

National Fish Habitat Board

FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP APPLICATION

Date: 5/17/2024

PARTNERSHIP INFORMATION

Partnership Name: The Eastern Brook Trout Brook Trout Joint Venture

Primary Contact (address, email, and phone):

Lori Maloney

lori.maloney@canaanvi.org;

917-751-2616

Partnership web site: www.easternbrooktrout.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (500 word maximum)

Note: Provide a summary of this application by briefly restating the high point(s) of each section.

The Eastern Brook Trout is a beautiful fish of cultural, recreational, and economic importance, and an icon of clean water. In 2004, in response to the alarming decline of this species, the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) formed as a coalition of partners dedicated to keeping wild Brook Trout on the map for future generations. One of the nation's first Fish Habitat Partnerships, the EBTJV operates in the historic eastern United States (U.S.) range from Georgia to Maine, which is about 70% of Brook Trout habitat across the U.S.

The mission of the EBTJV is to secure resilient populations of wild Brook Trout by protecting, enhancing, and restoring aquatic habitat and increasing human connections to, and stewardship of, our natural environment. The EBTJV advances this mission by completing landscape-level scientific assessments on the status of wild Brook Trout which drive the development of shared conservation priorities. The partnership provides vital decision-support tools and web-based data management systems. It also fosters outreach efforts that build stewardship support for conserving wild Brook Trout and directs resources to essential on-the-ground wild Brook Trout conservation projects.


The EBTJV works across jurisdictional lines to set coordinated conservation priorities and strategies. It is governed by a Steering Committee of 24 representatives from state and federal agencies, and Non-governmental Organizations, and has one coordinator whose position is hosted by a 501 c(3) sponsor, the Canaan Valley Institute. Sixteen of the 17 states in the EBTJV geography are currently represented on the SC. The EBTJV MOU has been signed by 38 organizations. The EBTJV also has over [370 partners](#) who have applied for, funded, provided technical assistance for, or sponsored EBTJV fish habitat conservation projects since 2006.

The EBTJV has led the way for landscape-scale conservation planning for Brook Trout through range-wide

salmonid occupancy assessments. The original assessment in 2006 at the subwatershed scale was the first comprehensive analysis of its kind documenting the loss of historic Brook Trout habitat, and remains widely cited. It was followed by an assessment and analysis at the catchment and patch scale in 2015, which not only provided a management-relevant picture of the state of Brook Trout across the range, but provided defensible, comprehensive data that are utilized by agencies, conservation groups, and funders. An update to this assessment will be made in 2024.

The assessment also forms the foundation for EBTJV's numeric Range-wide Goals and Objectives and priority Conservation Actions. These goals and actions are promoted by the EBTJV annual request for Brook Trout conservation projects. EBTJV has supported 106 on the ground Brook Trout conservation projects with \$4.05 M in NFHP funds and \$22.3 M in partner funds, opening 448 stream miles and restoring 358 acres of riparian habitat.

The EBTJV serves as a hub for information on science-based management of Brook Trout. With recent improvements to its website, informational events, and targeted educational materials, the EBTJV continues to effectively promote connections among Brook Trout, watershed health, stream health, and human communities.




The challenge:


Eastern Brook Trout is a beautiful fish whose presence tells us about the health of our waters.

Loss and ongoing degradation of its sensitive homes has resulted in the species only being found in a fraction of the waters where it once lived.

The approach:



The EBTJV works with partners to enact meaningful conservation, science, and recovery projects that are showing real conservation benefits.



Science-based conservation:

The EBTJV:


- hosts the Eastern Brook Trout assessment and status map, and other tools.
- has identified strategies and actions to guide conservation decisions at local, regional, and range-wide levels.

On-the-ground work 2006- 2023


On-the-ground projects	106
Fish barriers removed	116
Riparian acres restored/enhanced	358
Stream miles opened	448

Brook Trout habitat work flows downstream:


Buffers against flooding




Protects sources of drinking water



Provides fishing and recreational opportunities




Increases property values by improving the environment



facebook.com/EBTJV

[instagram EBTJV](https://instagram.com/EBTJV)

[Youtube @brooktrout](https://youtube.com/@brooktrout)



www.easternbrooktrout.org

EBTJV infographic showing partnership

rationale, conservation project outcomes from 2006-2003, and co-benefits of Brook Trout habitat conservation work.

PARTNERSHIP RATIONALE (500 word maximum)

a. Describe the fish and fish habitat focus or purpose around which your FHP was organized

Eastern Brook Trout is a recreationally and culturally important species that represents healthy watersheds. Ongoing habitat degradation has resulted in this species only being found in a fraction of the waters where it once lived. In 2004, state and federal agencies, conservation groups and academics formed the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV). Through science-based planning the EBTJV has identified strategies and actions to guide conservation decisions at local, regional, and range-wide levels.

b. What is the mission/vision of your Partnership?

The mission of the EBTJV is to secure resilient populations of wild Brook Trout by protecting, enhancing, and restoring aquatic habitat and increasing human connections to, and stewardship of, our natural environment.

Our vision is healthy coldwater systems with fishable Brook Trout populations throughout their historic eastern geographic range.

c. Provide the goals and objectives of your Partnership. Priority species, habitats, geography, or project type, if any, can be included here.

The strategic goals of the EBTJV are: (1) conserve, enhance and restore Brook Trout populations that have been impacted by habitat modification, or other threats and disturbances; (2) encourage partnerships among management agencies and stakeholders to seek solutions to issues such as regional environmental and ecological threats; (3) develop and implement outreach and educational programs to ensure public awareness of the challenges that face Brook Trout populations; and (4) develop support for implementation of programs that perpetuate and restore Brook Trout throughout their historic range.

The EBTJV has defined numeric targets to track Brook Trout conservation progress, which are linked to the partnership’s range wide status assessment at the catchment scale.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES (by 2022)
Increase the average size (km ²) of wild Brook Trout patches, which is currently 19 km ²	Increase the size (km ²) of 30 wild Brook Trout patches.
Restore wild Brook Trout to catchments where they were extirpated	Establish wild Brook Trout in 15 extirpated catchments.
Maintain the current number of wild Brook Trout patches (i.e. no net loss)	-Retain at least 6,022 allopatric wild Brook Trout patches (1.1) across the EBTJV geographic range. -Retain at least 3,838 sympatric wild Brook Trout patches (1.2, 1.3, and 1.4) across the EBTJV geographic range.
Increase connectivity within and among wild Brook Trout catchments	Complete Aquatic Organism Passage projects within 45 wild Brook Trout catchments.

