

Trees for Watersheds Grant Announcement 2027

Since 2005, **Trees for Watersheds** (formerly TreeVitalize Watersheds), led by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) in the five-county southeastern Pennsylvania region, has focused on tree planting along stream corridors, wetlands, adjacent upland areas, headwaters, and naturalized stormwater basins. Through this program, dozens of watershed restoration projects are conducted throughout the region every year, resulting in well over 100,000 trees planted in sensitive water protection zones. The program receives funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and corporate sponsors Aqua PA and PECO, as well as substantial in-kind contributions from various partners.

Trees for Watersheds depends on collaboration between the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the Conservation District offices in each of the four surrounding SE PA counties to guide and help implement watershed restoration projects in their service areas. These organizations will provide technical assistance to you as you develop your project and write your application. Please refer to page 4 for contact information.

Who Can Apply

Anyone with a good project on permanently protected land can apply, such as non-profit organizations, municipalities, schools, scouting groups and community organizations. If your organization is not a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit you can partner with a registered nonprofit or your local government to apply. Nonprofits must be 501(c)(3) and registered with the PA Bureau of Charitable Organizations. New applicants must have at least one appropriate representative complete PHS Tree Tenders® training or equivalent education or training to be eligible. Private landowners can apply through a registered non-profit or local government if they are willing to sign a 20-year agreement promising to leave the plantings undisturbed and allow maintenance of the plantings

Grant applications should only be submitted for projects that are “shovel ready” (meaning that with sufficient funding, plantings can be completed and billed prior to the reimbursement request deadline, as all associated permits and/or authorizations have already been secured, where necessary).

Project Scope: Your project should be designed such that all site preparation and planting will take place within the grant period (Spring or Fall 2027). Projects not completed during the grant period will need to apply to the following grant cycle. For larger sites that might constitute multi-year projects, it is best to break the site down into a subsection that can be fully prepped and planted during the grant period – you would need to apply for the next phase in a future year (many of our grantees have taken that approach).

Projects can request a maximum of \$25,000 in grant funds and have a total of \$50,000 in total project expenses. If your project exceeds either of those amounts, please reach out in advance of submitting your application to discuss. Our budget for all cumulative grants varies from year to year. Past grants (not including grantee match) have averaged around \$6,000.

Target areas and project types: Streamside and sourcewater protection areas, on public lands or private permanently protected lands. Projects may include stream buffers, wetlands, plantings on adjacent uplands (where stormwater “sheet flow” across the land would drain directly into the stream below) and naturalization of stormwater basins. Landowners must be willing to sign the DEP Landowner Agreement, which requires all plantings to be undisturbed (except for maintenance) for a period of 20 years. Both the Landowner and the applicant (if separate parties) must sign the Operations and Maintenance Agreement.

Project Ranking

To fund as many projects as possible with limited funding, project approval will consider various factors, including the level of partner match, the price of plant material used, and consultant costs, if any. Average cost per tree (total grant request divided by total number of trees) is also used. Individual site and project considerations will also be considered.

Each round of applications is reviewed by a Review Board. If funding does not allow for support of all projects that meet basic eligibility requirements, the following criteria will be used to rank and prioritize projects:

- Projects that consider the specific site conditions and context of surrounding development are preferred.



- Wider buffers are preferred, particularly those exceeding an average width of 30 feet.
- Project is designed to include multiple layers of tree canopy (understory and canopy) and herbaceous cover.
- Adjacent waterway is a Special Protection Water (Exceptional Value or High Quality).
- The project sits within a watershed that feeds to a waterway that is a source water for local drinking water.
- Adjacent uses have a high potential to generate nutrient, sediment, and/or stormwater runoff, giving the potential for a new or enhanced buffer to filter high levels of pollutants. For example, intensive agriculture, impervious surfaces, industrial sites, etc.)
- Project includes public engagement and/or education (e.g. educational signage, public access, etc.).
- Riparian buffer plant palette compliments an existing high-quality buffer nearby.
- Project is a restoration of a previous existing buffer that was destroyed or degraded over time.
- Project increases the continuity of an existing riparian corridor or eliminates gaps in riparian forest cover.
- Project includes a credible long-term maintenance and stewardship plan, including invasive species management, watering, monitoring, and replanting as necessary.
- Project provides environmental benefits to underserved communities or communities disproportionately affected by poor water quality, flooding, or lack of tree canopy.

