Request for Proposals (RFP)

Appalachian Headwaters: 2027Graduate Student Field Research Grant

1. Purpose and Overview

Appalachian Headwaters invites proposals from master's or PhD degree seeking students in environmental science, wildlife management, forestry, ecology, natural resource management, geography, or related fields to conduct field-based research in the Central Appalachian region.

To strengthen the connection between academic research and applied restoration, all projects must include at least some components of field research conducted on Appalachian Headwaters property in Greenbrier County, West Virginia.

2. Organizational Background

Appalachian Headwaters is a nonprofit based in Lewisburg, WV, dedicated to environmental education and ecological restoration (https://appheadwaters.org/). Major initiatives include:

- Habitat restoration, wildlife, and pollinator garden programs
- Reforestation of degraded pastureland
- A native plant nursery supporting pollinator habitat and restoration plantings
- Environmental education programs for K–12 students and the public
- Citizen science program using wildlife cameras

Research conducted through this grant program will directly support and expand on one or more of these initiatives.

3. Appalachian Headwaters Properties

Research supported through this grant must include a field component on Appalachian Headwaters' property. Sites include:

- Wood Thrush Park: Mixed use property with educational facilities, trails, gardens, and restoration sites on approximately 150 acres.
- Kestrel Woods: Farmland Restoration Tract: More than 800-acre property, consisting of a 90-acre reforestation project and 750 acres of forest, including early successional to mature (>150-year-old) stands.
- Native Plant Nursery: Native plant propagation facility, producing pollinator-focused species and plants for retail and restoration projects, on approximately 60 acres of old pasture and secondary forest.

Applicants should propose how research could incorporate one or more of these sites. Final site access and research design will be refined in partnership with Appalachian Headwaters staff if a proposal is selected for funding.

4. Eligibility Criteria

- Enrollment in a master's degree or PhD program at an accredited university.

- Relevant fields of study: environmental science, forestry, wildlife management, ecology, geography, or related discipline.
- Work must be conducted in the Appalachian region, with at least part of the research taking place on an Appalachian Headwaters property.
- Faculty advisor endorsement confirming academic standing and project feasibility.

5. Funding Details

- Award Amount: Up to $3,000 per project
- Number of Awards: Up to 2 applicants per cycle, preference is given to first time applicants
- Funding Period: April–December 2027
- Allowable Expenses: Field equipment, research supplies, travel, data analysis, and community engagement. Tuition and general living expenses are not eligible. ***Lodging provided on site, free of charge, at Wood Thrush Park*.**

6. Research Focus Areas

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Utilize Headwaters existing wildlife camera trap and/or invasive plant data sets
- Investigate pollinator biology, native plant ecology, or habitat management on Appalachian Headwaters' properties.
- Contribute to ongoing research of the wildlife of Central Appalachia, including habitat use, genetics, survival, movement, and other monitoring initiatives
- Advance understanding of forest and watershed restoration on degraded agricultural landscapes.
- Examine ecological or hydrological processes tied to reforestation, invasive species management, or biodiversity.
- Include a community or educational engagement component.

7. Proposal Components (12 pages max)

- Cover Page – Name, institution, program, advisor, project title.
- Abstract – ~300 words.
- Project Narrative – Background, objectives, methodology, significance, expected outcomes.
- Site Component – Description of how Headwaters' property will be used as part of the research. Applicants may identify a preferred site type (e.g., forest, pollinator meadow, nursery). Final details will be refined in collaboration with Appalachian Headwaters staff if awarded.
- Timeline – Anticipated schedule of activities.
- Budget Justification – General breakdown of expenses.
- Applicant CV – 2 pages max.
- Faculty Advisor Letter – Statement of support and feasibility.

8. Review Criteria

- Scientific Merit – Strength of research design and objectives.
- Alignment with Mission – Relevance to Appalachian Headwaters' restoration and education goals.
- Use of Headwaters' Property – Clear integration of Appalachian Headwaters' land into research activities.
- Feasibility – Realistic timeline and budget.
- Community/Educational Impact – Potential to involve or benefit local communities.

9. Submission Process

- Deadline: Friday, January 31, 2027 (11:59 PM ET)
- Submission: **Apply at this link** by filling out the application and attaching your Proposal as a PDF. No submissions via email please. If you have questions, you can reach out to Dr. Merri Collins at mcollins@appheadwaters.org
- Notification of selection: Early March 2027
- Start of Funding: April 2027

10. Reporting Requirements

Awardees must:

- Deliver a final report (5–10 pages) summarizing findings and relevance to Appalachian Headwaters programs.
- Provide a public-accessible resource (e.g., StoryMap, public talk, community workshop).
- Acknowledge Appalachian Headwaters in academic presentations and publications.

11. Past Recipients

- Elizabeth Kramer: PhD Student at Ohio University. 2026. "*Phylogeography, hybridization, and species delimitation in a complex of cryptic woodland salamanders in central Appalachia*."
- Brian Brillhart: Masters Student at Marshall University. 2026. "*Analysis of Black-capped (Poecile atricapillus) and Carolina Chickadee (P. carolinensis) Vocalizations in Allopatric vs. Sympatric Populations*."