The EBTJV has six priority Conservation Actions that the partnership promotes to achieve its range wide goals and objectives for conservation.

- Increase recreational fishing opportunities for wild Brook Trout
- Conserve and increase habitats that support robust wild Brook Trout populations
- Restore and reconnect suitable habitats adjacent to robust wild Brook Trout populations
- Conserve genetic diversity of wild Brook Trout populations
- Minimize threats to wild Brook Trout populations (e.g., degraded water quality, invasive species, altered hydrologic regimes)
- Conserve unique wild Brook Trout life history strategies (e.g., lacustrine populations, large river populations, and coastal populations)

d. Describe how the geographic boundaries of your partnership are appropriate to prioritize and address regional habitat needs

The EBTJV works in CT, GA, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, NC, OH, PA, RI, SC, TN, VT, VA, WV. This encompasses the historic US eastern range of Brook Trout, as the causes for Brook Trout decline within this region are similar. By functioning at this scale, the EBTJV is better positioned to secure strategic actions for Brook Trout conservation while maximizing the expertise of existing partnerships.



Map indicating the historical range of Brook Trout in the eastern USA (shaded area; includes a 50-km buffer zone around the range; from MacCrimmon and Campbell 1969).

SECTION 1. Demonstrate how your Partnership promotes the health of important fish and fish habitats (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(A)). (up to 1000 words)

Note: Promote is broadly interpreted here to include on-the-ground restoration, maintenance, construction, conservation, or preservation of fish or fish habitats, as well as outreach, education, and research regarding Partnership projects, fish or fish habitat issues, the National Fish Habitat Partnership, or Board's national priorities.

Note: Throughout this application the term project is intended to mean discrete or individual projects solicited, managed, or collaborated on by the Partnership, as opposed to a group of projects presented as a package to the Board on an annual basis.

a. How do the goals, objectives, and priorities of your Partnership help promote fish and fish habitats.

The strategic goals, objectives, and priorities of the EBTJV were developed by managers, biologists, and researchers to specifically conserve, protect, and enhance populations of wild Brook Trout and their habitats. The partnership works at landscape scale, which assists with advancing its priorities for work and funding at the regional and local levels.

b. Describe how you solicit and prioritize fish or fish habitat projects for funding.

To solicit Brook Trout [conservation projects](#) for funding, the EBTJV sends a Request for Proposals (RFP) via email to ~900 partners each year. This RFP is also posted on [EBTJV's website](#) and social media.

Examples of project types that the EBTJV supports include:

- restoring aquatic connectivity by removing small dams and replacing undersized culverts;
- executing strategies that eliminate competition from non-native species (including removal);
- planting native shrubs and trees in riparian zones to provide shade and stream bank stabilization;
- adding large woody material to streams to add complexity, improve sediment sorting, and reconnect groundwater;
- restoring native Brook Trout to watersheds where it has been extirpated ; and
- implementing watershed conservation practices that reduce sediment and nutrient pollution.

The EBTJV Project Review Team assesses applications using EBTJV Steering Committee approved project [scoring criteria](#), which has been developed over many years and was amended for FY21 to incorporate America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act criteria more explicitly. A high priority is placed on projects that utilize proven methods that address the root cause of decline in the catchment, rather than just treating the symptom of the impairment. Priorities are placed on projects that address EBTJV's Conservation Actions, the NFHP National Conservation Priorities, state-level Action Plans, occur in Brook Trout patches or expand a Brook Trout patches, result in Brook Trout occupying habitat where it had been extirpated, and that increase fishing opportunities and/or public access (amongst many other criteria). Projects must contain an outreach component and monitor project success.

In addition to the written proposal, applicants must coordinate with and include a letter of endorsement from their respective State Fish and Wildlife Agency. Once the EBTJV reviewers have scored each proposal, the team meets to agree upon a prioritized ranking that is approved by the partnership's Steering Committee and then is submitted to the NFHP Board.

c. Provide summary statistics of numbers and types of fish or fish habitat projects implemented over the history of your Partnership to demonstrate activity, capacity, and success in promoting fish and fish habitats

In a typical year, EBTJV receives \$85,000 for operations (Coordinator salary and benefits, website hosting and support, sponsor indirect costs, meeting travel, and outreach materials), and about \$180,000-\$250,000 for on-the-ground projects. Culvert remediation has been the biggest category of projects funded, which reflects the scientific understanding of the value of connectivity to Brook Trout genetic integrity, climate resilience, and population persistence.

From FY06 - FY23, EBTJV has supported 106 conservation projects with \$4.05 M in NFHP funds and \$22.3 M in partner funds, which opened 448 stream miles and restored 358 acres of riparian habitat. Other projects added wood and complexity to stream and river channels and addressed Abandoned Mine Drainage (AMD) impacts. In FY22, the EBTJV implemented a one-time program to support training and outreach related to Brook Trout conservation that resulted in four partners receiving sub-awards through a competitive process. The entire project funding cycle also provides many opportunities to promote the successes of partner organizations and to tell the story of the connections among Brook Trout, watershed health, stream health, and human communities.

d. Describe the type and amount of outreach/education your Partnership conducts (e.g., how do you highlight the issue of fish and fish habitat health in project solicitation, project selection, outreach and education events, social media, project implementation, etc.).

The EBTJV's ability to serve as a hub for information and communication exchange between the resource management community and to the public continues to expand.

The EBTJV distributes e-newsletters to ~900 members on its listerv on a regular basis. Newsletter links to original news items and interviews, science publications, and funding notices are especially popular (open rate 40 - 50%). EBTJV continues to grow its social media presence with a reach of ~50,000/year on

Facebook, [Instagram](#), and a new [YouTube channel](#). Finally, the EBTJV has hosted several successful “lunch n learn” science discussions and will continue this effort.

