REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS **November 18, 2025**

Estimating Water Benefits from Thornforest Restoration in Texas

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Water is the fragile lifeblood of Texas, especially in the drought-prone, agriculturally dependent Lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV). The Rio Grande River is the Valley's sole source of freshwater, and drought risk and overdraft from the Rio Grande to meet increasing demand threatens both the region's agricultural and ranching communities, and municipal water users. Water quality also represents a significant challenge to communities due to aging delivery infrastructure as well as nutrient and sediment runoff from intensive agricultural production in the Valley, and increasingly polluted urban stormwater in this rapidly developing region.

American Forests, a national reforestation organization, has been leading efforts to restore the native thornforest ecosystem in the RGV for the past decade, and has been engaged in the region for over 25 years. Over 90% of native thornforests were cleared between 1910-1960. American Forests and its partners created the Thornforest Conservation Plan in 2022 as a means to prioritize forest recovery in the region, driven by the understanding that restoring thornforests yields resilience, biodiversity, water, economic, and community benefits.

Texas thornforests, also known as Tamaulipan thornscrub, are globally significant for their biodiversity. They serve as habitat for over 500 species of birds, 300 butterfly species, 1,200 plant species, and 45 threatened or endangered species like the ocelot. This biodiversity is matched by the forests' critical role in the continued survival of the Rio Grande River and the health of local communities through their clean air, clean water, and mental health benefits. They are also a strong driver of rural prosperity: Texas thornforests help generate $320 million annually in ecotourism revenue and could become an even greater economic driver if restored.

Over the next three years, American Forests will be restoring at least 200 acres per year of thornforest across National Wildlife Refuge tracts and private agricultural lands in the region. This is part of a longer-term restoration project in the region and employs a climate-informed approach in terms of species selection, seed zoning, and planting density so the forests planted today will thrive in the future.

While research has been done on the water quantity and quality benefits of restoring forest cover in other regions of the U.S., much of this research has focused on commercial hardwood or softwood species, and little research has been done to accurately quantify the impacts of restoring Tamaulipan thornscrub habitat on watershed health in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

American Forests seeks to hire an experienced external consultant ("Consultant") to better understand the volumetric and water quality benefits that can be expected from and attributable to thornforest restoration activities in the RGV over the coming years.

The findings from this work will be used to refine models for quantifying the water benefits of restoring Taumalipan thornscub.

PROJECT SCOPE

The budget for this scope of work is $20,000-$30,000. The scope of Consultant services shall include at least the following tasks listed below. Consultant can include additional tasks they deem appropriate.

1. **Synthesize learnings from any existing relevant scientific and gray literature** on forest hydrology and water benefits studies in analogous semi-arid regions in the Americas, and especially for the Tamaulipan thornscrub of South Texas and northern Mexico where available (such as from dos Reis Oliveira et al. 2025, Adhikari and White 2014, Gonzalez Rodriguez et al. 2004, García Ledezma et al. 2018, as well as reports from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Reclamation). Key variables for refinement include actual and potential evapotranspiration (AET and PET) rates, evaporation rates, average soil moisture, and canopy water storage capacity for common genera within the Tamaulipan thornscrub ecosystem and for areas of intact mature diverse Tamaulipan thornscrub.
2. **Gather, organize in a manipulatable format, and synthesize seasonal and annual precipitation, as well as baseline water gauge and sensor data and reported data on water quantity** (hydrograph data), as well as **water quality data** for the Texas watersheds of interest to American Forests, including the Nueces-Rio Grande Coastal Basin's South Laguna Madre sub basin (HUC8 code 12110208) and the Rio Grande River Basin's Los Olmos (HUC8 13090001) and Lower Rio Grande (HUC8 13090002) sub basins for the past 25 years (2000-2025). The goal of this task

is to determine if there has been any measurable improvement in water availability or water quality (or at least a strong correlation) over the past 25 years of landscape-level restoration activity led by American Forests and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
Identify data sources in a bibliographic format, and where to retrieve said data. Data sources can include but are not limited to prior estimates provided by consultants, as well as water and watershed data from the Texas Water Development Board, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, individual irrigation districts and the International Boundary and Water Commission. Water quality data should include conductivity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, dissolved solids, total algae, pH, nutrient concentrations, and turbidity (where available).

