

Call for Letters of Inquiry Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot

Large Grants

Eligible Countries:	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Tunisia
Opening Date:	Wednesday, 5 March 2025
Closing Date:	Friday, 11 April 2025, (midnight EDT, UTC-4), Washington, D.C. time
Budget:	US\$50,000 to US\$180,000
Project Timeframe:	Projects are expected to begin on 1 July 2025, at the earliest.

CEPF and BirdLife International, as regional implementation team (RIT) for the hotspot, are inviting proposals in the form of letters of inquiry (LOIs) for **large grants** from non-governmental organizations, community groups, private enterprises, universities and other civil society organizations (CSOs). Applicants are advised to read this call for proposals document in full and submit LOIs under the scope of this call.

BACKGROUND

The [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#) (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence française de développement, Conservation International, the European Union, Fondation Hans Wilsdorf, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.

The Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot is the second largest hotspot in the world and the largest of the world's five Mediterranean-climate regions. CEPF's investment strategy was updated in 2024. The resulting investment strategy (2025-2030) is documented within the [ecosystem profile](#) (PDF – 7.85 MB). This investment strategy is comprised of a series of strategic directions, broken down into investment priorities outlining the types of activities that are eligible for CEPF funding. Additional information, including a technical summary of the Profile, can be found on the CEPF website's [Mediterranean Basin Hotspot pages](#).

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Non-governmental organizations, community groups, universities and small private enterprises may apply for funding. Individuals must work with civil society organizations to develop applications rather than apply directly.

Organizations must have their own bank account and be authorized under relevant national laws to receive charitable contributions.

Government-owned enterprises or institutions are eligible only if they can demonstrate that the enterprise or institution has:

- a legal personality independent of any government agency or actor;
- the authority to apply for and receive private funds; and
- may not assert a claim of sovereign immunity.

Grants cannot be used for:

- the purchase of land, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities.
- activities adversely affecting Indigenous Peoples or where these communities have not provided their broad support to the project activities.
- removal or alteration of any physical cultural property (includes sites having archaeological, paleontological, historical, religious or unique natural values). Proposed activities should observe all other relevant safeguard and social policies as set out on the [CEPF website](#).

Applicants are allowed to propose more than one application, but they have to be in different strategic directions. CEPF will not grant more than one project per organization under this Call.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Letters of inquiry will only be accepted for the following strategic directions and countries described below.

More information is available in the Ecosystem Profile, chapters 12 and 13. Applicants are invited to also check the Results Framework in chapter 14 to ensure that their proposals contribute to CEPF’s targets in the Mediterranean Basin.

Strategic Direction 1: Coastal Areas	
Investment Priority 1.1: Marine Protected Areas	Cabo Verde Morocco Tunisia
Strategic Direction 2: Freshwater Ecosystems	
Investment Priority 2.1: Information and promotion	Albania (<i>ALB-10 only</i>) Bosnia and Herzegovina Montenegro North Macedonia
Investment Priority 2.2: Protection, restoration and improved management	
Strategic Direction 3: Traditional Land-use Practices	
Investment Priority 3.1: Improve management practices	Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia (Southwest Balkans Corridor) Morocco (Rif & Atlas Mountains Corridors)
Strategic Direction 4: Threatened Plants Conservation	
Investment Priority 4.1: Capacity of botanical community	Cabo Verde
Investment Priority 4.2: Plant conservation in Protected Areas management	
Investment Priority 4.3: Innovative actions with land-owners & resources users	

Other Calls for Proposals for additional countries and other SDs will be issued at a later stage during this investment phase (2025-2030).

1) Strategic Direction 1: Support local partnerships for conservation of globally important **coastal biodiversity**

- *Investment Priority 1.1. Support involvement of civil society in the management of Marine Protected Areas and realize opportunities to establish new ones*

Countries: Cabo Verde, Morocco, Tunisia

Coastal and marine ecosystems in the hotspot, including protected areas, are often used for activities like fishing, agriculture and hunting. Other resources, such as sand and gravel, may also be extracted, and there are non-exploitative activities, like recreation, that impact habitats and species.

This investment priority will focus on negotiating improvements to management regimes by enhancing planning, raising awareness and enforcing agreed-upon rules. At the same time, projects should aim to improve the conservation status of sites that are not already designated as MPAs. This could involve moving towards formal MPA designation or adopting alternative mechanisms, such as community conservation areas or seasonal/permanent no-take zones. Where feasible, these efforts will promote sustainable use and may introduce new practices that increase the value of sites to local stakeholders, encouraging better management.