The EBTJV’s [website](#) contains information about the organization, Brook Trout conservation priorities, decision support tools, Brook Trout occupancy data, and NFHP funded projects. Traffic to the partnership’s website was first tracked in 2022, which followed a major redesign of the site, and showed there were 72,600 visits that year. In 2023, after additional site edits and more deliberate outreach, the number of visits grew to 604,000. Based on direct feedback from site users and website tracking statistics, by section and page, much of the traffic is driven by both public and conservation professional users curious about where Brook Trout are located, their ecology, habitat requirements, and conservation strategies.

In 2022 the EBTJV partnered with the West Virginia Rivers Coalition to develop outreach materials describing the connections between Brook Trout, stream habitat projects, and drinking water for communities. Approximately 1,500 of these outreach brochures were distributed to watershed groups in West Virginia, and to 12 organizations across 10 states that requested them via an online form.

A portion of the FY22 NFHP funding supported eight sub-awards for training and outreach. This program was crafted to make funds available as sub grants, in cooperation with 501C(3) sponsor the Canaan Valley Institute. These awards allowed awardees to access funds for non-construction projects on a much shorter timeline and also allowed the EBTJV to fund training for on-the ground work, and to help new partnerships bring coldwater conservation messaging to landowners and the public.

In 2020 the EBTJV assisted with the development of a poster “Get to know your native Brook Trout” in partnership with Trout Unlimited’s Native Trout Workgroup, NFHP, Beyond the Pond, and Rep Your Water. The partnership has distributed several hundred of these via the Steering Committee and other partners.

SECTION 2. Demonstrate your Partnership’s ability to coordinate the implementation of priority projects that support the goals and national priorities set by the Board (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(B)). (up to 1000 words)

Note: Coordinate is interpreted here to include the activities necessary to solicit, review, prioritize, select, contract (with Partnership or partner acting on Partnership behalf), inspect, monitor, and report on fish habitats projects; it does not include those activities required to implement or conduct the project.

a. Describe the organizational structure and capacity of your Partnership and the duties and responsibilities of each position and organizational layer, individually and/or collectively to coordinate priority projects to successful completion (i.e., how does the Partnership itself or key partners take care of the steps – e.g., *soliciting, selecting, contracting, oversight, review and inspection, fund disbursement* – necessary for project implementation to occur).

EBTJV’s Steering Committee has members from 16 states, 4 Federal Agencies and 4 NGOs ([link](#)). Related to the coordination of priority projects that support NFHP priorities, the Steering Committee business includes guiding the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Brook Trout conservation strategies, and prioritizing EBTJV projects for funding.

The Steering Committee is supported by a full-time Coordinator whose duties include overseeing the annual EBTJV/NFHP habitat funding cycle. The Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that, ultimately, each year’s funding allocation from NFHP is utilized and leveraged to the greatest extent possible to improve Brook Trout populations and their habitats. The Coordinator leads the Project Review Team through revisions of the Request for Proposal (RFP) language, priorities, and scoring; shares the RFP via various channels, communicates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and state biologists about project review requests and deadlines; responds to inquiries from applicants; compiles proposals and scoresheets for the review team; organizes meetings to agree on ranking; writes the annual funding

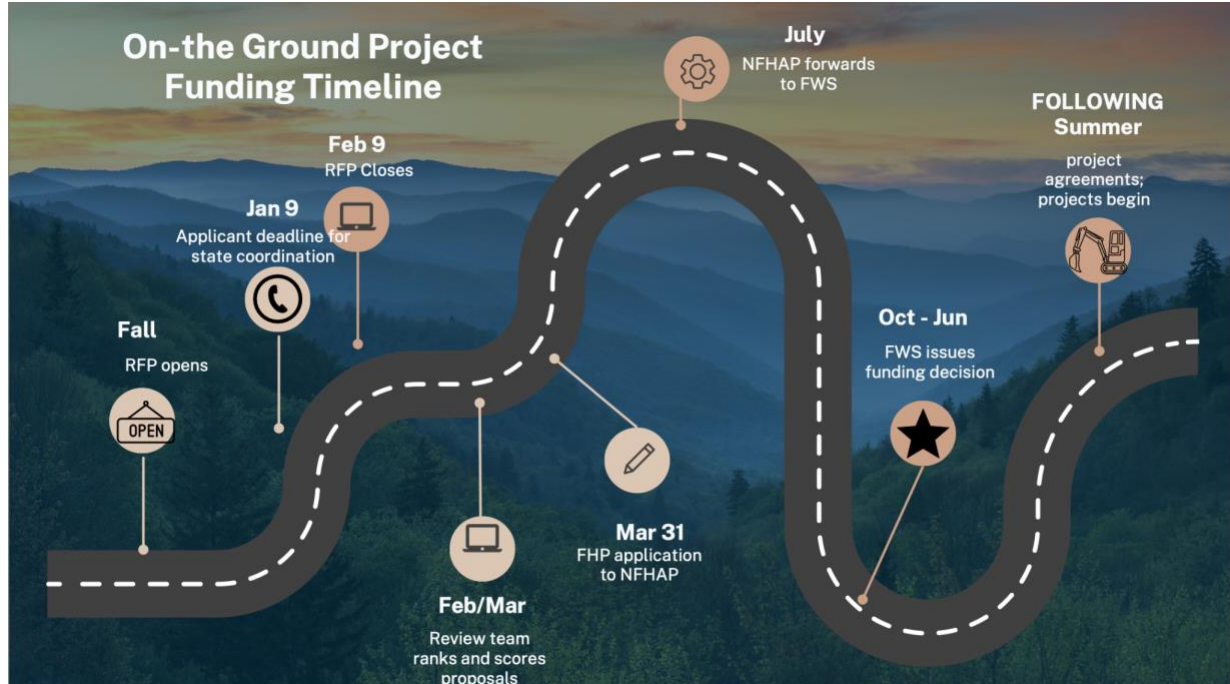
allocation and project list request to NFHP. Once award decisions are made by NFHP and FWS, the Coordinator communicates with the lead organization to help them understand the grant agreement process and remains in contact to get project updates and ensure projects will be completed prior to the grant end date.

