacts the supply source and the delineated source water protection area in that watershed. This funding is specifically for a watershed plan, *not* a Source Water Protection Plan.

Once a watershed plan is in place, it becomes the guidance and framework for water quality improvement activities in that watershed. Having a watershed plan in place opens additional funding opportunities such as the EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grant for watershed plan implementation, as well as the potential for reduced interest rates to implement eligible activities using a Clean Water SRF loan.

A. WRITING WATERSHED PLANS

Watershed plans are developed to identify pollutants in a watershed, determine the sources of the pollutants, and describe what needs to be done to address each pollution source. A watershed plan *must* include stakeholder participation, assessment of the specific causes of impairments and sources of water quality problems, identification of measurable water quality goals, and the recommended implementation of specific actions needed to solve those problems—point *and* nonpoint. To be eligible to receive 319 funding for future watershed implementation projects, the watershed must have an approved watershed plan in place. Current federal 319 grant guidelines outline [EPA's nine elements](#) that must be included in a plan.

The completed watershed plan will outline an implementation strategy for the recommendations made in the plan. While data analysis is an important aspect of watershed planning and recommendations, most of the time, effort, and resources should *not* be spent on data analysis, but rather on the interpretation of data for implementation. Approved watershed plans are published for public use and should be concise and manageable for use by any stakeholders in a watershed.

The purpose of this solicitation for plan development is to assist stakeholders in preparing plans that may be eligible to receive 319 funding in the future. Of note, 319 funds are not available for use where an implementation project would assist in satisfying the requirements of an NPDES permit; therefore, a watershed plan must include significant and measurable 319-eligible best management practices (BMPs).

Ultimately, plans should demonstrate a clear, in-depth knowledge of the watershed, as well as the relationship to sources of drinking water and how activities in the watershed impact drinking water. Local groups are often best suited to develop and implement these plans as they are most familiar with their watersheds and their community. Drinking water utilities are highly recommended as partners, or as lead organizations.

B. ELIGIBLE WATERSHEDS

South Carolina watersheds that provide source water for public drinking water systems, including surface water intakes or public water supply wells, are eligible project areas for funding under this grant. See Public Water Supply in the [SC Watershed Atlas](#) or contact NPS staff for more information.

Selected watersheds should be chosen so that elements of the completed plan may then be eligible for use of 319 funds, although communities are encouraged to explore multiple funding options for plan implementation. Selection for funding under this RFA does not guarantee future 319 implementation funding. Note that watershed plans are not meant to substitute or replace existing approved TMDLs. The load reductions prescribed in approved TMDLs must remain in place for permit requirements or other non-regulatory reduction goals. Watershed plans may build on these reductions and outline a set of best management practices needed to effectively reach them. Plans may address multiple pollutants.

Due to the relatively short timeline and watershed plan development requirements, proposals should have a limited watershed size to provide a workable focus area. Most accepted proposals cover a reasonable geographic scope of one to four 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs). Proposals for a portion of one 12-digit HUC, focused on a proposed BMP to address a particular impaired site, may also be considered.

C. GRANT LENGTH

The watershed plan development timeline is 24 months. A completed first draft is due within 90 days of grant completion and a final version is due by the end of the grant period.

D. FINAL PRODUCT

Watershed plans must include, at a minimum, all nine required elements. While watershed plans may include considerable introductory, supporting, and alternative material, each of the nine elements should be clearly identified in the plan.

A *complete* initial draft is due 90 days prior to grant completion. This ensures time to make necessary revisions before a final draft is submitted. Multiple rounds of drafts and revisions by SCDES may be necessary before a final watershed plan is approved. Final watershed plans are due by the grant end date. A plan will not be approved before all edits and revisions are complete, regardless of the grant end date.

III. SOLICITATION DEADLINES

All proposals and supporting documents must be submitted electronically to NPSGrants@des.sc.gov by 5 p.m. on March 20, 2026.

Once proposals are received, a review committee will select eligible proposals for funding. For each proposal selected, the applicant may be asked to submit a revised workplan, incorporating the comments received from the review committee. Following the submittal of the revised workplan, SCDES will conduct a final review.

SCDES reserves the right to (1) make no awards following this solicitation, (2) reject all proposals, or (3) to reject proposals which, in the judgment of SCDES staff, fail to reasonably meet requirements of the RFA.

IV. AVAILABLE FUNDING

Watershed Plan Development Grants will be funded with monies provided to SCDES by EPA's DWSRF set-aside for SWP. For this RFA cycle, SCDES is allocating \$200,000 for all (not each) proposals funded under this RFA. No maximum funding amount is specified in this solicitation, but proposals must clearly justify all costs included in the proposal. No non-federal match is required and will not be included in the actual grant contract; however, match funding may be necessary to meet project costs and demonstrates community support and investment.

All watershed plan development grants, regardless of funding source, are funded by quarterly reimbursement. SCDES is not liable for any costs incurred by the grantee prior to the date of grant signature, and no payment in advance of the grant signature can be made. Applicants may incorporate previously completed work in the watershed plan, but no funding can be used to pay for work performed prior to the signed grant agreement.