Eligible sites for this Investment priority will be KBAs with a marine portion (see list in the Ecosystem Profile, Annex 2), as well as sites that meet the KBA criteria but have not been officially recognized yet. Specific attention will be given to sites that are not yet supported by other international donors or initiatives, with the objective of extending the network of sites benefitting from local conservation action.

Details on eligible actions are provided in descriptions of Investment Priority 1.1 in the Ecosystem Profile.

2) Strategic Direction 2: Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened **freshwater biodiversity**.

- *Investment Priority 2.1. Document and promote recognition of the freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem service values of Key Biodiversity Areas*
- *Investment Priority 2.2. Advance protection, restoration and improved management of important sites for freshwater biodiversity, with the participation of local stakeholders*

Countries: Albania¹, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia,

Under the Investment Priority 2.1, CSOs could propose projects to support research and surveys on the distribution, population and threat status of freshwater biodiversity to allow

¹ In Albania, only proposals for the transboundary KBA ALB-10, "Liqeni i Shkodrës - Lumi i Bunës - Velipojë - Vau i Dejës" will be considered under the present Call for Proposal

identification of the most urgent sites for conservation action, or to act as a baseline against which to evaluate improvements. Additionally, applicants can undertake biological, social and economic values of freshwater ecosystem services when those are poorly understood and not widely appreciated by decision makers. CEPF will support grantees to collect this information but will require such preparatory work to be clearly linked to subsequent conservation action.

Under the Investment Priority 2.2, CEPF will support civil society organizations to take direct conservation action at specific sites, working with management agencies or local stakeholders to change behavior, reduce the impact of specific threats, or exploit opportunities for enhancing management, protection or restoration. These threats may be the result of proposed infrastructure, which may cause direct habitat loss and/or indirect impacts through changed flow regimes and land use patterns. Threats may be more insidious and cumulative, for example through pollution, deforestation in the catchment, or the impacts of climate change.

Project will have to take place in the two priority corridors of the **Eastern Adriatic** and the **Southwest Balkans**. Priority will be given to projects in KBAs with significant representation of freshwater ecosystems within these corridors. Projects may work in the wider catchment beyond the KBA boundary, either because this is necessary to maintain the integrity and value of the KBA, or because there is an opportunity to restore areas beyond the existing boundary. Proposals should then explain the relevance of any actions in the wider catchment to the integrity of the KBA.

Details on eligible actions are provided in descriptions of Investment Priorities 2.1 and 2.2 in the Ecosystem Profile.

3) Strategic Direction 3: Promote **traditional land-use practices** that maintain biodiversity in priority corridors

- *Investment Priority 3.1 Support traditional resource managers to follow land management practices that maintain biodiversity in mountain landscapes*

Countries: Albania, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia

Traditional management practices in cultural landscapes survive throughout the region although in many rural areas, evolution of agriculture practices led to homogenization of habitats and species. CEPF will prioritize projects that have potential for making a difference to globally threatened biodiversity, and, therefore, favor projects centered on Key Biodiversity Areas within priority corridors, and with impacts on threatened species. Projects may extend beyond the strict boundaries of KBAs, to follow a landscape approach and take into account ecological connectivity.

The projects eligible under this Call for Proposal will have to take place in the following corridors:

- The Atlas Mountains (Morocco)
- The Rif Mountains (Morocco)
- The Southwest Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia)

The core of this strategic direction is working with traditional resource managers to enable them to enhance their livelihoods through maintaining biodiversity-rich traditional practices, in particular as regards grazing of livestock. The intention is to ensure livestock levels and management practices are compatible with maintenance of the valuable habitats, in and

around KBAs. As grazing management often goes along with other agricultural practices that are beneficial to the diversity of habitats and species, due to the mosaic features of the areas, projects may include activities to sustain and improve these agricultural practices. The key will be to enable resource users to increase their income, through improvements to processing and marketing of products, including through certification and labelling, as well as exploring opportunities such as payment for environmental services or access to government support. Use of innovative techniques and tools will be promoted, as long as they support the sustainability of traditional land-use practices.

Details on eligible actions are provided in descriptions of Investment Priority 3.1 in the Ecosystem Profile.