The Project Review Team has representation from state agencies (TN, NC, VA, MD, MA, ME), the National Park Service, and FWS. This team revises the RFP based on prior year feedback and to incorporate current EBTJV and NFHP priorities in the requirements and scoring. The team also reviews proposals according to the [scoring criteria](#), meets to discuss project merits, and sets the prioritized ranking for NFHP consideration.

EBTJV State Fish and Wildlife Agency contacts serve an important role: they respond to initial requests by Brook Trout project applicants, help to guide project design to be most effective, and write letters of support. They weigh in on the value of many factors including location, methods, monitoring, partners, etc., and especially on what is known about the potential response of Brook Trout to conservation work in that specific location.

The Coordinator periodically requests information such as project photos, lessons learned, quotes from partners and agency representatives, and updates from Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) biologists, and crafts news stories for EBTJV outlets. Project data are also reported via the NFHP project tracking database.

FWS FWCO offices are critical to the EBTJV/NFHP habitat project funding process. Most importantly, they administer the funds that allow EBTJV/NFHP projects to happen (writing grant agreements, working with applicants to execute all steps including compliance, reviewing and approving reports, distributing fund draws, etc). In addition to these administrative duties, biologists also spend time assisting applicants with project generation, partnership formation, provide technical assistance, and even outreach.

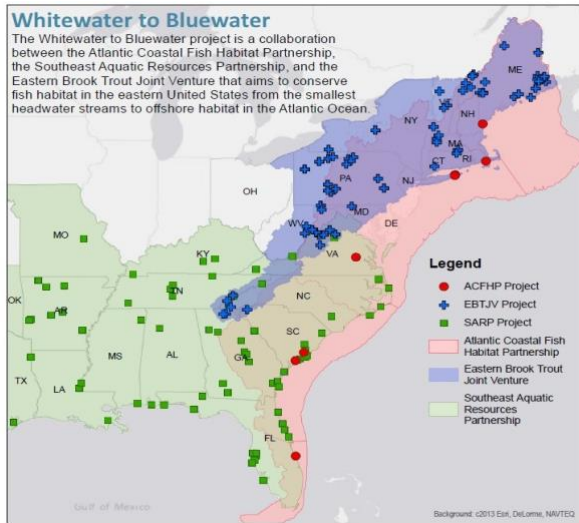


EBTJV annual timeline for conservation project funding. FY25 shown.

b. Describe how your Partnership’s priorities or targets that guide project solicitation and selection (for funding) are established and support the national priorities set by the Board.

The EBTJV’s RFP has been developed over many years based on knowledge of the best project types and locations for Brook Trout conservation. It also incorporates the NFHP National Conservation Priorities (NCPs) in two ways: 1) there is a direct question asking which NCPs will be addressed, and 2) EBTJV’s priorities align well with NFHP’s priorities.

c. Does your Partnership’s boundaries overlap with other Fish Habitat Partnerships, and if so, how do the Partnerships differentiate/coordinate/collaborate on fish and fish habitat projects.



Yes, the partnership’s boundaries overlap with the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) and the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP). In the southeast, the EBTJV shares habitat priorities for headwater streams with SARP, and Brook Trout partners particularly benefit from the work of SARP’s Aquatic Connectivity Team. With ACFHP, the EBTJV’s habitat priorities for coastal rivers overlap in the northern end of the Brook Trout range. The three FHPs worked collaboratively on a “Whitewater to Bluewater” initiative from 2012 to 2019. One of the outcomes of this initiative was the selection of the Rivanna watershed for future shared work.

SECTION 3. Demonstrate a self-governance structure that supports the implementation of strategic priorities for fish habitat (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(C)).

(up to 1000 words)

Note: Self-governance is broadly interpreted here to include governing activities conducted by the Partnership itself or activities conducted by partners in support of the Partnership (e.g., support from US Fish and Wildlife Service can be part of the governance structure).

a. Describe the governance and organizational structure of your Partnership and the decision-making protocol(s) (e.g., consensus, majority vote).

Guided by EBTJV’s [Charter/By-Laws](#), the Steering Committee is a self-directed focused on achieving the partnership’s vision of healthy coldwater systems with fishable wild Brook Trout populations throughout their historic eastern geographic range. Participation on the EBTJV Steering Committee is voluntary. The Steering Committee is the decision-making body for the EBTJV partnership and has oversight responsibility for all EBTJV activities. The Chair and Vice-Chair positions are 2-year roles by election of the Steering Committee. Decisions are made via majority vote, with a quorum (10) needed to pass. The activities of the Steering Committee directly support the [Eastern Brook Trout Action Strategies](#). The Steering Committee meets quarterly by webinar and annually in person.

Committees currently include the following, which are populated primarily with members of the Steering Committee but also include volunteers from partnering organizations:

- Project Review Team: to revise and release the annual project RFP, and to review, score, and rank proposals for consideration by the EBTJV Steering Committee and the NFHP Board.
- Science and Data Committee: To facilitate applied research directed to answer questions relative to Brook Trout conservation actions and the establishment of a centralized, web-based, data management system. This committee also oversees the assessment data and products and has a workgroup dedicated to disseminating the results of the 2023 update to the range-wide assessment.

- Outreach and Communications Committee: To engage partners for the purpose of seeking solutions to regional and ecological threats, raise awareness of Brook Trout conservation outcomes among the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture's community of support, and communicate the partnership's accomplishments to targeted audiences.
- Fundraising: this team is not formally included yet in the EBTJV organizational structure, but has been working to develop a fundraising workplan since mid-2023. It interacts with the Outreach and Communications to craft effective messaging.

The EBTJV formulated a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) that confirms the intent of state, tribal, and federal fishery resource agencies, as well as interested non-governmental organizations, to participate in and support the partnership with its efforts to conserve wild Brook Trout and their habitats in the eastern portion of the United States. As of December 2019, [38 organizations](#) have signed the EBTJV's MOU.

The Steering Committee is supported by a full-time Coordinator who has many duties including running the business operations of the EBTJV, promoting the value of EBTJV's work and partners' work to conserve Brook Trout habitat, ensuring the committees are running effectively, writing and reporting on grants, convening meetings, responding to inquiries and requests, communicating with partners, and overseeing the annual conservation project RFP. The Coordinator also participates on the national level via the NFHP Partnerships and Science and Data Committees.