Up to 90% of the awarded grant amount will be available for reimbursement throughout the watershed plan development grant timeline. To ensure plan approval, the final 10% of grant funding will not be available until the final watershed plan is approved by SCDES.

V. APPLYING

The required grant proposal form and budget form are available on the [Watershed Plan RFA page](#). Any concerns or questions can be sent to NPSGrants@des.sc.gov.

The proposal form should include extensive detail about the proposed watershed plan development and its budget. In addition to the proposal form, all applicants are required to provide a digitally created location map of the targeted watersheds or area on one page of 8.5"x11" paper clearly showing, *at a minimum*, the SCDES monitoring sites, waterbodies, towns, drinking water intakes, public water supply wells, and watershed boundaries. This information can be found in the [SC Watershed Atlas](#). For watersheds near MS4-permitted coverage, the permit boundaries should also be included.

Email your complete proposal form and attachments to NPSGrants@des.sc.gov by 5 p.m. on March 20, 2026. Only emails sent to this address will be considered. Confirmation e-mails will be sent upon receipt of proposals.

VI. FAQs

A. Are matching funds required?

Matching funds are not required. Selected proposals will be funded 100% by monies provided to SCDES by EPA's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund set-aside for Source Water Protection. However, additional consideration may be given to proposals that show supplementary funds leveraged for watershed plan development.

B. Can SCDES staff review draft documents?

NPS staff and Watershed Coordinators are available to review draft proposals on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit draft materials and to submit those materials well before the application period closes to receive timely feedback.

C. What grant conditions will apply to selected proposals?

The applicant for each selected proposal must enter into a written Grant Agreement with SCDES that specifies terms for completing the watershed plan. The Grant Agreement is in the form of a contract formatted according to standard SCDES contract procedures. Watershed plans developed under this grant agreement then belong to SCDES and will become public documents. A sample grant agreement is available upon request. Some of the key elements included are as follows:

Administrative Capacity

A "Grantee" (grant recipient) must have administrative capacity to comply with the applicable requirements of federal "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements" (40 CFR Part 30 or 31) or "Uniform Administrative Requirements" (2 CFR Part 200 and 1500) and State requirements. Applicable federal requirements will be specified in an executed grant agreement. This includes, but is not limited to, managing allowable costs, non-federal match, cost accounting and invoicing, audit procedures, records access, record keeping, sub-agreements, and progress reporting.

Timely Implementation and Closeout

The first draft of the watershed plan will be due 90 days before grant close and the final version will be due at the close of the grant period. Note that the final invoices and reports will be due 30 days after the close of the grant. No costs will be allowed after the close of the grant.

Pre-Award Costs

SCDES is not liable for any cost incurred by the Grantee or any Grantee subcontractors prior to the contract effective date. SCDES cannot authorize any payments prior to final approval and signing of the grant agreement.

Reporting and Invoice Requirements

The grantee agrees to submit interim **quarterly** progress reports and invoices.

Fund Reimbursement

Grantees will be paid by reimbursement only. Applicants should have funds available to cover costs each quarter while waiting for reimbursement. 90% of the awarded grant funds will be available for reimbursement during the watershed plan development timeline. The remaining 10% of funds will only be available following approval of the watershed plan.

Monitoring and Environmental Data Quality Assurance

Due to the relatively short grant duration, monitoring will not be a *funded* component of the watershed plan development proposal. Watershed plans may utilize any existing data collected prior to plan development (including applicable volunteer monitoring data), but no new data is envisioned as part of watershed plan development through this grant. Data collection may occur outside of the grant with outside funding.

Food and Promotional Items

No food or promotional items may be purchased with these grant funds.

GIS Requirements

All selected proposals that have a Geographic Information System (GIS) component must follow EPA/SCDES GIS guidance. Please ensure the most current protocols are used.

Travel

Travel expenses, including room and board, incurred in connection with the watershed plan development will be limited to reimbursement at the standard State rate in effect during the period of the grant agreement and will be included within the maximum amount of the contract. The 2026 mileage rate is \$0.725 per mile. The State standard rate for hotels will be at the established Federal Government Services Administration rate or below for the area of travel. These rates can be found at [gsa.gov](https://www.gsa.gov).

Management Fees and Similar Charges

Management fees or similar charges in excess of the direct costs and approved indirect rates are not allowable. The term “management fees or similar charges” refers to expenses added to the direct costs to accumulate and reserve funds for ongoing business expenses, unforeseen liabilities, or for other similar costs which are not allowable under this solicitation. This includes any markup added to eligible costs.

