FY26 EBTJV Project Review Process and Project List

FY26 reviewers:

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| Stephanie Chance | Tennessee Aquarium  |
| Brad Fink | Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries |
| Merry Gallagher | Maine Dept. of Inland fisheries and Wildlife |
| Adam Kautza | Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife |
| Matt Kulp | Great Smoky Mountains National Park |
| Lori Maloney | EBTJV |
| Jaime Masterson | US Fish and Wildlife Service |
| Jake Rash | North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission |
| Mark Staley | Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources |
| Peter Ten Eyck | Independent (also a TU volunteer) |

**Background/process:**

EBTJV opened its brook trout conservation project [RFP](https://easternbrooktrout.org/projects/funding/FY26_RFP) in November 2024. It received 37 pre-applications via online form by the coordination deadline of January 22, and received 13 full applications by the final deadline of February 14, 2025. State and federal agency points of contact consulted with the applicants to ensure their project was a good fit for the EBTJV program. Additionally, the coordinator offered one hour phone consultations and held 17 separate consultations with potential applicants.

Each review team member independently completed project evaluations and assigned a 0-100 numeric score based on the EBTJV [scoring criteria](https://easternbrooktrout.org/projects/funding/FY26_RFP/ebtjv-2026-criteria/view). This rubric has been developed and refined by the EBTJV over many years. This rubric includes 22 individual scoring elements such as potential of the project to benefit recreational fishing for brook trout, appropriateness of methods and budget, and overall quality and potential for the project to benefit EBTJV strategic goals. Points for several criteria, such as nonfederal match ratio and number of partner categories supporting the project, were populated in advance and provided on the scoring template for consistency. Total scores for projects that were within a reviewer’s own jurisdiction were removed from consideration (although the state recommendations were heavily considered through letters of support and verbal support). Each application had a minimum of eight reviewer scores included in its average score. At a March 11, 2025 review team meeting, the Coordinator presented the scores and rankings and the group discussed and agreed on a ranked list.

Based on prior NFHP-FWS funding, the EBTJV might anticipate ~$200,00-$250,000 funding allocation for projects (in addition to operational funds). The Coordinator recommended selecting eight projects to submit to NFHP, based on prior project lists and also a drop in scores after the first eight projects. The team retained the straightforward ranking based on average reviewer score – which is typical for the EBTJV and reflective of the emphasis on scoring rubric and process – and agreed on the list of eight projects. The eight selected projects represent a collective $365,000 NFHP request, and are listed on page 4 below.

**Evaluation and summary of eight selected projects:**

The review team was happy with the overall quality of applications. Reviewers felt that there were many excellent projects across the 13 proposed and all would clearly benefit wild brook trout populations, improving the best of the best habitats for brook trout, and addressing the root issues in the catchments. These projects meet program standards for both EBTJV and NFHP. These projects are located in Maine to Virginia and will benefit several life history strategies of brook trout.

The eight recommended projects will make significant progress towards improving habitat conditions for wild brook trout (see metrics on page 5). They will collectively remove or upgrade 15 barriers and reconnect 257 miles of brook trout habitat, including 28 miles of upstream habitat. They will involve planting over one mile of riparian vegetation and restoring 26 acres of vegetative cover. Additionally, three miles of habitat structures will be installed or upgraded.

The projects will also include 36 outreach or education events, reaching approximately 81,920 people. A total of 22 outreach materials will be prepared, and two tribal communities will be engaged. Additionally, 106 assessments will be conducted, with monitoring efforts spanning from 3 to 13 years.

**EBTJV Operational Funds:**

The review team recommends applying for $125,000 in EBTJV operational funds, which goes towards the coordinator’s salary, fringe, nonprofit sponsor’s indirect and fees, EBTJV website hosting, travel, EBTJV Assessment, and other outreach and operational items. More details on the EBTJV budget can be seen in a separate attachment. Details of the EBTJV budget will be further refined prior to an award agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service in the summer of 2026.

**A note about nonfederal match**:

Nonfederal match is no longer a program requirement at the project level, but must be met at 1:1 across all projects. The USFWS has recently indicated that it will require awardees to report on the match that they promised in their NFHP application. These eight projects easily meet the required 1:1 nonfederal match at the portfolio level, with **3.8 match to grant ask ratio**. This year EBTJV only considered nonfederal match amounts that applicants noted were “in hand” or “secured”. Match is an important element to the scoring and evaluation, but ultimately the points awarded for nonfederal match amounts did not influence the inclusion of the top six projects, or the rank of the top two. Also, changes to the ACE ACT included that Fish Habitat Partnerships are no longer bound to the 1:1 nonfederal match and are not considered projects in the portfolio, so no match is needed for the EBTJV operational line item.

**It takes a team!**

The EBTJV is grateful to our reviewers for the hard work evaluating applications and improving the EBTJV RFP criteria and process; to EBTJV state and federal points of contact for consulting on these projects and for sharing RFP and ultimately recruiting such a strong slate of applications this year; to the US Fish and Wildlife Service FWCO staff and biologists for executing project awards and providing technical assistance to partners to the applicants and their funding; to project partners for applying to EBTJV and supporting brook trout conservation; to the Canaan Valley Institute for hosting EBTJV’s operations; and to NFHP for making this funding possible.

Action items for March 18, 2025 SC meeting:

* The EBTJV Steering Committee will be asked to vote on a list of projects to NFHP by the March 31, 2025 deadline, considering the project review team’s recommendation to submit the ranked list of 8 priority projects shared below.
* The EBTJV Steering Committee will be asked to consider and vote to apply for EBTJV operational funds to NFHP by the March 31, 2025 deadline, considering the recommendation at $125,000.

Summary information for the top 8 projects (listed in rank order).

  **$4.6M** total project costs

**$1.34M** nonfederal match secured

**$365,000** NFHP ask

**3.8** match to grant ask ratio

Funding and scoring information for all applications for FY26 EBTJV funds.



Select project metrics. Metrics are summed for the top eight projects and for all 13 that applied.