The EBTJV has an [annual workplan](#) that organizes tasks and actions under each of the four EBTJV Conservation Goals.

b. Describe how your Partnership conducts fiscal administration including your ability to accept, manage, track, disburse, and report on federal and state grant income.

The EBTJV's operations are supported by the Canaan Valley Institute, a 501c3 non-profit organization based in Davis, WV, that works to create healthy communities, vibrant economies, and clean watersheds across Central Appalachia. Beginning in 2021, CVI has held grants for EBTJV operations, primarily NFHP grants but also include smaller outside awards for the Coordinator's time. CVI supports the Coordinator's position (payroll, benefits); makes payments, tracks finances, and ensures its operations sufficient to maintain its status as a 501 c3 non-profit eligible to receive federal funding. CVI also supported management of grant funds as sub-awards for outreach and training under an FY22 grant.

Beyond the Pond, the 501 c3 arm of NFHP hosts the EBTJV's individual giving platform.

The EBTJV is grateful for the continued support of the USFWS staff in Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices (FWCO) in Regions 4 and 5, who are critical to the habitat project funding process. They administer the funds that allow NFHP supported projects to happen. Additionally, these biologists invest time assisting applicants with project generation, partnership formation, technical assistance, and outreach.

c. How does your Partnership governance structure promote joint strategic planning, establishment of Partnership priorities, project selection, and decision-making among partners or, if applicable, other Partnerships?

The EBTJV governance structure was intentionally designed to include representation from the agencies and organizations which are best suited to collaboratively conserve habitat for eastern Brook Trout. Committees meet approximately every other month and undertake projects and tasks that support the activities under the workplan, and which make progress towards the EBTJV Conservation Goals. Products of these products are taken to the Steering Committee for feedback and eventual action if needed at quarterly Steering Committee meetings. Committee membership (such as Project Review or Science and Data) may come from any partner of the EBTJV. Steering Committee representatives are appointed by the agency or organization that has a seat on the EBTJV Steering Committee, and that organization must be an MOU signatory to the EBTJV. When there are gaps, the EBTJV leadership recruits participation to a standing Committee or to become an MOU signatory as a first step. Additional opportunities to participate in EBTJV decision making occur at annual Partnership meetings.

d. Provide copies of your Partnership's governance documents (e.g., charter, memorandum of understanding, other).

EBTJV's [Charter/By-Laws](#)

[Memorandum of Understanding](#) and its [38 signatories](#)

SECTION 4. Demonstrate your Partnership's ability to develop local and regional relationships with a broad range of entities to further strategic priorities for fish and fish habitat (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(D)). (up to 1000 words)

Note: Entities and partners are terms used interchangeably throughout this application and refer to the collection of agencies, organizations, municipalities, individuals, governments, etc. that support and work with a Partnership. We understand you may have many different partners and providing an exhaustive summary of those entities may be outside the scope this Section. Please focus on "key" partners that demonstrate the breadth and depth of your Partnership's local and regional relationships.

a. Describe your Partnership's engagement with partners on fish and fish habitat priorities and projects within your region, especially touching on state and federal resource agencies, tribal entities, local communities, landowners, or private organizations.

Partnership engagement is at the core of EBTJV's operations. The partnership works primarily at the landscape scale, with Steering Committee and MOU signatory partners at the federal, state, and NGO level. There are currently 38 organizations that signed the EBTJV [MOU](#). The EBTJV understands that Brook Trout conservation work happens at local, regional, and range-wide scales. Partners at state and federal agencies are critical to connecting range-wide priorities and funding to the local level, where habitat conservation and restoration work happens.

The EBTJV works with local level partners in recruiting Brook Trout conservation projects through an annual request for proposals (RFP). A full list of partners who have led or contributed to EBTJV/NFHP funded conservation projects is [here](#). EBTJV's project funding cycle is important in communicating the value of the EBTJV priority Conservation Actions. To support local conservation, the EBTJV has developed a website section to help landowners and other groups find funding and technical assistance in their state, and produced and distributed a QR-code linked brochure for landowners, in cooperation with the West Virginia Rivers Coalition.

A portion of EBTJV's FY22 funding supported sub-awards for training and outreach. These awards allowed partners to access funds for non-construction projects on a much shorter timeline and funded training to boost the potential for future on-the ground work.

b. Describe your Partnership's key partners' and their interest/mission/philosophy in conserving fish and fish habitat, as well as their role in your Partnership's governance or operation, if any.

EBTJV's Key partners include 17 states (16 on Steering Committee), 6 federal agencies (4 on Steering Committee), 1 tribal organization, and 6 NGOs (4 on the Steering Committee). These agencies and groups are the foundational fisheries management and research organizations in their states or regions, which is why many of them helped to define the EBTJV, write plans, and became Steering Committee members. The partnership also works closely with the Chesapeake Bay Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and have helped ensure that Brook Trout remain a priority species in regional programs.

Each agency has its own set of priorities for Brook Trout, habitat conservation, and outreach, with many shared concerns and approaches. Quarterly steering committee meetings, annual meetings, symposia (such as EBTJV 2019 Symposium at AFS; Proceedings), partner workshops and EBTJV events such as lunch n'learn webinars, all provide opportunities for partners to learn, discuss challenges, and set shared priorities.

Brook Trout are the State Fish in ten (10) eastern states, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in most of the EBTJV member states, and incorporated into each states' [coldwater or trout management plan](#). Many states have designated high quality eastern Brook Trout fisheries that have special management regulations to protect these fish, and to improve and promote recreational fishing opportunities there.

Brook Trout are the conservation focus of nine National Forests, who collaborate with state agencies, federal highways administration, groups like TU and local watershed groups to plan, design and construct 10-20 projects a year with Brook Trout as the conservation target. The FWS funnels millions annually for fish passage and stream restoration projects for Brook Trout; in FY22 and 23 the Fish Passage Program through awarded over \$8.4M to nine (9) projects across six (6) states that benefited Brook Trout. National Park Service units like Great Smoky Mountain National Park are managing streams to protect and reintroduce eastern Brook Trout. Building on the EBTJV catchment data, NFWF has designated eastern Brook Trout focal areas in at least 6 grant programs in the eastern U.S. NFWF reports removing 248 barriers, enhanced 713 miles of in-stream habitat, and restored 1,024 miles of riparian buffers in Brook Trout waters. The US Geological Survey has dedicated entire research programs to understanding the ecological drivers of Brook Trout population health and locating and modeling the environmental conditions needed for persistence, especially in light of climate and global change.