How to Apply

Contact your County Conservation District or, within Philadelphia, PHS (contact information included on page 4.) Your Conservation District will guide you through the steps involved in planning your project, including plant material selection, site preparation, landowner agreements, matching funds, and the required grant application documents (see below under "Grant Application Package"). It is recommended that you reach out to them to share your plans well in advance of the deadline in case application support is needed.

Grant Application Package

Send your completed application materials to your Conservation District listed by county on page 4. Only complete grant application packets will be considered for funding. A complete grant application package must be submitted to your Conservation District by December 31st, 2026 and must include:

- 1) An Application Completion Checklist, with all required items checked;**
- 2) A Project Bid Sheet (please include original MS Excel file);**

- 3) A brief Project Narrative;**
- 4) A Site Location map (in color. Can be annotated Google Map screenshot);**
- 5) A Landowner Agreement form including a signed Operation, Maintenance and Repair Plan;**
- 6) A W9 for the grantee;**
- 7) "Before" Pictures.**

All forms are posted at the PHS Website: [Trees for Watersheds Grant Program](#)

Deadlines

Submission of your complete grant application is due to the appropriate entity by December 31st, 2026. Once initial reviews have been completed, the Conservation Districts will forward all complete grant application packages to PHS for final review. Submission of your Request for Reimbursement and required documentation for Spring 2027 projects is due to your grant advisor by May 1st, 2027. Request for Reimbursement for Fall 2027 projects is due by November 30th, 2027.

Activity	Date
2027 TfW Grant Announcement released	September 1, 2026
Grant Applications due to Conservation District	December 31, 2026
2027 TfW Grant Awards Announced	End of February 2027
Reimbursement Requests for <u>Spring</u> Projects due to Conservation District	May 1, 2027
Reimbursement checks released for Spring projects with properly completed paperwork	As approved by PHS. All checks released by June 15 th , 2027
Reimbursement Requests for <u>Fall</u> Projects due to Conservation District	November 30 th , 2027
Reimbursement checks released for Fall projects with properly completed paperwork	As approved by PHS. All checks

	released by January 31 st , 2028
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Project Reimbursement Request

Grantees will be reimbursed after project completion. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society will provide reimbursement to grantees for completed projects upon submission of:

- 1) Completed Request for Reimbursement Checklist;**
- 2) Completed Project Reimbursement form;**
- 3) Cover letter from applicant organization;**
- 4) Invoices and copies of receipts detailing all project related costs, including staff time and volunteer hours;**
- 5) A Landowner Agreement form including a signed Operation, Maintenance and Repair Plan (this can be the same as what was included with the application packet or include a revised maintenance and repair plan);**
- 6) Before and after photos of the site; and**
- 7) Updated Site Location Map in color.**

When submitting a Reimbursement Request, please be sure to provide/attach a copy of your completed Project Reimbursement Form in its original MS Excel file format.

Reimbursement requests for 2026 projects must be submitted to your Conservation District by **May 1st, 2027 (Spring Projects)** or **November 30, 2027 (Fall Projects)**. Incomplete or late submissions may result in a lower ranking on future projects.

Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

In addition to covering plant costs (including delivery/freight), the Trees for Watersheds grant may be applied toward site preparation and supplies such as tree stakes, mulch, watering bags, tree shelters and other deer protection. See [2027 Trees for Watersheds Eligible Expenses](#) document for more detail.

Required match: Trees for Watersheds will cover up to 75% of the total project costs. The remainder must be covered by other sources as part of the required minimum 25% match. **Funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's other Growing Greener programs are not eligible to be used as match.** In-kind

contributions, such as volunteer and staff time for planting, site preparation, and maintenance are applicable towards those match requirements. For volunteer effort match, volunteer sign-in sheets are required and must be submitted to document the number of volunteers and the hours those volunteers participated. Staff time must be documented with timesheets. Monitoring and maintenance of previous Trees for Watersheds projects may be counted as match and documented via timesheets and/or volunteer sign-in sheets as applicable.