3. **Identify remaining gaps in science** (including data, monitoring, and modeling) as it relates to characterizing the main drivers, extent, and severity of regional water challenges and estimating the effects of thornforest restoration on watershed hydrology and water quality in the RGV, specifying where credible claims can be made on water quantity and quality benefits for consumptive and ecological uses.

DELIVERABLES

1. Interim summary report: Summarizes key findings from Task 1. The interim report is to be completed and delivered electronically to American Forests by **January 23, 2026.**
2. Final synthesis report: Summarizes findings from Tasks 2 and 3, and combines outputs from both phases of work. The final report is to be completed and delivered electronically to American Forests by **March 20, 2026**.
3. Final presentation: Summarizes findings from both phases for select American Forests leadership. The presentation should be made no later than **March 20, 2026**.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Through their response to this Request for Proposal (RFP), the proposer should demonstrate knowledge and experience in nature-based solutions and innovative financing mechanisms relevant for organizations operating in the U.S. The proposer shall develop a proposal that includes a budget and time schedule, and organize and direct all of the technical expertise, labor, equipment, supervision, operating supplies, and incidentals needed to fully accomplish the work.

To be considered complete, proposers should submit a proposal of **no more than 6 pages** that includes the following items, in the order set forth:

1. Applicant or Firm name.
2. Name, title, email address, and phone number of Applicant or main contact at Firm.
3. Names and qualifications of personnel assigned to the project, including any relevant professional registrations and/or affiliations.
4. Applicant or Firm qualifications and past projects as appropriate:
    a. Applicant's experience and familiarity with thornforest ecosystems in the U.S. or Mexico.
    b. Applicant's experience in forest hydrology, including researching and synthesizing habitat-related water benefits.
    c. Applicant's experience in synthesizing large datasets.
    d. Applicant's experience in estimating volumetric water benefits and water quality improvements from habitat restoration projects.
    e. Detailed plan of approach and methods to be used to yield the desired project outputs as described in Project Scope above.
5. Anticipated timeline for the draft and final synthesis reports.
6. Itemized budget for the full Project Scope. Estimated fees must include all labor, materials, equipment, professional services, insurance, travel, and all other costs and expenses for the proposed project.

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACH

1. This RFP does not constitute an offer of employment or an offer to contract for services.
2. If chosen, Consultant will work directly with American Forests staff to conduct interviews and develop deliverables.
3. Consultant may not subcontract to third parties for any portions of the work scope.
4. Proposals that feature teams are acceptable, but the role of each team member in conducting this project must be clearly defined.
5. Consultant must already have access to necessary materials, relationships, and equipment along with staffing.

6. This is a request for proposals only and quotations furnished are not offers. This request does not commit American Forests to pay any costs incurred in the preparation or submission of the quotation or to contract for supplies or services. All costs for preparation of proposals shall be borne by the proposer.
7. American Forests shall not provide any insurance coverage of any kind to Contractor or Contractor's employees or contract personnel. Contractor is responsible for insurance coverage and shall provide proof of coverage via their existing liability insurance certificate upon request.

PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL AND SELECTION

1. All proposals must be emailed no later than COB on **Wednesday December 17, 2025** in PDF form to jdale@americanforests.org and iakker@americanforests.org.
2. Any inquiries should be directed to:

   Jon Dale
   Senior Director of Texas, Mexico, and Pacific Islands
   American Forests
   (jdale@americanforests.org)
3. American Forests staff will review the proposals and will select the one that they believe is most advantageous for project results. American Forests may reach out for clarifications after proposals have been received. The final decision on the winning bid will be announced by December 23, 2025, or sooner.
4. The fee proposal will be used as a basis for negotiations with the selected Consultant of a final scope of work and proposed fee arrangement. If no acceptable arrangement can be negotiated, American Forests may terminate talks with the highest-ranked Consultant and initiate negotiations with the next-ranked Consultant, and so forth until a final agreement is reached.
5. American Forests reserves the option to reject any or all proposals received in response to this request for Proposals, wholly or in part.
6. The successful Consultant will be expected to enter into a contract with American Forests within 30 days. American Forests will award a contract resulting from this solicitation based on the following factors: qualifications and past performance, technical approach, proposed timeline for completion, and proposed fee-for-service.

7. American Forests reserves the right to retain all proposals, whether selected or rejected.
8. All proposals shall remain firm for sixty (60) working days following the closing date for receipt of proposals.
9. Please note American Forests is an equal opportunity provider and employer.