Trout Unlimited (TU) has been a leader in Brook Trout habitat conservation work, and the EBTJV provides catchment level data as a primary layer of TU's Eastern Brook Trout Conservation Portfolio. In 2023, the partnership worked with TU on a Chesapeake Bay Goal Implementation Team funded project track the Chesapeake Bay Program's Brook Trout Outcome, summarizing over 5,000 projects on the ground by project type and objectives to see if there is any connection between changes in Brook Trout occupancy and funded projects.

Eastern Brook Trout have been designated by the Chesapeake Bay Program as one of the key indicators of the health of the Chesapeake Bay. The EBTJV continues to work with its Brook Trout Workgroup to elevate the visibility of and funding for Brook Trout habitat conservation, and to help set the workgroup's strategies. There is an unmet need for project management and landscape-level Brook Trout project coordination in other major watersheds. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), fisheries administrators from New York State, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and the EBTJV, with input from NFHP Board member Timothy Schaeffer, are proposing and designing a new collaboration in the Delaware River Watershed.

c. Provide an estimate of the overall number of partners your Partnership has worked with. If available provide a link to or a list of these entities.

The EBTJV has over [370 partners](#) who have applied for, funded, provided technical assistance for, or sponsored EBTJV fish habitat conservation projects since 2006.

d. Describe the procedures in place for communicating with your partners and for recruiting additional partners.

EBTJV Steering Committee members are the first step in networking; announcements, news, and other items of interest are disseminated from EBTJV through their agency or organization to their partners. Participation in regional and national meetings also keep the EBTJV connected to integral agencies and organizations. The EBTJV e-news listserv has about 900 subscribers. Website and social media are also important in reaching new audiences.

e. Provide documentation indicating support and commitment to your Partnership by key partners (e.g., federal or state agencies, Native American governments), regional Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, or similar entities.

Support of the EBTJV from other organizations such as federal or state agencies and Native American governments, and regional Associations is documented [in a pdf on the EBTJV website](#) which includes copies of each signed MOU.

SECTION 5. Development of a strategic plan that details required investments

for habitat conservation that addresses the strategic fish habitat priorities of your Partnership and the Board (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(E)). (up to 1000 words)

a. Describe the status of your Partnership's strategic plan and provide a copy of the plan with this application (file or link).

Conserving the Eastern Brook Trout: Action Strategies (2008) was the EBTJV's initial strategic plan and was based on the subwatershed assessment that brought to attention the drastic loss of Brook Trout populations from historic watersheds. The EBTJV referred to this plan as the Conservation Strategy, but for clarity in this application it is referred to as the "Strategic Plan". It is a goal-oriented, science-based, action plan that explicitly states Joint Venture partner goals, presents guidance for decision-making, and provides methods for evaluating success. In 2011, the EBTJV updated the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. In 2018 the EBTJV added additional numeric goals and objectives following the 2015 wild Brook Trout assessment completed at the catchment scale. This most recent update is: [Conserving the Eastern Brook Trout - Action Strategies \(2018\)](#). The EBTJV also produced several "Roadmap" documents as outreach mechanisms that summarized the key points in the Strategic Plan. See an infographic summary of the EBTJV strategic plans and supporting documents [here](#).

b. Describe the process used to identify your Partnership's strategic priorities

The EBTJV is a collaboration of many entities with an interest in Brook Trout conservation. Through the years there have been several iterations of its Strategic Plan developed with input from federal and state agency biologists, researchers, NGOs - in particular Trout Unlimited (TU) - and other interested parties.

In 2015, the EBTJV created an ad-hoc Conservation Strategy Committee and convened a meeting to establish a framework for incorporating the results from the 2015 assessment of Brook Trout status at the catchment scale into the Strategic Plan. ([Meeting agenda](#)). Steps taken included a review of the priorities and objectives in prior versions of the Strategic Plan, use of catchment assessment findings to modify the EBTJV's prior objectives at the state/regional/range-wide scales, and discussion of how to monitor and evaluate Brook Trout population responses to conservation actions.

c. Summarize the strategic priorities of your partnership (e.g., priority focal areas, key stressors, or impairments).

EBTJV's strategies include: Conservation Goals (there are four which focus on operational priorities such as encouraging partnerships); Range-Wide Goals and Objectives (these are numeric and time-bound goals for Brook Trout occupancy and connectivity), and Key Conservation Actions (actions, such as conserving genetic diversity of wild Brook Trout populations, that are understood to achieve success in conserving wild Brook Trout). The partnership's geography is the eastern native range for Brook Trout, from Georgia to Ohio to Maine, encompassing all habitats of Brook Trout: stream and river, pond and lake, coastal. The EBTJV has completed several analyses of impairments by sub-region. Conservation Actions are intended to address root causes of decline across the range.

d. Describe how your strategic plan/priorities are used to solicit and select fish habitat conservation projects and the process for finalizing the prioritized list of projects for submission to the NFHP Board.

EBTJV's first of four Conservation Goals is to conserve, enhance or restore wild Brook Trout populations that have been impacted by habitat modification, non-native species and other population level threats. To meet this goal, it is important that the partnership recruit high quality fish habitat conservation projects. Lasting solutions such as dam removals, culvert replacements, and riparian restoration, have been well represented in projects put forward by EBTJV to NFHP. Projects are vetted based on extensive criteria, including if the project is likely to result in an increase of fishable Brook Trout populations. This requires that the applicant is proposing the right action in the right place: for example, will it open miles of stream

where Brook Trout had previously been extirpated? Will it improve habitat in a known allopatric catchment? Will it increase the size of an existing Brook Trout patch? Thus, a successful application must address one of the EBTJV [Conservation Actions and quantitative Range-Wide Goals and Objectives](#). It must also address at least one of the NFHP National Conservation Priorities. The EBTJV application was developed over many years and includes 25 scoring categories that reflect these and other priorities of both EBTJV and NFHP. For full documentation, please see the [FY25 application instructions](#) and [Project Scoring Criteria](#).