Tree stock: All projects must use native Pennsylvania species. Trees are typically acquired as container stock, though bare root and ball-and-burlap (B&B) trees are also acceptable. Use of B&B trees should be limited and cost less than \$100 each. The size of the tree stock can vary widely, depending on the site, planting method, and other considerations. However, an average cost of \$25 per tree or less is preferred. Note: The local natural plant community as recorded in the Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania section of the [Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program website](#) should be taken in consideration when selecting the planting material for the project. Identifying native plants present in the project site area is another good way to select plants, although more native species can possibly be added for diversity.

Other plants: Trees alone are rarely enough for an ecological restoration project. Shrubs and herbaceous plants may be needed as well. Trees for Watersheds funding can be used to cover the cost of some complementary plant material, provided it is also native to eastern Pennsylvania. However, **trees must account for at least 80% of the total cost of Plant Materials.**

Consultant costs: The use of consultants is discouraged for most Trees for Watersheds projects but may be necessary in some cases. The maximum allowed amount in such cases is \$1,000 per project toward consultants' fees. Additional fees may be counted as match.

Conservation District fee: Your County Conservation District Office receives a \$200 fee for each project to help offset the staff time spent by the Watershed Specialist. This fee is not calculated as part of the grant and should not be included in any forms you submit.

Other Grant Guidelines

Project changes: Sometimes a project must be cancelled or modified. If this occurs, please contact your Conservation District to discuss any changes. PHS will issue final approval for changes via email to the applicant and county Conservation District. Any cancellations should be reported as soon as possible, so that those funds might be used elsewhere. Failure to discuss changes with your Conservation District may result in ineligibility for reimbursement.

Funding credit: In all communications, the following statement must be used to attribute credit to each funder: "This restoration project was made possible by the Trees for Watersheds Grant program, managed by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and local conservation districts, with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Growing Greener program, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Aqua, an Essential Utilities company."

Signage: Informational signage at planting sites is encouraged, whether temporary or permanent. If signage is installed, proper credit for the partnering organizations should be incorporated, including PHS, Trees for Watersheds, DEP Growing Greener, DCNR, Aqua PA, and any other funders. These signs should be displayed at least a week prior to and a week after the planting and should be returned to your Conservation District. Permanent signs must give credit to the above funders and display their logos. Signage is eligible for reimbursement up to a \$1,000 limit. You may erect a more expensive sign if you are able to afford the extra amount, which you can count as match. Logos are available from PHS staff.

PA One Call Notification: In certain cases, underground utilities (including but not limited to electric, gas and sanitary and stormwater sewers) and their associated rights-of-way exist within areas where riparian buffer restoration and/or enhancement activities are being planned and implemented. For public safety and other reasons, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Underground Utility Line Protection Law PA Act 287 of 1974 (as amended by Act 121 of 2008) *requires you to inform the utilities of any type of work involving the movement of earth with powered equipment*. Know what's below. Call 1-800-242-1776 before you dig. For additional information, please visit PA One Call System, Inc. at <http://www.pa1call.org>

Training Requirements: New applicants are required to complete a **PHS Tree Tenders®** training or equivalent training/education on proper tree selection, planting

and establishment prior to completing their Trees for Watersheds project. There must be at least one trained Tree Tender on the planting team or someone with equivalent training. For more information, contact trees@pennhort.org. Information about Tree Tenders training opportunities can be found at <https://phsonline.org/programs/tree-programs>

To apply for a Trees for Watersheds grant, contact the appropriate point of contact below for your area:

Bucks County Conservation District

Karen Ogden
215-345-7577 ext. 107
kogden@bucksccd.org

Chester County Conservation District

Cori Trice
610-455-1384
ctrice@chesco.org

Delaware County Conservation District

Chris Cook
610-892-9484
CookC@co.delaware.pa.us

Montgomery County Conservation District

Brian Vadino
610-489-4506 ext. 15
BVadino@montgomeryconservation.org

Philadelphia County Conservation District

Olivia Glinsky
215-988-8844
Oglinsky@pennhort.org



Trees for Watersheds Grants

For more information about the Trees for Watersheds program, contact Olivia Glinsky, PHS Director of Special Initiatives, at 215-988-8844 or oglinsky@pennhort.org

