USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Program

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The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural disasters. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the EWP. **It is not necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance.**

What You Need to Know

- EWP can assist if you have residents who fear that their home or driveway is in imminent threat of damage or destruction, or if severe erosion or debris is jeopardizing public infrastructure.
- EWP Recovery program is for property protection. EWP Floodplain Easement program is for floodplain building removal and restoration.
- Submit proposed projects to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).
- **Property** is defined by the USDA's Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) as any artificial structure permanently affixed to the land such as, but not limited to, houses, buildings, roads, utilities, structures, dams.
    - Land alone is not considered property under the EWP program.
    - EWP cannot repair or rebuild damaged or destroyed property.
    - There must exist an imminent threat to the property to be eligible for EWP assistance.
- **Imminent threat** means the property will be damaged or destroyed if there is another storm/flood event.
- Projects must have a "Sponsor," In Vermont, this has historically been a municipality. *Sponsor* can include any legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native

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American tribe or tribal organization.

- Sponsors must submit a formal request for assistance letter **within 60 days of the disaster occurrence, or 60 days from the date when access to the sites becomes available.**
- Cost Share (a.k.a. "match") is 75% federal, 25% sponsor for Financial Assistance and 100% federal for Technical Assistance. Match can be in the form of cash or in-kind services. Project sponsors can ask the benefiting private property owner to pay the match cost and to be responsible for operation and maintenance requirements (written agreement recommended).
- Work ***cannot*** start until an EWP grant agreement has been executed between NCRS and a Sponsor. Otherwise, the work will be ineligible for funding.

The Request for Assistance Letter

- Must come from entity capable of acting as Sponsor.
- Must be signed by an "official of the requesting entity (Sponsor)" - this would be a member of the municipality's/sponsor's legislative body.
- Must have a **penned or digital signature**. A typed signature will not be accepted.
- Begins the EWP process.
- Must be addressed to Travis Thomason, Vermont NRCS State Conservationist.

Program Resources

- Program Fact Sheet
- Key Program Points 2024

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- Process Overview
- Assistance Request Letter Instructions
- Assistance Request Letter Template
- Program In Brief Handout

Webinar (prerecorded)

- EWP Informational Meeting, July 24, 2023
- EWP Informational Meeting, presentation slide deck

For More Information

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Eligibility

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but must be represented by a project sponsor. Sponsors include legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization.

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Type of Work Authorized

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster. Threats that the EWP Program addresses are termed watershed impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- Debris-clogged waterways
- Unstable streambanks
- Severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure
- Wind-borne debris removal
- Damaged upland sites stripped of protective vegetation by fire or drought

The program can include purchasing floodplain easements. These easements restore, protect, maintain, and enhance the functions and values of the floodplain, including associated wetlands and riparian areas. They also conserve natural values including fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention and ground water recharge, as well as safeguard lives and property from floods, and the results of erosion.

EWP work is not limited to any one set of prescribed measures. NRCS completes a Damage Survey Report which provides a site-by-site investigation of the work and measures necessary to protect life and property from additional flooding and soil erosion. **NRCS will only provide funding for work that is necessary to reduce applicable threats.** Should sponsors want to increase the level of protection, the **sponsor will be responsible for paying 100 percent of the costs of the upgrade and additional work**.

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More Guidance

- EWP Sponsor Resources page
- EWP Program National Sponsor Guide (October 2021)

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