e. Demonstrate that your Partnership’s strategic plan addresses the following (*reference to specific sections of or language in Partnership’s strategic plan is adequate*):

Demonstrate that your Partnership’s strategic plan addresses the following (reference to specific sections of or language in Partnership’s strategic plan is adequate):	EBTJV Strategic Plan (Eastern Brook Trout Action Strategies, 2018)	EBTJV Annual Workplan	EBTJV FY25 RFP
i. includes specific, measurable, achievable, time-bound goals and objectives;	Four range-wide Goals and five nested Objectives; pages 5-6	Workplan activities are organized under the EBTJV Conservation Goals, and many elements are time-bound within the year.	Question 5; Appendix B refers to Range-Wide Goals and Objectives
ii. supports the national priorities established by the Board;	The Key Conservation Actions (Pg 6) align well with NFHP Conservation Priorities. Pages 6-10 reference the Board’s 2015 National Assessment of Fish Habitats.	Objective 4: Ensure EBTJV remains a functioning Fish Habitat Partnership under the National Fish Habitat Partnership	Question 7; Appendix C refers to NFHP National Conservation Priorities
iii. connects to one or more goals and objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan;	EBTJV and its strategic plan were built in accordance with the National Fish Habitat Action Plan and aligns with all four of its goals.		

<p>iv. identifies desired outcomes in terms of habitat conditions and/or fish and aquatic community conditions;</p>	<p>EBTJV has four range-wide Goals and five nested Objectives; refer to pages 5-6.</p>	<p>Goal 4, Objective 3: review and update strategic priorities</p>	<p>Question 1: Project plan, Element b-d: project purpose, objectives, deliverables.</p>
<p>v. identifies strategic priorities in the form of geographic focus areas or key stressors or impairments, as examples;</p>	<p>The EBTJV was developed at a specific eastern range-wide scale; page 3. The plan and other documents identify causative agents of decline.</p>	<p>Goal 4, Objective 3: review and update strategic priorities</p>	<p>Question 1: Project plan, Element a: statement of need.</p> <p>Question 20: What are the root causes of degradation in the catchment(s) where the project is located and which of these are addressed by the project?</p> <p>Question 10 and 11: Catchment code and Wild Trout patch code</p>
<p>vi. connects priorities of the Partnership to state wildlife action plans, watershed plans, recovery plans, land and water use plans, or other regional-scale plans</p>	<p>The Conservation Strategy focuses conservation decisions at all delivery levels: Range-wide, State, and Local. (Page 5)</p>	<p>Goal 2, Objective 1: Support existing partnerships</p>	<p>Application question 21 asks for state wildlife plans and other relevant plans.</p>
<p>vii. identifies fish and fish habitat information gaps and priorities for filling gaps; and</p>	<p>Strategic Plan is built upon on the EBTJV Wild Brook Trout Assessment, which is used to locate gaps in known status.</p>	<p>Goal 4, Objective 1: update EBTJV catchment dataset</p> <p>Goal 4, Objective 2: maintain EBTJV business operations; item: maintain list of science and data needs</p>	<p>Question 24: project evaluation plan</p>
<p>viii. identifies conservation actions needed to address strategic priorities and achieve desired outcomes.</p>	<p>Eastern Brook Trout Action Strategies (2018) lists six Key Conservation Actions that are understood to achieve success in conserving wild Brook Trout.</p>	<p>Goal 4, Objective 3: review and update strategic priorities</p> <p>Goal 4, Objective 2: maintain EBTJV business operations; item: maintain list of science and data needs</p>	<p>Application question 6; Appendix C refers to EBTJV Conservation Actions.</p>

SECTION 6. Demonstrate your Partnership’s ability to develop fish habitat conservation priorities based on sound science and data, measure the effectiveness of fish habitat projects, and a clear plan as to how the Partnership’s science and data components will be integrated with the Board’s science and data efforts (ACE Act 204(c)(2)(G)). (up to 1000 words)

a. Describe how scientific information and data are used to establish your Partnership’s priorities.

The EBTJV has embedded the NFHP Science and Data Strategy into its strategic plan. This plan focuses on the causative agents of Brook Trout declines and it identifies strategies that effectively protect, conserve, and restore Brook Trout habitats because they are directly aimed at the key threats.

The eastern Brook Trout range-wide assessment is a critical tool for brook trout conservation planning. The EBTJV’s first assessment at the subwatershed scale (Hudy, 2008) has been cited 297 times. The 2015 assessment at the catchment scale is used by many partners to target and prioritize brook trout conservation efforts, support the need for increased protection and funding, track conservation successes, and highlight areas in need of study and monitoring.

EBTJV serves as a hub of information on brook trout science and conservation, and facilitates discussions between researchers and managers (e.g.: symposia in in 2018 and 2019; and lunch n’learn events). Many of EBTJV’s Steering Committee and Science and Data Committee members hold research roles within their agencies, co-author publications, and participate in regional workgroups like the Southern Division AFS Trout Committee, and thus are skilled at utilizing scientific information and data to develop management goals.

b. Explain how your Partnership has organized itself and its information systems to make use of scientific information, partners’ data, and other data to help set habitat conservation priorities.

The subwatershed assessment in 2006 was the first of its kind. The partnership created an assessment at the catchment level in 2015 and will release an update to it in 2024. This assessment makes use of data from 17 states, several national parks, and tribes. The catchment and patch level data on Brook Trout occupancy form the basis of the EBTJV’s numeric range-wide Goals and Objectives.

The EBTJV website is an information system that classifies, organizes, and makes available a wide variety of data including publications, links to partnering organizations and partner tools, and projects supported by NFHP funds.

c. Describe your Partnership process for tracking projects and the types of data or metrics that are collected and used by your Partnership to assess project success, measure project effectiveness (e.g., type and amount of fish habitat impacted), and report progress.

The EBTJV tracks Brook Trout conservation projects in at least four places:

1. its own internal project tracking spreadsheet,
2. project profiles published on the EBTJV website,
3. the NFHP Project Tracking Database; and
4. via partner projects and datasets to which EBTJV members have contributed.

