



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

# Department of Environmental Protection

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## MassDEP's Official Answers to Questions Regarding the Natural Resource Nitrogen Sensitive Area 2024-2025 Grant Program

Posted on September 27, 2024

On August 30, 2024, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) announced the 2024-2025 Opportunity for the Natural Resource Nitrogen Sensitive Area (NRNSA) Grant Program (Grant Program). On September 10, 2024, at 2 p.m., MassDEP held a virtual Pre-Application Meeting. A recording of the video is available on our website at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality#natural-resource-nitrogen-sensitive-area-grant-program>. Written questions from potential applicants were accepted through September 13, 2024.

Below are MassDEP's official answers to all questions received by the September 13, 2024, deadline. All questions are formatted in **bold font** and answers are posted below each question in italicized font.

### Eligible Projects

**Question 1 (Q1): If a town is looking at treating nitrogen in the watershed area that is under jurisdiction and they are doing it in an area that is also helping the pond, if you can show that it has a benefit to the watershed and estuary, is that eligible? Even if it has a secondary benefit?**

*Answer 1 (A1): The NRNSA Grant Program will fund planning activities associated with development of a Watershed Management Plan. The Request for Responses for this grant opportunity requires the proposed project to include nitrogen planning but does not limit it to only that nutrient. Planning for reducing pollutant loads in freshwater ponds as a part of the development of the Watershed Management Plan is an eligible activity under the Watershed Management Plan definition in the regulations at 314 CMR 21.02 and is an eligible activity under the grant. Please see Section 1.E. of the [Request for Responses](#) document for more information on Eligible Projects.*

This information is available in alternate format. Please contact Melixza Esenyie at 617-626-1282.

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**Q2: Can you give us some examples of other planning activities?**

*A2: Please see Section 1.E. of the [Request for Responses](#) document for information on Eligible Projects and specifically, for examples of eligible planning activities. For convenience, a relevant excerpt from that section of the Request for Responses document has been reproduced here:*

*“Only planning activities that contribute to, or come from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application (as defined in 314 CMR 21.00) will be considered for funding. Examples of Eligible Projects include, but are not limited to:*

- *Planning activities necessary to complete a watershed permit application as explained by 314 CMR 21.03(2) or De Minimis Load Exemption application as explained by 314 CMR 21.12. This includes, but is not limited to:*
  - *Completing a Watershed Management Plan, CWMP, TWMP, or Scientific Evaluation;*
  - *Assessment of nitrogen loads; or*
  - *Modeling of nitrogen reduction scenarios.*
- *Planning activities required by approved watershed permit. This may include, but is not limited to:*
  - *Data analysis of ambient water quality monitoring results; or*
  - *Permeable reactive barrier design.*
  - *Review of ambient water quality monitoring, modeling, and/or other measures for the purpose of demonstrating de minimis load within a watershed or sub-watershed.*

*Construction or implementation projects will not be considered for this round of funding. Examples of projects that are not eligible for funding include, but are not limited to:*

- *Construction or implementation projects, including but not limited to:*
  - *Construction of approved sewerage;*
  - *Upgrades to existing wastewater treatment facilities and/or septic systems;*
  - *or Installation of a permeable reactive barrier.*
- *Continued operation or maintenance of wastewater treatment facilities or upgraded septic systems.”*

**Q3: For communities considering UD [urine diversion] as an alternative control approach in their watershed planning efforts would a pilot project (or some portion thereof) be eligible for funding under this grant? Would UD installations be considered “implementation” or**

**“planning” since the purpose of those installations is to gather nutrient removal performance data to inform the town's future watershed planning.**

*A3: This activity could be considered part of “Scientific Evaluation” in support of planning activities that could contribute to or come from a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load Exemption application (as defined in 314 CMR 21.00). At this time, there is limited data on the amount of nitrogen removed from a watershed using urine diversion (UD) as a nutrient removal method. Without evaluation, it is unclear whether or not this would be an implementation activity in the future as it is not currently clear that it is an effective strategy as part of a plan. Therefore, sampling for the purpose of determining the nitrogen load reduction that can be achieved by diverting urine is considered a planning activity and is eligible under the grant.*

### **Award Questions**

**Q4: The project that would be submitted, the work under the grant would have to be completed by the end of next June? Even if the work continues, the scope of the grant has to end then?**

*A4: Yes. Applicants may seek funding for Eligible Projects that will exceed the length of the grant award period (i.e., past June 30, 2025); however, only work that is proposed to be completed on or before June 30, 2025, is eligible for funding. In addition, work conducted after July 1, 2024, but before the date of the execution of the grant contract award, may also be eligible for reimbursement. Please see Section 1.E. and Section 1.H. of the [Request for Responses](#) document for additional information on this issue.*

### **Misc. Questions**

**Q5: Next step is to file the watershed permit. Just curious, what the level of effort is involved with doing that? As far as filing for the permit, is that a huge effort? Is that something that I should be looking to our consultants to do?**

*A5: Each applicant will need to determine for itself whether it has sufficient expertise on staff to file the application, or if they will need to contract professional services. Please refer to 314 CMR 21.00 (Watershed Permit Regulations) for more information about Watershed Permit application requirements. Please note that pursuant to 314 CMR 21.08(1), a town signatory will be required to submit a Watershed Permit application.*

**Q6: Can you share what other communities have paid for their consultants to apply for the Watershed Permit?**

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*A6: MassDEP does not have this information readily available. You may submit a public records request to receive any responsive information that may be contained in our files. The Department recommends speaking with other Cape Cod municipalities about who they hired, at what price, and for what work.*