VII. REVIEW CRITERIA

The review committee will evaluate proposals with the following criteria:

- Does the proposal describe protection of sources of drinking water and specify ambient surface water pollutants that impact source water?
 - Does the organization demonstrate administrative capacity, expertise, and experience?
 - Are the included HUCs part of the source water for surface water intakes or public water supply wells?
 - Is the proposal clear and thorough, with well-defined steps for completion of all nine elements of the plan?
 - Are all budget costs reasonable, explained, and justified?
 - Does the proposal identify appropriate partners, including the drinking water system?
 - Does the proposal provide a detailed description of the watershed? Is it of reasonable geographic scope? Does it include the number of drinking water customers and demonstrate local interest in protection and restoration?
 - Does the proposal demonstrate use of water quality monitoring data in the area?
 - Are all required attachments present? This includes a digitally created map showing monitoring sites, waterbodies, towns, target watershed boundaries, surface water intakes, public water supply wells, and MS4 permit boundaries, if applicable. This also includes Commitment Letters from all cooperating organizations.
 - Does the proposal identify potential BMPs that will be addressed in the watershed plan?
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VIII. DISCLAIMER STATEMENT

The SCDES NPS Program reserves the right to refuse any proposal which does not meet the RFA requirements for:

- Eligibility
- Complete budget justification
- Submission of required information

Additionally, proposals which, in the judgment of SCDES staff, fail to reasonably meet other requirements of the RFA may also be rejected.

IX. ATTACHMENTS

The grant proposal form and budget form are available on the [Watershed Plan RFA page](#) as well as helpful documents for applicants.

See the SCDES [Watershed Plan Development Grants page](#) for additional resources and guidance.

X. Contacts

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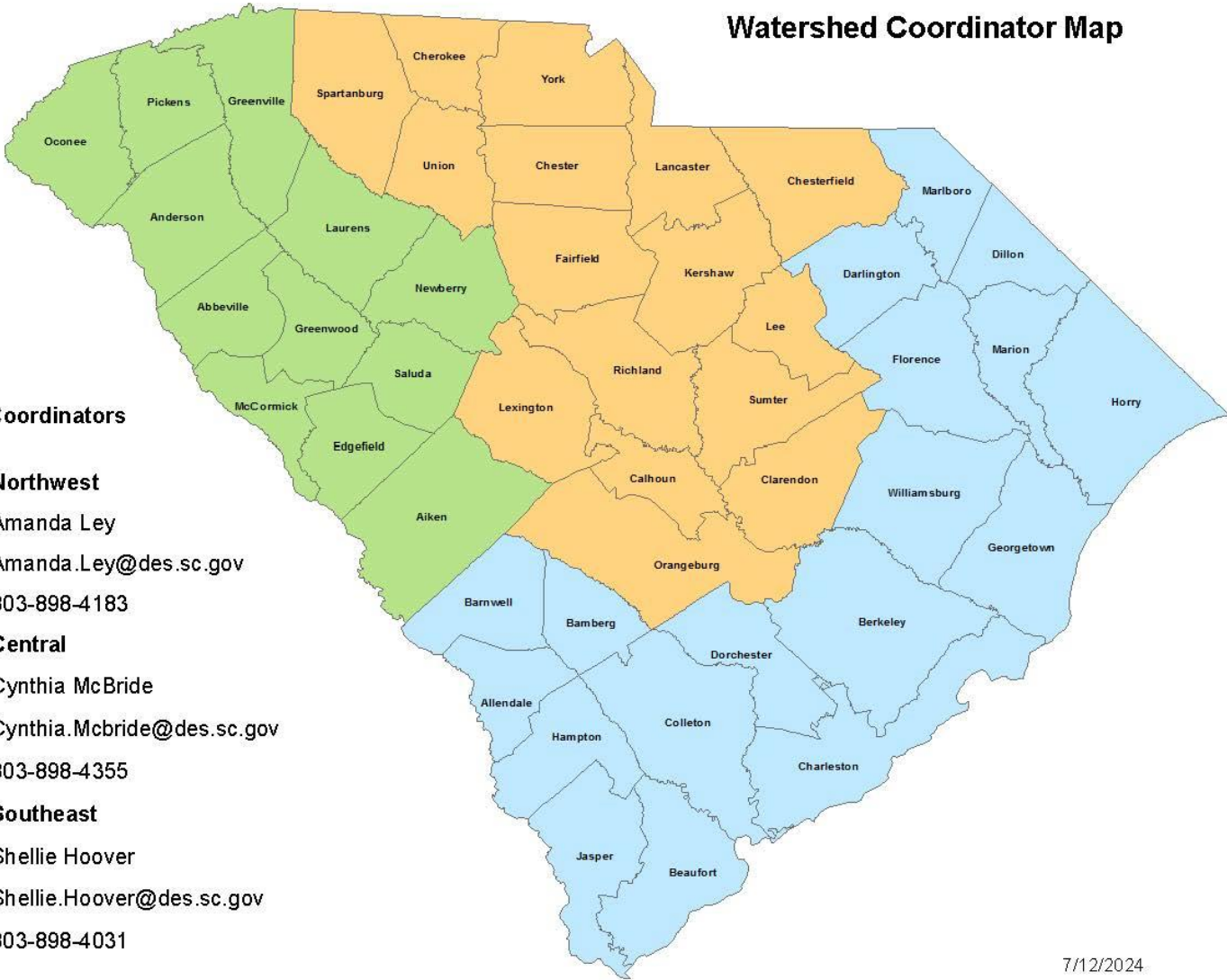
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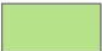
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Watershed Coordinator Map



Watershed Coordinators



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