EBTJV tracks metrics from projects funded via NFHP/EBTJV, for example: miles of upstream habitat opened, number of barriers to aquatic passage removed; acres of riparian habitat restored; and number of outreach products produced.

It is important to distinguish between compiling statistics such as barriers removed that are expected to benefit Brook Trout, and documenting population level changes. In Vermont, research alongside conservation projects has demonstrated that adding wood to the stream channel increases Brook Trout size and abundance (Kratzer, 2018). Matt Kulp, biologist with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, maintains a [Brook Trout restoration dataset](#) compiled with information from managers across the range, and includes restoration technique, year, public visibility, and whether those have been successful in establishing new populations.

Additionally, the TU-EBTJV collaboration, Facilitating Brook Trout Outcome Attainability through Coordination with Chesapeake Bay Jurisdictions and Partners is looking at links between projects on the landscape and changes to Brook Trout occupancy in the Chesapeake watershed since 2016. This collaboration will result in a living database that will allow the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program to track progress made towards its numeric Brook Trout Outcome.

d. With examples, describe resources and capabilities that partner organizations have made available to your Partnership to measure baseline conditions and progress in habitat conservation.

There are numerous state, agency, and nonprofit resources that contribute to the knowledge of baseline conditions and progress for coldwater habitats in the eastern US.

TU and NFWF maintain their own eastern region Brook Trout conservation goals and mechanisms to track progress towards them. Trout Unlimited utilizes EBTJV's catchment level data in its own [Brook Trout Conservation Portfolio](#), to help identify strategic conservation opportunities and evaluate potential projects.

Knowledge of aquatic connectivity, flow, and stream temperature, as well as Brook Trout genetics, are important to Brook Trout conservation and we are grateful to the work of partners to make such landscape-level information available. Tools include:

SARP: [National Aquatic Barrier Inventory and Prioritization Tool](#)

North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NACC): [data for road-stream crossing assessments](#)
EcoSheds (USGS) [Flow Photo Explorer](#), [Stream Temperature Database](#)

The Nature Conservancy/Chesapeake Bay Program: [Chesapeake Bay Fish Passage Prioritization Tool](#)

Yoichiro Kanno (Colorado State): model in development linking [brook trout population to temperatures at the reach scale for the Southeast states](#).

USGS: [Brook Trout Explorer](#) online database of Brook Trout genetics data from catchments across the eastern range.

USGS: [Brook Trout Thermal Habitat Forecasts Catoctin Mountain Park, Maryland & Shenandoah Valley, Virginia](#). Users can compare current conditions against various future scenarios.

e. Describe the technical and financial resources your Partnership has to support its assessment work.

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) contributed \$7,500 to support time for Jason Coombs (FWS) to develop the new catchment updater web portal for the Brook Trout assessment. The EBTJV has occasionally

utilized a portion of its operational funds (\$13,000; FY23) or requested an additional operational project (\$35,000; FY20) from its NFHP allocation to support the assessment and products. The greatest contribution is partner time dedicated to the generation and handling of the data that go into the database, including biologist time on field surveys and data management. Considering that the 2015 database has over 270,000 catchments classified, at least 70,000 which are based on field survey data (about half of those since 2005), it is truly a tremendous collective effort.

f. Provide documentation or examples of how your Partnership manages information that is provided by partners or other sources.

The EBTJV Assessment and the catchment updater web tool are EBTJV products that are utilized widely. EBTJV hosts and supports these in the cloud using operational funds. The EBTJV also hosts the Riparian Tool, which allows decision-makers to rapidly identify and prioritize areas along the banks of rivers, streams, and lakes for restoration, and the Brook Trout Explorer, which compiles and visualizes the known genetic information on Brook Trout by catchment. Finally, the EBTJV website is itself an information management system.

g. Provide documentation of resource assessments conducted by your Partnership.
<https://ebtjv.de> EBTJV range-wide assessment updater portal, which allows data stewards to update salmonid occupancy data directly.

<https://rpccr.ebtjv.de/> 2015 assessment and riparian tool; Coombs and Nislow, 2015; EBTJV 2016.

2006 EBTJV range-wide assessment at the subwatershed scale: [Hudy \(2008\)](#)

Note: The Board is satisfied that the criterion as defined in the ACE Act Section 204(c)(2)(F) has been sufficiently addressed in Sections 1-6 of this application. Specifically, Sections 1,2, and 5 have addressed the Partnerships ability to develop and implement fish and fish habitat projects consistent with the strategic priorities of the Partnership and the Board.

References

Batiuk, R., Brownson, K., Dennison, W., Ehrhart, M., Hanson, J., Hanmer, R., Landry, B., Reichert- Nguyen, J, Soueidan, J., Tassone, S., Vogt,B.. (2023). *Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures— Ecological Implications and Management Responses*. Download.

Coombs, J.A., and K. Nislow. 2015. EBTJV Salmonid Catchment Assessment and Habitat Patch Layer. Prepared for the Eastern brook trout Joint Venture. Available at [EBTJV Salmonid Catchment Assessment and Habitat Patch Layers](#)

EBTJV, 2016. Range-wide Assessment of Brook Trout at the Catchment Scale: A Summary of Findings. Available at: <https://easternbrooktrout.org/science-data/brook-trout-conservation-decision-support-tools/catchment-assessment-summary-report-appendix-tables/range-wide-assessment-of-brook-trout-at-the-catchment-scale-a-summary-of-findings-by-stephen-perry-2016-last-modified-aug-23-2016-11-49-am-2014-history/view>

EBTJV, 2018. Conserving the Eastern Brook Trout - Action Strategies. Available at:

[Conserving the Eastern brook trout-Action Strategies_January 2018 — EBTJV](#)

Hudy M, T.M. Thieling, N. Gillespie & E.P. Smith (2008). Distribution, Status, and Land Use Characteristics of Subwatersheds within the Native Range of Brook Trout in the Eastern United States. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, 28:4, 1069-1085, DOI: [10.1577/M07-017.1](https://doi.org/10.1577/M07-017.1)

Kratzer, J. F. 2018. Response of brook trout biomass to strategic wood additions in the East Branch Nulhegan River watershed, Vermont. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* 38:1415-1422.