4) Strategic Direction 4: Strengthen the engagement of civil society to support conservation of **threatened plants** and plant communities

- *Investment Priority 4.1. Build the capacity of the botanical community to increase knowledge and skills and engage in applied conservation of threatened plants*
- *Investment Priority 4.2. Secure better implementation of plant conservation in the management of protected areas*
- *Investment Priority 4.3. Take innovative actions for conservation of threatened plants, working with landowners and land users*

Country: Cabo Verde

Projects under this strategic direction should focus on sites comprising priority plant species, defined as:

- Plant species in threat categories Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU) on the [IUCN Global Red List](#)
- Plant species that have not yet been assessed on the Global Red List, but that are included on regional red lists or would qualify for global CR, EN or VU status according to the [IUCN Red List criteria](#).
- Site-restricted endemics (SRE), which include:
 - Taxa occurring in only one site (and nowhere else in the world) or
 - Extent of occurrence less than 100 km² or
 - Area of occupancy less than 10 km².

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Demonstrate that they are focused on one or several priority species or are addressing a priority need for the conservation of plants.
- Demonstrate that they will lead directly to action for the conservation of priority plant species as defined above.
- Include, where possible, a significant component on capacity building for plant conservation, for either the project implementers or their local partners (e.g., community resource users or protected areas managers).
- Complement other projects (funded by CEPF or not) working at site/landscape level, therefore creating synergies between plant conservation community and other conservation actors.
- Address the conservation of sites where there is a demonstrable need for funding and opportunity for success.

Details on eligible actions are provided in descriptions of Investment Priorities 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 in the Ecosystem Profile. **Note that Investment Priority 4.4 is not yet open under the present Call for proposal.**

MAP OF PRIORITY CORRIDORS FOR CEPF PHASE III (Strategic Directions 2 & 3)



APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications (LOIs) can be submitted in **English, French or Portuguese**.

All applications must be submitted through the ConservationGrants website via [this link](#).

CEPF will not accept LOIs via email or any other mechanism. You will receive an acknowledgement from CEPF confirming that your submission through ConservationGrants has been received.

CEPF partners who applied or were granted a project in Phase II (2012-2017): please make sure that you use your existing login and password, to prevent creation of new accounts on the ConservationGrants portal.

Questions regarding account creation or issues using ConservationGrants should be emailed to conservationgrants@conservation.org.

The LOI review process will take approximately eight weeks from the deadline date. The review committee will select the strongest LOIs which meet the eligibility criteria. All applicants will receive a response from CEPF following the review of their application.

Applications which are invited to the second stage will be developed into a full proposal through ConservationGrants. Full proposals that receive a positive review will lead to the award of a grant between Conservation International, as the host of the CEPF Secretariat, and the applicant's institution (the "grantee"). Grants will be denominated in United States dollars and grant agreements will be in English.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

All applicants are advised to review the CEPF Investment Strategy for the Mediterranean Basin within the ecosystem profile. This provides more detail on the types of activities CEPF will fund under each investment priority:

- Ecosystem Profile:
 - [English](#) (PDF – 7.85 MB)
- Ecosystem Profile Technical Summary:
 - [English](#) (PDF – 2.2 MB)

The interactive map of the Mediterranean Hotspot can be accessed [here](#); use the top right-hand "layer list" icon to select the layer you would like to view. Note that a few KBAs have changed names or been added – for up-to-date information, please refer to the Ecosystem Profile.

CEPF is committed to integrating gender into its portfolio. Applicants should design projects and write proposals that consider gender issues in the achievement of their conservation impacts. CEPF has developed several resources that can help applicants to design, implement and evaluate gender-aware projects ([CEPF Gender Toolkit](#), PDF – 359 KB) and understand what CEPF seeks in a proposal ([CEPF Gender Fact Sheet](#), PDF – 352 KB). Visit the [CEPF and Gender webpage](#) to learn more about how CEPF addresses gender in the projects it supports. The integration of gender in your project will be a factor in evaluation.

Helpful resources:

- [Eligibility and How to Apply](#)
- [ConservationGrants Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Safeguard Policies](#)
- [CEPF and Gender](#)
- [12 Tips for Getting Your Grant Idea Funded](#)
- [CEPF Project Database](#)

CONTACT

Before applying, applicants are encouraged to discuss project ideas and eligibility with the Program Officer for your region:

- Balkans Program Officer, Marijana Demajo: marijana.demajo@birdlife.org
- North Africa Program Officer, Awatef Abiadh: awatef.abiadh@birdlife.org
- Cabo Verde Program Officer, Aurélien Garreau: aurelien.garreau@proton.me

In case the Programme Officer is not available, applicants can contact:

- Mediterranean Basin Grant Director, Pierre Carret: pcarret@cepf.net
- Mediterranean Basin Regional Implementation Team Leader, Vedran Lucic: vedran.lucic@dopps.si

Questions received after 31 March 2025 will not be answered.

We will organize introductory webinars in English, French or Portuguese on 19 March 2025. [You can register for these webinars using this link.](#)